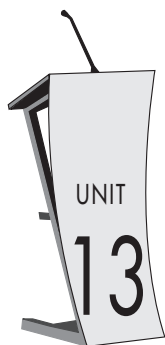


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# Group Discussion

## UNIT PREVIEW

- Know the importance of a group discussion
- Develop the skill of analysing the different aspects of a problem
- Improve your oral communication skills
- Avoid interpersonal conflicts in a discussion
- Convince others with your arguments
- Develop your listening skills
- Accept others' point of view

## Introduction

The word 'group' means a number of persons or things gathered or acting together or naturally associated. The word 'discussion' means the process of discussing something. Hence, the compound term 'group discussion' means the process of discussing in a group. It is used to refer to an interactive oral communication situation.

### TIPS to Remember

Group discussion is an interactive oral communication situation.

### TIPS to Remember

Groups work effectively by generating and evaluating alternatives.

Human beings have a natural tendency to form groups. The needs of the ever-increasing complexity of the modern society requires deep thinking. To increase the efficiency at workplaces, there is a continuous and increasing need for optimum use of manpower, resources and material. This needs deep thinking and a critical analysis of the problem from all aspects. It has been realized that this can be done by a group, not by an individual. Thus, the process of group thinking is an essential technique for solving problems.

The term Group Discussion (GD) is used to refer to an oral communication process in which a small number of professionals meet to discuss a particular problem, topic, issue or situation among themselves, to exchange information, to analyse the situation and attempt to arrive at a consensus, or to make a decision on the announced topic. A GD is, therefore, a cooperative activity within the framework of ground rules. It is a platform where people can hone the art and technique of shared thinking.

The aim of a GD is not persuasion. It is a way of solving problems through collective thinking and cooperation. GDs are also used in job interviews to find out how an individual is able to make their point within a team—the kind of social personality they have—and how individuals communicate under collective pressure.

## Kinds of Groups

Groups can either be informal or formal. An informal group is formed to meet the desired needs of individuals and to establish a relationship among them, whereas a formal group is formed to complete a specific task. Generally, informal groups are small groups and remain self-regulating. Formal groups, by virtue of their task-related nature, require greater professional attention. Often, formal groups would form one or more informal groups. The small groups are of four kinds.

- The first one is the experiential group. This group is composed of people who want to develop personal awareness, overcome personality problems, develop communication skills or grow as matured professionals from the advice and feedback of others.
- The second kind is the learning group. The purpose of a learning group is to help members learn about a subject by sharing their knowledge and visions among themselves.
- The third kind of group is the information gathering group. The main objective of this group is to help members of the group acquire a lot of information about an issue.
- The fourth group is the problem-solving group. Professionals generally form small informal groups to solve work flow issues.

### TIPS to Remember

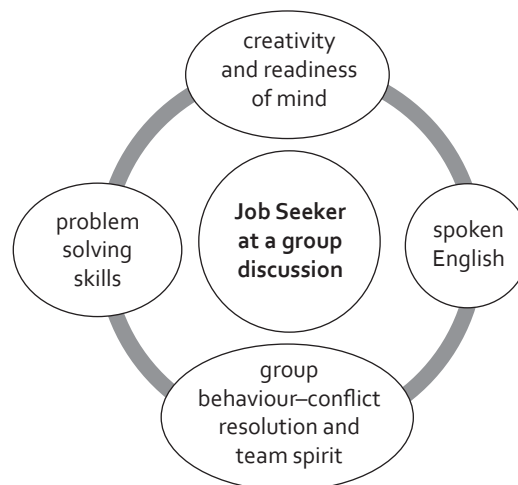
Participation in GD inculcates conceptual clarity, mature reaction to other's views, effective presentation of one's own ideas, sagacity to see reason, etc.

## Importance of Group Discussion

Several qualities like conceptual clarity, judgement of subtle hints of a problem, mature reaction to other's views, effective presentation of your ideas, ability to persuade, knowledge to see reason, among many others are integral to group discussions.

In addition, as a job seeker you might have to face selection GDs as a part of the interview process. A representative of the prospective employer sits throughout the GD and observes the group performance.

**Figure 13.1** Assessment Parameters at a Job Interview GD



## Features of Group Discussion

It is difficult to specify the number of participants that would make the discussion useful and fruitful. Typically discussion groups comprise 3 to 12 members. A small group permits everyone to shift easily between speaking and listening. The advantage in such a group is that everyone in the group is able to get across their views and opinions. For your purpose, you can consider a small group comprising three to twelve members.

