



How to
Crack Group
Discussions?

MBA

Prep

IdeasMakeMarket.com presents all the insights needed to fulfill your dream of studying in a premier B-school by clearing all your hurdles related to Group Discussions!

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About The Author

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1. What is a Group Discussion? Where is it used?

A GD (Group Discussion) is a forum where people sit together; discuss a topic for a certain amount of time with the common objective of finding a solution for a problem or discussing an issue that is given to them.

2. Why are Group Discussions used as a part of the selection process? How are they useful?

Group Discussions measure certain attributes of the candidates that are otherwise difficult to identify and time consuming to assess. A number of people who can communicate their ideas well and discuss effectively with others in a one-to-one situation become tongue-tied in a group situation. They will just not be able to present their ideas or discuss their ideas with the other members of the group. A Group Discussion will identify people who have such group communication skills and people who do not possess such group communication skills.

3. What are the similarities / differences between Group Discussions and Public Speaking / Debating?

Debating and Public Speaking are one-to-many communication situations whereas a Group Discussion is a many-to-many situation. A debate, an elocution or a public speaking contest are solo performances whereas a Group Discussion is NOT. In a debate, it is your individual views that matter. In a Group Discussion, apart from your individual views, the views of the entire group matter.

In Public Speaking / Debating, the speaker can take a particular position on the topic and speak accordingly. In a Group Discussion, all the members of the group will participate and one has to listen to the views of the other members of the group. It is a discussion and the speaker will be “interrupted” by the other members of the group while speaking.

4. How is a Group Discussion conducted?

A group of candidates are made to sit together in a circular / semi-circular fashion or in a U-shape. There will be a person to co-ordinate the Group Discussion (called the moderator).

After the topic is given, the candidates start discussing the topic amongst themselves. They stop the discussion when the moderator asks them to stop.

5. How many candidates will there be in a Group Discussion?

The group size could range between eight to fifteen students.

6. How much time is given for each Group Discussion?

Normally, 15 to 20 minutes.

7. Are the participants expected to address each other by name?

No. You should address a specific person either by looking at him / her directly or by pointing out to him / her.

8. What is the role of the moderator?

The primary role of the moderator is to evaluate the performance of every participant. He is the person who tells the group members what they should do, announces the topic and the time for the discussion, keeps track of the time of the Group Discussion and evaluates the performance of the candidates who participated in the Group Discussion. For all practical purposes, he is non-existent once the Group Discussion starts.

9. Does the moderator write the topic on the board?

The moderator normally does not write the topic on the board. He just reads it out and repeats it once – you have to be attentive while the topic is being given and make sure that you have got the wording right.

10. Will we be given paper and pen / pencil to note down the topic?

No. You are normally expected to carry your own pen / pencil and paper to a Group Discussion.

11. What are the methods that can be used for idea generation?

The three methods / approaches are

- Key Word Approach (KWA)
- Viewpoint of Affected Parties (VAP)
- Socio-cultural, Political, Economic, Legal and Technological (SPELT) angles to the given topic.

a. What is KWA?

In this approach, you should look at the topic word by word. Take each key word or phrase of the topic and see what it means. It has to be clarified as to what “frame of reference” you are using.

Example topic: Excessive exposure of female anatomy in advertising should be banned.

Excessive Exposure: What is exposure? How can excessive / adequate be defined? How does it affect the viewers? What will be the impact on various categories of viewers, say children?

Advertising: Types of advertisements? What is the Purpose of advertising? What is effective advertising? When are females effective in advertisement?

Ban: Is it possible to ban and implement the ban? Will the ban be effective? What was the impact of other things that were banned? Is it correct for a democratic society to ban all? Share things that some of its members dislike?**What is VAP?**

It stands for Viewpoint of Affected Parties. Consider all the people or parties who are likely to be affected by the topic viewers / readers, parents, children; the companies whose products are being advertised; advertising agencies / media TV, newspapers, magazine) who are the people involved in “exposing”.

b. What is SPELT?

Socio-cultural: Our culture and traditions; family set-up values and related issues

Political: The political will to implement an action of this nature

Economic: The adverse effect on the performance of advertising companies, advertising agencies.

Legal: Is such a ban legally tenable? The affected parties are likely to take recourse to legal help.

Technological: How can such a ban be implemented on media like satellite TV?

