

9. Group Discussion

Learning objectives

- Understanding the concept of Group Discussion
 - What is Group Discussion ?
 - Why Group Discussion ?
 - What is tested in a Group Discussion?
- Nature and Scope of Group Discussion
 - Group Discussion...a tool for the process of Selection
 - Features of a Group Discussion
 - How does Group Discussion work?
 - How is the performance judged?
- Preparation for a Group Discussion
 - The classic approach to successfully participate in a Group Discussion.
 - The Do's and Don'ts in a Group Discussion.
 - The potholes to be avoided in a Group Discussion.
- From Preparation to Participation
 - How to start participating
 - How to analyze a topic.
 - The secret for better participation in a Group Discussion
- How Institutes can help students prepare for Group Discussion.

Case Study

Case Study I

Rohit, Abhay, Siddarth, Yusuf, Alka, George, Elizabeth and Bhaskar are all contenders for the post of the Sr. Executive (Marketing and Sales), with the firm Leon Exports Internationale.

The Human Resources Team were well aware of the individual capabilities of each of them (their educational qualifications being on par).

As all of them were almost like a peer group, as they joined around the same time, it was not as if the senior-most in the hierarchy could be promoted to the vacant post. The Selection had to be done from amongst the eligible candidates mentioned above.

As the post of Senior Executive (Marketing & Sales), was one where a lot of Interpersonal Communication is required, a lot of Team play to be displayed and Leadership Skills to be executed to achieve the goals... the HR Team decided to hold a Group Discussion with these eligible candidates, in order to pick one most suited to the role.

Case Study II

Ashishsh, Smriti, Asmita, Jacob, Patricia, Vineet, Megha, Zaheer, Komal, Gurdeep Singh, Shyam and Bhaskar had all applied for a prestigious B-school. They all had cleared their written examination with top grades.

The natural II step in the process of selection was Group Discussion; of course only 2-3 from this group would be short listed for the Personal Interview.

* Everything else remaining same. i.e. their educational qualification, work experience etc. Selection would be based upon their performance in the Group Discussion, as in the Case Study I.

Case Study III

It is a Friday evening and as usual (which they do every Friday) this bunch of young professionals from "Savvy-Tech Solutions" head towards the Downtown's famous restaurant, where they literally unwind, listen to music and inevitably enter into a discussion.

This group indeed is a unique bunch.

- Ravi... he likes to dominate in any conversation (left to him, it can well be a monologue!)
- Kavita... takes off at a tangent, misconstrues things and takes it personally.
- James... feels that his point of view is right! err..always!
- Softy... prefers to keep quiet and observe!
- Sheik... pipes in his views, but prefers to 'shake' his head and generally agree with all & sundry!

- Seema... the attention seeker, speaks loudly, generally opposing all the views, mm... little realizing that this is not a Debate!*
- Vibha... the quiet one, wants to participate, but doesn't know how!*
- Nair... the one with the quick wit, sensibly intervenes and diffuses the situation when it kind of gets out of hand and gently guides them towards the topic that is being discussed (herds the cattle back on the track! so to say.)*

This ought to give you a glimpse of some of the personality traits that exists.....

Having gone through the three Case Study, and as you proceed to understand the Concept, Nature of a Group Discussion, you will realize that most of the Group Discussion has participants with the personality traits possessed by the group in Case Study III.

You will also be able to comprehend as to what were the qualities that the said individuals, in Case Study I possessed, for being considered as the best of the lot.

Why is it that some, e.g. in Case Study II, in spite of doing well otherwise, e.g. in their written examination, still failed to perform well in the Group Discussion, which resulted in their rejection? After going through this chapter you should be able to determine it, yourself.

Understanding the Concept of Group Discussion

What is Group Discussion ?

A Group Discussion can be defined as a formal discussion involving 10-12 participants in a group, wherein a topic or a situation has been assigned to the participants on which the discussion will be held.

All the participants are given few minutes to reflect upon the topic and then asked to discuss the same among themselves for 15-20 minutes. It is like team game e.g. Cricket, Baseball,

Football, which is based upon team work. Group discussion too is a team work, which incorporates the views of all the team members to reach a consensus. *general agreement*

Thus, for a Group Discussion, 10-12 candidates are formed into a 'leaderless' group and are given a specific topic/situation to analyze and discuss within a stipulated time. A panel will observe the proceedings and evaluate the members of the group on various skill levels. *demand*

Why a Group Discussion ?