### TIPS to Remember

In a GD, all members are potential speakers as well as listeners.

## The Role of Group and Group Participants

So far we have discussed the different kinds of groups, the importance and the features of GD. Now, turn your attention to the role of the group and the group participants in the activity.

## Defining the Problem

Before the group starts the discussion on an issue, it must know the problem it is going to discuss or try to solve. The best way to define the problem is to phrase it as a question of policy. The question of policy generally includes the word 'should'. Thus, the subject for a GD is in the form of a question. In phrasing the question for a discussion, a group should follow several guidelines.

- Make the problem or issue as clear and specific as possible.
- Ensure that the problem or issue allows a wide variety of solutions.
- Be especially wary of a problem or issue that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'.
- Avoid a problem or issue that has inherent bias.
- Make sure that you pose a single issue, not multiple issues.
- Make sure that the issue for discussion is understandable to all members of the group.

For Example

The objective of a GD could be: 'What measures should our institute take to raise its academic standards.'

## Analyzing the Issue

After the issue has been defined, the group begins to analyze it. While analyzing a problem, one must pay attention to two aspects of the problem.

- First, show how severe the problem is. Find out the scope and limitations of the problem. Assess what might happen if the problem is not resolved.
- Second, find out what the causes of the problem are. Also, determine the consequences of the problem. Collect the historical background of the problem and find out the factors behind it.

Correlate your knowledge with your personal experience. During the discussion, the participants are expected to analyze a problem and interpret and present their point of view clearly. It is simple

to present data and information, but it is very difficult to bring together different aspects of a problem in such a way that it creates the impression of a well thought-out, analyzed presentation in a GD.

## Gathering Information

A thorough understanding of the problem is essential to gathering information. If you have time, undertake some research work in the library. Interact with an expert. Sometimes, you can rely on your own knowledge and experience. When meeting with your group, make sure that you have done ample research so that you are confident that you would be able to offer complete, unbiased and useful information. The GD will be effective if all participants collect complete information on the problem being discussed.

## Encourage Participation

To participate freely, the following points can help.

- Be objective in presenting your views.
- Listen attentively.
- Ask others' opinions on a particular issue.
- Show interest in others' views and information.
- React to their views.
- Encourage free exchange of ideas.

If some ideas occur to you while other participants are speaking, make a note of what you want to say. When you are given the floor, try to make your comments or ideas as specific as possible. If you want to ask a question or raise a doubt, make it clear and direct. Do not hesitate to present your point of view if you can clarify a point, correct an error, or contribute additional information. Avoid all traces of aggressiveness and unpleasantness.

## Keep the Discussion on Track

Illogical arguments lead to gaps in reasoning in the GD. Identify arguments that are confusing and put the focus on logical reasoning. It is essential to identify digression from the subject and avoid it. When you notice diversion, politely point it out and re-state the main objective of the discussion.



### Points to Remember

- Avoid illogical and confusing arguments.
- Focus attention on the main objective of the GD.
- Stick to the time schedule.
- Now and then, summarize and clarify the points already presented.
- Remind the members of the group and warn them against diversion from the subject.

It is the responsibility of every member of the group to keep the discussion on track and to intervene if the group wanders too far from the subject.

## Oral Communication Skills

The common saying is that clarity in thinking is reflected in clarity of expression. Substantiate your point of view with examples so that you can make your idea clear to your listeners. If you express generalized statements without examples or reason, it indicates lack of clarity. For example, if one participant introduces the following idea:

‘Substance abuse creates a lot of problems among the youth. What do you think about it?’

Some other participant may seize the opportunity and come up with examples such as:

‘Yes, it is true. Substance abuse has indeed become common among the youth. They are wasting their precious time and money, unable to do anything, spoiling their future and health. We must think seriously about how to eliminate this menace.’

Then, the other participants would start giving their points of view on the issue. This motivates others to participate.

### TIPS to Remember

Support your point of view with examples; make your idea clear to your listeners.

As a participant should not simply continue the previous point. Instead, if you give examples and present your point of view, it will motivate others to take the discussion ahead. For example, if you say:

‘The effects of pollution are erosion, depletion of natural resources, mental and health problems.’