12. Is it admirable to take a position in favour of the topic or against the topic?

A Group Discussion is not a debate where you have to decide whether you would like to speak for the topic or against the topic. This is a “discussion” where you have to bring out all aspects pertaining to the topic. You have to bring out the points in favour of the topic as well as those against the topic and discuss them in the group.

Don't start the Group Discussions with statements like “I whole heartedly support the topic ...” or “I completely disagree with the topic”, etc.

13. What should I do if some other members of the group interrupt me when I am speaking?

If you are speaking, you should try preventing others from grabbing your chance. When some other participant tries to interrupt you while you are speaking, you should tell him / her clearly and unambiguously that you should be allowed to speak. You can say, “Excuse me, please let me complete.” Or, you can say, “Just a minute – let me finish my point”.

14. Can we use Malayalam / Hindi in the middle of our discussion for better effect?

A GD is a formal situation and therefore your entire discussion should be in proper English.

15. Will using statistics help in a GD?

If using statistics is going to enhance the presentability of your point, then go ahead and use them.

16. Can I question the other group members on what they say?

Asking questions just for the sake of asking questions, once again, is not going to get you any marks.

17. What should I do if I do not know anything about the topic?

Make sure that you have read up about a large variety of issues. You should just keep quiet in the initial stages and listen to what the others are saying. Once you get a good enough idea about what the others are saying, use those points combined with your common sense and come up with your own points. You can also try and use KWA and SPELT to help yourself generate ideas.

18. Should I be the first one to speak in the GD? Will it fetch me additional marks if I initiate the GD?

You are going to get only a small advantage. The marks you get will depend on your overall performance.

19. Case studies and a sample case

a. How is a case-based GD different from a topic-based GD? What are the similarities and differences?

While topic-based GDs are more free-wheeling in nature, case-based GDs are more structured and the direction of the discussion is almost pre-determined by the identified problem.

Topic-based GDs may or may not lead to any specific conclusion whereas case-based GDs will essentially move towards a solution.

While doing the case-based GDs, you will be required to don the role of the person in the case who needs to take a decision. The problems associated with the decision-maker will have to be considered and to that extent there are limitations. In a topic-based GD, you present your

views and opinions as reflective of your own self and you need not assume the role of anybody else.

b. What exactly is a case and how long will it be?

It can be business situations or social or economic related situations. A case is a narration of a situation or an event. It usually has a situation wherein a decision has to be taken. Your approach to taking the decision and your interaction with the other members of the group while in the process of taking a decision will be evaluated by the moderator. At times the moderator might ask you to write a summary of the case at the end.

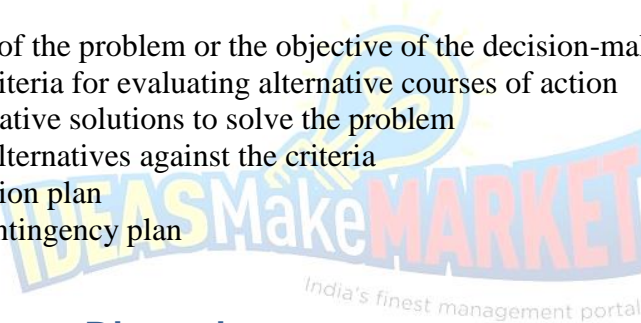
c. How should one go about analyzing and discussing a case?

First of all, when you read the case, try focussing on the following issues:

Who is the main decision-maker and what is the central problem? What are the decision-maker's constraints and resources? What variables need be considered for decision-making?

Then use the following framework to analyse it for yourself and subsequently for discussing the case with the group. The steps involved in this framework are:

- Identification of the problem or the objective of the decision-maker
- Identify the criteria for evaluating alternative courses of action
- Identify alternative solutions to solve the problem
- Evaluate the alternatives against the criteria
- Prepare an action plan
- Generate a contingency plan



20. Types of Group Discussions

a. Are there different types of Group Discussions?

Group Discussions are divided into two broad categories based on the topic / issue given for discussion.

- Topic-based Group Discussions, and
- Case-based Group Discussions (also called Case Studies). In topic-based Group Discussions, the group discusses a topic that is typically in the form of a statement. By the end of the discussion, the group should strive to arrive at a consensus on the issue that is covered by the topic

In case studies, a short description of a situation is given to all the participants. The participants have to study the case, analyse the problem, and then discuss their views about the possible solution to the problem with the other members of the group.

b. In topic-based Group Discussions, what types of topics will be given?