It is a methodology used by an organization to gauge whether the candidate has certain personality traits and/or skills that it desires in its members. *habit* *constr* *measure*

To name but a few...

Personality Traits that a Group Discussion is trying to assess may comprise of:

- Interpersonal Skills
- Ability to be a 'Team Player'
- Effective Communication Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Initiative
- Reasoning Skills
- Listening Skills
- Assertiveness
- Flexibility

Companies and Institutes conduct a Group Discussion after a written test so as to check on How-good-a-team-player are you?

- How good you are at communicating with others.
- How you conduct yourself, participate and contribute as a group member.
- What is the kind of importance you give to the group objective as well as your own.
- How well do you listen to the viewpoints of others.

- How gracious are you in accepting views of others though it may be contrary to your own opinion.

Nowadays, many Companies and Institutes are making Group Discussion as the first criteria for screening the candidates for Face-to-Face Interviews. Group Discussion is used for Mass Elimination, when supply is greater than the demand! E.g. if the seats available for an MBA Program in a particular B-school is only 120 and the number of candidates who have successfully cleared their written examination and applied for this particular B-school is 700, a Group Discussion offers an obvious solution.

Communication Skills and Group Discussion Skills are two relevant Soft Skills which are pre-requisites to pave your path towards success!

As future leaders one requires to communicate with different people like team members, managers, clients, vendors etc. hence, Interpersonal Skills is very important.

One may be very proficient in many skills, but if one is unable to communicate one's thoughts, ideas to one's Seniors or Evaluators, you stand to lose out and someone else may take credit for it !

What is tested in a Group Discussion?

Group Discussion, as a technique for assessing performance of individuals in a group, is based on the format that, to achieve the goals in any group endeavor, qualities such as Leadership Skills, Subject Awareness, Communication Skills are imperative.

It is in a Group Discussion, that one can observe these qualities being manifested clearly. The aspects which make up a Group Discussion are :

Verbal Communication and Non Verbal Communication

Also tested are your :

- Listening Skills
- Open-Mindedness
- Decision-Making Skills

- Subject Knowledge and Analysis Skills
- Problem Solving and Critical Thinking Skills
- Confidence
- Attitude
- Interactive Skills
- Tactfulness
- Co-operation
- Creativity/'Out of the Box Thinking'
- Assertiveness

Nature and Scope of Group Discussion

Group Discussion...a tool for the process of selection.

Nowadays Group Discussion is being extensively used as a preface to the Personal Interview, which ultimately leads to the final selection of the candidate/s. It becomes imperative to conduct further screening tests for having to choose few among many.

One does realize that, if Organizational Goals are to be achieved, it can be done so, only through 'Team Effort', which in turn has to be a seamless effort in other words, the lookout for that suitable candidate/s, who possesses the strength to carry the group ahead, steer through the rough seas as a good sailor would and yet keep his group of men happy.

In short, a dynamic person with a sharp intellect and well honed Social and Communication Skills is what is ideally required and Group Discussion helps in weeding out and selecting only those who meet the requirement.

Group Discussion is one of the best tools to study the personality traits that are exhibited by the candidates, as these can be perceived immediately, for they are responses to a situation/remark, these responses are raw, unmasked.

Inadvertently, the candidates expose their personality traits without realizing it, both the positive as well as the negative aspects. Group Discussion is also popularly called the 'Situational Test' for, it helps in not only screening the candidates but also in testing their potential. It is in a given situation like during a Group Discussion

that candidates reveal their 'Real Me', their knowledge, the strengths, their weaknesses, their attitudinal problems and thereby expose their true potential. This helps in assessing which candidate is a 'Team Player'.

Now, having understood that how Group Discussion plays a very important role in the Selection Process, you also realize that success lies in the clever handling of the Group Dynamics. You realize that, during a Group Discussion, situations may be fluid, but the results should be concrete, with the clever manipulation of words and gaining the approval and co-operation of the fellow members. This is the time for you to don the mantle of a Leader, adapting yourself to the situation, stimulating and motivating others (like a leader ought to) to contribute as you go along, explore the situation to gain advantage by 'naturally' revealing your social, analytical and enterprising facets of your personality.)