Your team member might add to this by saying: ‘Yes, it is true, the XYZ Hotel in Agra is *a case in point*.’

Here, the participant is continuing your views. Instead, they may say that:

‘Yes, you are correct. Even monuments of international importance are getting affected by pollution. The Taj Mahal is an important case in point.’

## Leadership Skill

As a successful group leader in a GD you ought to help the group reach its goal in time by being direct and focused. Personal skills such as intellectual ability, initiative, adaptability, creativity, assertiveness, willingness to solve problems, ability to convince others, discretion, accommodating other’s views, objectivity and persuasiveness are assessed through group discussions. These are leadership skills too. Thus, anything that contributes to goal achievement can be considered a leadership skill. Although leadership skills are shared among members in a

### TIPS to Remember

Leadership skills are initiative, adaptability, creativity, assertiveness, discretion, decision-making, ability to convince others, objectivity, etc.

GD, each participant should try to show these skills whenever the need arises. As a leader of the group you should identify the different types of members of the group, particularly those, who use influence, who give the sanest judgement, who are reasonable, who show anger easily or who want to dominate. The leadership skills of the group leader of a GD are given below. You should:

- initiate the discussion.
- create an atmosphere in which members feel free to participate.
- clarify points, when required, and explains them.
- be objective and dispassionate.
- summarize the group's progress at the end of the meeting.
- resolve conflict.

### Intensive Listening Skill

Your listening ability depends on your attitude towards the information, the speaker and the purpose. It also depends on your knowledge of the subject. The average listener recalls only a little more than half of what the speaker says. By understanding and applying the guidelines given below, you can reduce the communication gap between the speaker and the listener. You must try to:

- acquire information.
- evaluate information.
- get the main ideas.
- understand the speaker's logic.
- understand the speaker's supporting ideas.
- know the attitude of the speaker towards the topic of discussion.

### Non-Verbal Communication Cues

At interviews, interviewers generally observe your body language cues. Maintain eye contact with your audience while listening to others' views or presenting your views in the GD. This will indicate that you are paying attention to what others are saying. Look at the table below.

**Table 13.1** Recalling some Non-verbal Communication Clues

<i>Non-verbal Clue</i>	<i>Significance</i>
when your hands are on your lap, with the right hand on top of the left	it indicates that you are a logical person.
when you use frequent hand movements	it indicates distraction.
when you use occasional hand movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it indicates emphasis</li> <li>• it shows reinforcement of the idea.</li> </ul>
when your arms are crossed over the chest	it indicates defensive nature.

when one hand is on your chin, and the index finger points towards an eye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it signals critical evaluation of the points</li> <li>• it creates the impression of deep thinking</li> </ul>
when you push your body to the back of the chair and sit straight	it indicates alertness
when your legs are firmly on the ground	it indicates alertness
when you lean towards a speaker or listener	it shows interest in the subject
when you sit on the edge of the chair	it signals cooperation
when you sit with one of your legs on either side of the chair using the back of the chair as a support	it signals aggressiveness and dominance
when you sit cross-legged	it signals informality
when you shake your legs while listening to the other members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it indicates frustration</li> <li>• it signals inability to get what you want</li> </ul>
when you stretch your legs in front of yourself	signals lack of interest and casual attitude
when you frequently hit your hands on the table	it shows inability to choose suitable words and proper expressions to get the idea or message across
when you lock your hands tightly	it conveys inflexibility and rigidity in thinking
when you drape your hand around the head of the chair	it signals informal behaviour
facial expressions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when you raise your eyebrows</li> <li>• when you lower the eyebrows</li> <li>• when you frown or have a furrowed expression</li> <li>• when your mouth is open</li> <li>• when the chin is thrust forward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it signals surprise and curiosity</li> <li>• it signals acceptance</li> <li>• it signals anger, displeasure, and disagreement</li> <li>• it signals shock and surprise</li> <li>• it signals confidence</li> </ul>

## Language for Group Discussions

Here are some strategies, along with useful expressions, that you should use while participating in a GD.