The topics that are given in Group Discussions are of two types – knowledge-based, and abstract.

Knowledge-based topics are such that you need to have some knowledge about the topic to be able to speak on the topic. An example for this type of topics is “India should withdraw from WTO”.

Economic topics: A significant proportion of the topics given by a number of organisations is based on Economics, either pertaining to India or international in dimension. Topics like “India should slow down the pace of Liberalisation” or “The economics of technology-driven systems do not help developing nations”. You should be familiar with critical economic indicators such as GDP, the plan outlay, sectoral allocations from the budget, trade and fiscal balances, export & import items and values, banking concepts, and interest rates, stock indices, etc.

Social topics: Topics like “Dowry continues to haunt Indian brides” or “Education should become a fundamental duty”, etc., are examples of social topics. While discussing social topics, you should be clear about both the ‘generic’ nature of the topic and the ‘specific’ manifestations of the social issue.

Political topics: If a given topic is “Coalition politics in a poor country like India is a drain on the national Economy,” you need to know the nature of coalition politics, the political and social ramifications, the economic fall-out of coalition politics, and the economic problems of India as affected by the political state of affairs.

Sports / Films-related topics: Recently concluded tournaments / cups like the Olympic Games can be the subject matter for a number of GD topics. The topics may be direct and encompass the discipline in general like “Should India announce a Sports holiday?” or they could be specific to a particular game like “Indian cricket has reached the point of no return”. The topic could be interdisciplinary in nature like “Too much of consumer time and money is spent on cricket. This is leading to wastage of national resources”.

IT-based: “We need more money to fertilise crops rather than to increase bandwidth” or “The IT bubble has finally burst – even in India”. Ideas like e-governance and networking are all potential topics.

Abstract Topics are such that you do not really need any knowledge about the topic to speak on the topic. Your worldly knowledge and common sense will help you in speaking on the topic. Topics like “The farther we look the closer we are” and “Poverty and richness will eventually mean the same” are examples of abstract topics. Abstract topics can be best discussed using appropriate exemplification.

You have to be regular with newspaper reading, especially the editorial column.

For current issues, you should go through good magazines – of the last 8 to 10 months. This should include at least one business magazine (Business India, Business Today or Business world) and one general magazine (India Today, Outlook, Frontline, etc.). Your focus should be on the “why and how” rather than on the “when and where” of the issues.

For issues that are not current, a single source that can help you is any guide that covers the preparation for the General Studies paper of Civil Services Examination.

21. What does the moderator look for in the participants in a Group Discussion?

1. Content
2. Communication skills
3. Group behavioural skills
4. Leadership skills

Let us look at each of them in detail.

a. Content

Content is the single most important factor in a Group Discussion. The moderator would like to understand how well-versed you are with the knowledge relevant to the topic. It shows how well-read you are. It is very important for you to clearly display your understanding of all the issues pertaining to the topic.

b. Communication skills

If the content aspect covers “what to say” in a Group Discussion, Communication pertains to “how to say it”.

Communication covers three different aspects. They are

- (i) Correctly conveying what you want to say,
- (ii) Listening, and
- (iii) Language.

c. Group Behavioural Skills

You should listen to and understand the views expressed by the other group members, integrate them with your ideas, present a cogent picture of the group’s view and help arrive at a consensus in the discussion.

d. Leadership Skills

Leadership means showing ‘direction’ to the group. A leader is not the person who speaks the most in a group – a leader is the person who is ‘spoken to’ the most.

It is not possible for all members of a group to display leadership skills. If you get an opportunity to lead the group, do so by all means. However, do not go out of your way to establish yourself as a leader. It is quite adequate if you are able to display your knowledge, communicate effectively, and behave maturely with your fellow group members.

22. Final Points

Remember one important rule – you have here in order to get selected for the organisation of your choice. You are not there to make policy decisions for the government. Nor are you there to convince all your fellow group members that your point of view is the only one that they should follow. You are only there to contribute to the group in a manner that convinces the moderator that you will make a good student at his / her management school. Everything that you do or say should keep this all-important fact in mind.