Features of a Group Discussion

Based on what we have seen so far, let us briefly analyze the main features of a Group Discussion.

- As the name suggests, it is a **Group Activity** carried out by 8-10 participants. They exchange views on a specific topic, situation. The discussion takes place within a stipulated time of 20-30 minutes. The 'self-appointed leader' of the group leads the discussion to a mutually approved conclusion.
- It is an effective '**Testing Tool**' for the Selection Process. It is a tool to assess all the candidates in the group, at the same time. This helps in comparing and contrasting the performance of each participant on the same scale. Based on the performances, points are given pertaining to each skill tested. The top three scorers are shortlisted by the panel of judges.
- It is also called a '**Leaderless Discussion**'. The discussion begins on an even keel....i.e. to say, they all commence the discussion as mere participants. But, a 'Leader'

emerges, by the end of the discussion. The participant who displays: leadership skills, initiative, tact, subject knowledge, and gently propels the others to his line of thought....is the unspoken Leader!

- All the participants have similar academic standards and intellectual ability. However, what varies, is their Verbal and Non-Verbal Skills and their Interpersonal Skills.
- Group Discussion, generally involves a display of verbal excellence coupled with a good grasp of topic/subject, confidence and fluency on the part of the participant.
- The basis for a Group Discussion is the motto: '*good managers always work as a team*'. One starts as a Team Player and gradually surface as a Team Leader. Team Skills are keenly observed in a Group Discussion.
- Remember, a Group Discussion is NOT a debate but a discussion.

How does Group Discussion work ?

The panel of judges who observe the proceedings during a Group Discussion and evaluate the participants' performance, exhibiting various skills, basically look out for certain *core managerial skills*. This is how Group Discussion works and aids them in their evaluation process, for it helps in judging all the participants' performance, all at a given time, space, subject and skills.

Now, let us have a look at the 'core managerial skills' that one expects from the participants to be exhibited in this group activity.

- **Communication Skills definitely heads the list.**
The ability to express oneself with minimal, effective words is definitely a prerequisite. Clarity and Precision, for, Group Discussion is essentially a verbal oriented performance. Confidence and Conviction in one's thoughts and action before a group of co-participants and the panel of judges (who may be seated in front of you or otherwise) reflects a reassuring personality, clothing a calm, focused mind. The practice of

using formal language. Excellent articulation skills
Communication with Wit is a wonderful combination, provide
it is used prudently.

- ***Leadership and Decision-Making Skills***

In order to manage well, one needs to lead, take the initiative
and make the split-second decisions and accept responsibility.

- ***Co-ordinating Skills***

A Group Discussion gives you the platform to orchestra your
own performance, by skillfully taking the lead and
coordinating all the views, ideas that go back and forth into a
seamless discussion, through tact, understanding and
respecting your group members' views.

Like the Musical conductor, who 'Listens' you have the
chance to pick up the baton, lead and make a lasting
impression. (in the minds of the judges.)

How is the performance judged during the Group Discussion?

The main purpose of a Group Discussion is to get an overall
view about each candidate, within the short span of allocated
time, and make an assessment on each one of them, based on
the benchmark which has been set up.

- The performance is observed and evaluated by a panel of
3-4 members.
- There are various criteria based on which the performance
of each participant is judged.
- All the skills that a manager ought to possess, is judged :
 - Effective Communication Skills.
 - Interpersonal Skills
 - Sound subject knowledge
 - Ability to form and lead the Team
 - Ability to Motivate, Persuade, Respect team members
 - Above all, ability to take initiative, co-operate, co-ordinate
amicably.

* Each participant is judged on each of the skills mentioned
and given points.

- * The top three scorers are shortlisted
- * What one is on the look out for, is an emotionally well balanced, intelligent being with the right attitude, who will put the Organization above Himself/Herself.

Preparation for a Group Discussion

So, you just saw a great play. You come out of the theatre, marvelling at the performance of the Main Artistes...how effortlessly, they involved you (the audience) in their joys, sorrows, passion, fear, conquest....Ask any Theatre Artist how they were able to do it with no flaw...their answer will be unanimous.....**PREPARATION.**

During the Group Discussion, think that you are going to be 'the leading artist and not a mere participant'.....so, for that you have to start preparing in real earnest.

Where and How do you start ?