**Table 13.2 Interactive Strategies and Useful Expressions of GD**

<i>Interactive Strategies</i>	<i>Useful Expressions</i>
To begin the GD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a thought provoking topic. Let's start the discussion.</li> <li>• Our topic of discussion is very important and useful to all of us. Let's start.</li> <li>• May I begin . . .</li> <li>• Let me explain/interpret the concept first.</li> <li>• I feel that . . . is a big problem, today.</li> </ul>



To continue the discussion	<p>(The moment any speaker completes the point, you can start the discussion.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That is really an interesting point, but can I add another point . . . .</li> <li>• Well, that is true. I can add another factual information to your point.</li> <li>• Your point is a valid point. Let's discuss further on this aspect with examples . . . .</li> <li>• Can I add an example to your point?</li> <li>• I don't agree with you. Let me explain why.</li> <li>• It's not acceptable. Can we analyse this issue further?</li> </ul>
To give opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My opinion on this aspect is . . . .</li> <li>• I'm of the view . . . .</li> <li>• In my opinion . . . .</li> <li>• I'm pretty sure that is correct, but . . . .</li> <li>• I've no doubt on that, but . . . .</li> <li>• I'd like to express my opinion . . . .</li> <li>• According to me, this issue is . . . .</li> <li>• So far as I'm concerned . . . .</li> <li>• My experience says . . . .</li> </ul>
To ask for opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May I know your opinion on this . . . .</li> <li>• What do you think about it?</li> <li>• Would you like to say anything on this?</li> <li>• Do you want to make any comments on this?</li> <li>• What do you feel about this issue?</li> <li>• What is your opinion on this aspect?</li> <li>• Can you explain your opinion on this issue?</li> <li>• What is the general opinion on this?</li> <li>• Does anybody have anything to say?</li> <li>• Do you have any comments on this suggestion?</li> </ul>
To defend your opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let me restate what I mean . . . .</li> <li>• I repeat what I said earlier, because . . . .</li> <li>• What I'm trying to say is . . . .</li> <li>• The point made by Mr. . . . really supports my view . . . .</li> <li>• This is what I was trying to suggest . . . .</li> </ul>
To seek clarification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You said . . . what does this imply?</li> <li>• Just a moment. I don't understand . . . ?</li> <li>• You said . . . could you please elaborate?</li> <li>• If I understand your statement correctly, it is . . . .</li> </ul>
To accept other's view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That is definitely a right approach.</li> <li>• I'm strongly in favour of that . . . .</li> <li>• It is the best solution.</li> <li>• This is a good idea.</li> </ul>
To reject other's view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not possible . . . .</li> <li>• It is not achievable . . . .</li> <li>• I can't accept this . . . .</li> <li>• I'm strongly against that . . . .</li> <li>• I really find it unacceptable</li> <li>• I'm absolutely against this proposal . . . .</li> <li>• I'm sorry, I can't accept . . . .</li> <li>• I'm sorry, that is not possible . . . .</li> <li>• I'm afraid that is not practical . . . .</li> </ul>

To avoid aggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you hold on for a minute . . . .</li> <li>• Can you please stop for a while?</li> <li>• Just a minute, please.</li> <li>• Please wait, I would like to complete my argument at least.</li> <li>• Could you clarify this point further . . . .</li> <li>• Let me clarify this issue.</li> </ul>
To interrupt politely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sorry to interrupt you, but can I add a point here . . . .</li> <li>• Excuse me, I have a point to convey . . . .</li> <li>• Please allow us to express our point of view . . . .</li> <li>• Let me have a word . . . .</li> <li>• Please consider others' point of view.</li> <li>• Can I say something here?</li> <li>• If I'm not mistaken, we are overlooking a point here.</li> <li>• Before we go further, let us . . . .</li> </ul>
To avoid interruption, politely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let me complete my point.</li> <li>• Please allow me to complete my point of view.</li> <li>• Can you hold on for a minute? Let me complete my sentence at least.</li> <li>• Just a minute please . . . .</li> <li>• After listening to my point of view . . . .</li> <li>• You have a point, let me . . . .</li> <li>• That is a good point, but I still think that . . . .</li> <li>• Sorry to disturb you, but can I add a point here . . . .</li> <li>• That is a good idea, but I still feel that . . . .</li> <li>• I appreciate your point of view, but . . . .</li> <li>• I can understand your point of view, but . . . .</li> <li>• Your point sounds interesting, but . . . .</li> </ul>
To make a quiet participant to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you say about it?</li> <li>• Would you like to share your views?</li> <li>• Would you like to express your views?</li> <li>• May we know your opinion . . . .</li> <li>• Do you accept this . . . .</li> </ul>
To make suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I suggest that first we . . . .</li> <li>• Let's start with . . . .</li> <li>• What about . . . .</li> <li>• May we consider . . . .</li> <li>• Why don't we . . . .</li> <li>• Shall we . . . .</li> </ul>
To insist on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let me emphasize this point . . . .</li> <li>• I've to say again that . . . .</li> <li>• I must draw your attention again to what I said earlier.</li> <li>• I'm afraid I have to insist on . . . .</li> <li>• I repeat.</li> </ul>
To give in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I admit . . . .</li> <li>• I take that back . . . .</li> <li>• I now see the point . . . .</li> <li>• I accept your argument . . . .</li> <li>• Yes, you are right. I withdraw . . . .</li> </ul>

