

Group Interviews

What is a Group Interview?

Group interviews involve bringing you into an interview with several other candidates who are vying for the same position. All candidates in the group are interviewed simultaneously.

The interviewers in these situations are interested in how you respond and react to other candidates, as well as how you respond to questions directed at you.

In a group interview setting, interviewers often pose hypothetical problems or situations to the group as a whole and allow the group to engage in activities to solve or address the issue.

The interviewers or assessors will be assessing “soft” skills such as:

- Problem solving skills
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Teamwork

Group interviews can be more stressful than one-on-one interviews, so they also give potential employers better insight into how you will function in the stressful situations that crop up frequently on the job.

Why Do Companies Use Group Interviews?

Group interviews are common in jobs that require dealing with the public and heavy customer interaction because of their highly stressful nature, and the fact that they require candidates to have the ability to think fast on their feet, keep their cool, and solve problems.

Types of Group Interview Formats

1) Group Activities – Activities usually involve groups of five or fewer candidates who are tasked with a specific problem to solve. The goal is to see how you handle conflict and how well you work together even though you are competing for the same job.

2) Group Discussion – With group discussions, the groups may involve three to seven people and the interviewer asks questions of each candidate present. Everyone takes turns and your mission in this interview process is to make yourself memorable to the person conducting the interview.

3) Group Followed by Individual Interview — Some organisations will conduct the group activity and/or discussion and then meet with candidates individually to ask additional questions.

How to Prepare for a Group Interview

Start with the basic interview preparation that you would do for ANY job interview (including performing adequate company research, practicing common interview questions and answers, and preparing your own questions).

Resist the temptation to over-rehearse for group interviews. Much of the purpose of a group interviews is to see how you operate in an “off the cuff” situation. Over-prepared responses may come off too scripted, and can disappoint the interviewers who are looking for authentic reactions and responses.

Tips for Standing Out at the Group Interview

- Display your listening skills. As difficult as it may seem, it is definitely possible to stand out in a group interview situation. One way to do this “Show your listening skills by paying attention to what others say during the interview and try not to repeat their responses.” Not only is it polite to listen while the other candidates are talking with the interviewers, but you also learn a lot from the experience. Pay attention to the responses of other candidates and the interviewers’ reactions to those responses.
- Speak up. This is your chance to demonstrate your fit for the role. Some people get uncomfortable and clam up, especially if they are intimidated by a group of big-mouthed extroverts. If you don’t speak up, you can easily be overlooked. Interviewers are also looking for people who know how to make their voices heard. That doesn’t mean you have to be the loudest. Look for opportunities to jump in and confidently raise your hand.
- Resist any temptation to try to one-up the other interview participants and instead focus on sharing the traits, talents, and characteristics that make you unique. It may seem smart to undermine the other candidates in an effort to make yourself look better. However, you should always err on the side of supporting your team in group interview environments.
- Don’t forget to build on responses other participants provide. This lets the interviewers know you’re paying attention and demonstrates your ability to think as a member of a team.
- Involve everyone on your team in the problem-solving process. Be the leader, not by taking charge, but by getting to know the people on your team, addressing them by name, and using their strengths to accomplish your goals.
- Share the things that make you unique. You never know when you’ll find a kindred spirit among the interviewers. More importantly, it humanises you and gives an impression of you as a whole person rather than a one-dimensional candidate. It sets you apart from the others being interviewed, which is your goal at the end of the interview.
- Treat everyone with respect. Yes, the other candidates are your competition. However, they may become your teammates at some point in time, whether in this position or another position down the road. An added benefit to treating everyone with respect is that this is something the people conducting the interviews are looking for as well. It’s a point in your favour to behave as if you’re already coworkers attempting to reach a common goal.
- Lastly, don’t forget to acknowledge all the members of your team for helping to carry out the plan effectively. This shows leadership and humility while presenting you as a leader in the creation and execution of the plan.