Start Reading

- Collect as much of Information on and about Group Discussion as possible.
- Be abreast with Current Affairs...both National as well as International.
- Visit the library frequently and pick up magazines, books which offer an insight into various events; reflect upon the different approaches and views various contributors have on the same topic.
- Analyze: Try to reason objectively as to why you agree or disagree; what are your personal views?
- You may pick up any topic at 'random' but your analysis should be 'systematic'.

Start having Fun ! Start holding Mock Sessions of Group Discussion

- Put that mobile to use for a purpose (for a change!) Call about 8-10 friends (classmates or office colleagues) of yours and invite them over for an informal Group Discussion.

- Once, all of them are settled, give them few topics to choose from (this way they will not feel that they are being told but being given a chance to select and participate!)
- * Set the timer and finish after 20-30 minutes.
- * You may request few of your other friends to act as the judges and evaluate the performance of each of you.
- Repeat this drill as frequently as possible, it can be scheduled or an impromptu one !
- Take the Feedback seriously and improve upon your performance.

When the D-Day arrives, believe me, you are not going to be a bit flustered. You will be on the stage, full of confidence FOR you have prepared well for this show !

The classic approach to successfully participate in Group Discussion

There are few unspoken behavioural codes pertaining to 'Group Attitudes' which accompanies any Group Discussion.

The participants have to be aware of them and accordingly toe the line.

- The aim of each participant should be that the outcome of any Group Discussion should be constructive and rewarding.
- Each participant should don the role of the 'unspoken leader' and try to take the discussion ahead, by taking the initiative and the responsibility that goes along with it.
- The roles of Leaders and Followers fluctuate; in the beginning, there are no absolute well-defined roles.
- Adopt a 'Broad Minded', 'Liberal' approach.
Be open to the views of others, be objective and tolerant.
Avoid being subjective all the time.
- Be flexible and impartial.
- Let your well modulate voice mirror your views.
Let your verbal skills be put to test now.
Let your thought process flow in a logical manner that expresses the depth of your knowledge.

Follow this approach and you are on the first step towards a successful participation. Remember, each move of yours is being assessed !

The Do's and Don'ts in a Group Discussion

The Do's

Let us begin with

• *Formal Dressing*

Ensure that you are formally dressed. A Formal Suit/Combination Formal Attire, along with comfortable formal shoes. (no sport shoes please, even if it's a Nike or a Reebok!)

• *Maintain a Positive Attitude*

Keep your cool. Maintain a positive body language projecting confidence. Be alert to the ever changing flow in the discussion.

• *Maintain Eye Contact*

Ensure that you keep your eye contact across the other participants and evaluators, as you speak. That is the most effective body language when you are trying to persuade/convince others, your point of view.

• *Initiate the Group Discussion*

Initiating a Group Discussion gives you a bonus point, BUT, do so, only when you have understood the topic for Group Discussion clearly and have some subject knowledge of the same. Rushing in to open the discussion, without any topic knowledge will only create an unfavourable impression of yours in the minds of the panelist.

• *Be Articulate*

Speak clearly; use polite language; Your choice of words and phrases should be simple and understandable.

• *Speak Sensibly*

Emphasis should be on Quality and not on Quantity! It is 'What' is being said counts and not 'How much'! Few minutes of

sensible speech may gain you points, whereas, Few minutes of nonsensical speech may cost you points.

- ***Allow Others to Speak***

Try not to 'hog' the show! Other participants are here for the same reason as you...be gracious.

- ***Listen to Others Have to Say.***

You have to pick up your cues for your next statement from what your predecessor has said, so be attentive to their views.

- ***Ensure that the Discussion is on Track***

By being alert, you can gauge the situation and if you notice that the discussion is being led off track by some of the member-participants, tactfully take the initiative and steer the discussion towards the goal.

The Don'ts

- ***Do not Interrupt. It is Bad Manners!***

When a participant is trying to convey his/her views, which you may disagree with, does not give you the right of way to break in. Instead, make a note of it, so that you may convey your opinion when it's your turn.

- ***Do not be Aggressive.***

Only a weak person displays anger! With this negative display of your emotion, you will be revealing this facet of your personality to the judges, which means negative points! Learn to express your disagreement in a gentle but firm way.