<p>To focus on the discussion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think we're off the track . . . .</li> <li>• I'm afraid . . . .</li> <li>• I think there is another view we should think about. For example, . . . .</li> <li>• The main point of the discussion is . . . .</li> <li>• The focus of the discussion is . . . .</li> <li>• I think I can substantiate your point . . . .</li> <li>• I think . . . is a good example of . . . .</li> <li>• Yes, you are right . . . .</li> <li>• Yes, we have a point in your argument . . . .</li> <li>• Yes, I didn't think from that angle . . . .</li> </ul>
<p>To disagree with others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't agree with you on this point . . . .</li> <li>• This is not the issue . . . .</li> <li>• We should not think in this way . . . .</li> <li>• Oh! No. Can I explain why . . . .</li> <li>• Oh! You can't say that . . . .</li> <li>• I don't think so . . . .</li> <li>• I'm afraid, I think differently . . . .</li> </ul>
<p>To keep the discussion on track</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think we are deviating from the main issue.</li> <li>• Let's come to the main subject.</li> <li>• Don't you think it is a deviation from the issue under discussion?</li> <li>• I know what you mean, but it would be better if we restrict ourselves to the given subject.</li> <li>• I do understand your point of view, but let's stick to the main subject under discussion.</li> <li>• I appreciate your analyses, but it is a deviation from our topic.</li> <li>• That is well appreciated, but I do not find the link between what you want to say and the subject under discussion.</li> <li>• Let's discuss something related to our topic.</li> <li>• Let's avoid diversion from the subject.</li> </ul>



## Review of Concepts

To make the group discussion purposeful, each member should stick to the topic. Listen carefully and courteously and contribute when you can and keep your remarks as brief and clear as possible, so that you can avoid hasty decisions and can reach a satisfactory decision. During a group discussion held for job interview purpose, the examiners, generally assess the oral competence of a candidate in terms of the following points: sound knowledge of the subject, ability to define

the problem, ability to analyse the issue, ability to gather information, ability to show commitment, ability to avoid interpersonal conflicts, ability to keep the discussion on track, clarity of expression, ability to accommodate other's views, the ability to motivate participants to discuss further and the ability to initiate the discussion when it is subsided. To evaluate a GD you can use the following evaluation scale.

**Evaluation Template for Group Discussion**

Evaluation components Candidate's name	Knowledge of the Topic 25%	Ability to communicate effectively 20%	Ability to lead the discussion 10%	Ability to cooperate with other members 10%	Ability to keep the discussion on track 10%	Ability to moderate the discussion 10%	Ability to initiate the discussion if it is subsided 10%	Ability to initiate the discussion 5%



## Application Based Questions

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1. Listen to a television discussion programme, and analyse it. Did the discussion follow the principles of a group discussion? If not, what are your suggestions?
2. A few statements for a GD are given here. Express your views on each one of them and write what you would like to say as a participant in each GD.
  - i) Vocational emphasis in education.
  - ii) Indian cinema is neither a source of healthy entertainment, nor an instrument of social change.
  - iii) The present-day policy of liberalization of our economy should be changed as it is against our national interests.
  - iv) The establishment of multinational companies in India has boosted the Indian economy.
  - v) English should be one of the evaluation components, along with other subjects, in all the competitive examinations in India.
  - vi) Brain drain is a myth.
  - vii) Politics is no longer an instrument of public services; it has instead become a means of acquiring power and wealth.
3. Watch the accompanying videos for this chapter. Form groups with peers and try and conduct an improved discussion, keeping in mind the review comments.