- ***Do not Dominate.***

Flow with the thought process of others, and still find the gap where you can branch off on your own, with your own views and emerge a leader.

- ***Do not get stuck with minute details.***

Remember, you may effectively have just 5 minutes to make a lasting positive impression on the panelist with your Verbal and Non-Verbal presentations. (i.e. through your positive Body

JENIFER	-S	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	Long	Admission
JEVETHA	-R	5	1	20	17	15	11			
KAMALESHWARI	-R	1	1	18	16	14	12			
KEERTHIKA	-C	2	1	18	15	18	14			

Language) So, do not get into deep explanation or detailed statistics. State what you have to, in a concise and precise manner with clever choice of words.

From Preparation to Participation

How to start participating ?

You are well armoured with all the information that is to be known pertaining to Preparation.....Now is the time to test the water, so to say. Do not worry, you are well equipped.....so just put your best foot forward and participate.....

By now, you would have realized that Group Discussion is a test of your ability to think quickly, respond logically, lead the discussion cohesively... *apart* from playing *varied roles* within the course of 20-30 minutes, that of a/an:

Initiator

Coordinator

Data collector

Peacemaker

Data giver

Negotiator

Analyzer

Recapitulator

These are the roles available in any Group Discussion. Will you grasp the opportunity to play all of them or at least some of them?

Also, remember to exhibit the following skills:

- Listening Skills
- Group Behavioural Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Conflict Handling Skills
- Persuasive Skills

Last but not the least.....

- Communication Skills

belief
Bearing all this in mind, you embark upon the terrain of Participation.

Initiation.....

All discussions begin with an initiative made by one from amongs the group to set the ball rolling. The topic/situation is known and understood; to get the Group Discussion started, someone should propose the subject with his/her views. Understandably getting started is invariably the most difficult but important role.

Important, because apart from displaying the leadership skills, the onus also lies on this person to provide continuity by contributing fresh ideas and also collaborate with the ideas of others to keep the discussion going on a fertile ground.

But...you can have only one initiator....

So, what do you do now?

- Gently get into the discussion, as the Initiator tapers off. Politely agree or disagree as the case may be and state your views, citing examples, anecdotes relevant to the discussion. The more effective your views are, the more your stature in the group will grow.

Have you missed this opportunity....?? Some other participant spoke up before you?

Don't worry...

This is how you can be an active participant.....

- The 'data seeker'.

To make your presence felt, it is always safer to play the role of the 'data seeker' and eagerly question more or seek elaboration on a statement made by the other.

- Do not be afraid to express your view point. Before someone else snatches the spotlight from you, make the move, by voicing your opinion. Maybe, you will give a new direction to the course of discussion.
- Become the 'Analyzer'
Analyze the different views put forth by the others, by seeking elaboration, clarification and remember to add some of your own views as well.

- Be a 'Leader'

Initiating the discussion is not the only initiative that one can take ! Take the initiative to co-ordinate the different stages of the discussion towards the goal. Motivate those who are reluctant to speak up.

- Be a 'sheep dog'!

Suddenly, you may notice that the discussion is going off at a tangent, with some members of the group, voicing irrelevant views; Using your inter-personal skills, gently bring them back into the fold, by subtly indicating that their opinions matter too, but that its not in the context.

- Garner support

You can make a quiet move by making few of the others in the group, who are not so vocal, to agree with what you have to say, by convincing them, thus, winning them over to your side, so to say...

- Play the role of a 'Peacemaker'

Sometimes, the Group Discussion can seem like a 'Vocal Battle Ground'! Here's the chance for you to emerge as a 'Natural'! By seemingly agreeing with all of them, you are actually making them pay heed to what you have to say...Quickly, take the discussion to the next level.

- Humour always wins...

Sprinkle your views with witty anecdotes, it not only diffuses a tense situation. But also breaks the monotony.... And, you suddenly become a likeable figure!

So what if you could not 'Initiate' the Discussion

Conclude the Discussion with a Recapitulation

- Take the lead in summarizing the discussion, by gently threading the views of all and giving it a shape and meaning and give the final flourish by stating your views as well.

How to Proceed with the Analysis of the Topic/ Situation for Group Discussion

From the perspective of the participants, we do realize that the entire objective of the Group Discussion is, *'To Be Noticed, Favourably'*.

After having made your foray onto the discussion scene, you need to take it ahead.

One of the simplest format to follow is, how you used to break down your Essay into three segments :

- i). Introduction
- ii). Main Body
- iii). Conclusion & Recommendation, if any (not applicable to Group Discussion)

You cannot go wrong if you mentally divide the given topic into these segments and accordingly plan your verbal presentation, during the few minutes that is given to you before the commencement of the Group Discussion.

- Quickly, try and grasp the main outline of the topic.
- Think calmly as to how you will proceed, how you will present your views.
- Reflect how you are going to support your views with sound, logical statements.
- Make a mental note to Avoid borrowing others' ideas and being Repetitive.

In short, think before you leap!

Let us analyze this further.

Step I

Introduction

This may be restricted just to the first person who takes the initiative who briefly introduces himself, presents others as 'My Fellow Participants', proceeds to state the purpose of the discussion and gives his view on it.

telephoning v using internet
This stage may be extended to the II participant as well, if he presents a view which is different from the one stated by the Initiator. As his introduction offers a different thought process altogether.

If at all the III participant presents a view point totally different from his predecessors, one may include that also in this Step I.

Step II

Main Body

The initiator cannot rest on his/her laurels, even they, as the rest of the participants have to continue to strive to make a good impression on the judges, with their objective, analytic, knowledge, communication and leadership skills.

In this step, the participants have to provide more subject awareness, in order to offer credibility to their opinions/views. This can be done through several ways:

- Offering clarity through Definitions.
- Quoting various famous personalities or the stance that they have taken on the subject of the topic.
- Providing facts and figures, by way of data and statistics, pertaining to the topic. (to be mentioned briefly and not launch into the details.) The idea is, to display your knowledge and authority on the subject-matter. In other words, you know what you are talking! This will not only gain the judges' appreciation but also your fellow participants.
- If you agree with the view point stated by a fellow participant, state and explain 'Why' you do so. What is your justification? Do not merely 'echo' and say, 'Yes, I agree with what Mr. Manoj says!'—That is NOT called participation! Acknowledge the other person's views.
- On the other hand, if you disagree with what your fellow participant has to say, state and give reasons, as to Why you disagree. Follow it up with facts and figures. Justify. Ensure that your views are objective and free of any bias towards any individual, caste or creed.

- You may cite a very different example but which is parallel to your views. But, something which you will be able to do with conviction.

Step III

Conclusion

Like the Step I, this concluding Step is also crucial because it gives you an opportunity to make a favourable impression on the panelist. And this is going to have a lasting impression!

In a Group Discussion, you will seldom have views that are unanimous. Generally, even by the end of the discussion, one will have a mixed bag of views! However, Summarization of the Group Discussion ought to take place at the end of the discussion.

So, how does one Summarize?

If you have 'seized' the opportunity to do the honour of Concluding/Summarizing.....

There are certain basic principles that you need to bear in mind.

- Your Summarization should discretely convey the fact that, You are representing your team participants; that, What you state, includes their view points as well as yours.
- Keep it brief, clear, concise; avoid jargons.
- Objectively, give a quick analysis of the view points presented.

First present the analysis of views, with which you do not concur; (You, of course do not state that you do not agree with them!)

Later, present the other viewpoint with which you concur, so that you can add a statement to that effect. All this should look seamless, with the artful use of your Communication Skills!

- Do not pick and choose the views expressed to suit your convenience. Make it a point to incorporate All the important views and counter-views that was expressed during the Group Discussion.

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- At this juncture, just state the facts and do not add any new viewpoints.
 - Conclude graciously by thanking the panelist. Needless to say, that it has to be just a crisp, formal thank you and not a flowery, waxing flow of words !!

The Secret for Better Participation in Group Discussion

First of all, let us see how you can improve your Participative Skills, there by Making A Group Discussion, a more meaningful experience.

The Golden Rules Are :

- Actively Seek Feedback.
- Work towards eliminating the flaws
- Pay attention to the performance of the others
- Observe and make notes
- See how you can enhance your strengths
- Practice, as often as possible, with your peer group

During A Group DiscussionHow Can You Have An Edge Over The Others?

Here are some guidelines that should help you to have the cutting edge!

- Project a positive attitude
- Display confidence
- Be Alert
- Listen
- Show interest in the proceedings
- Don't interrupt when someone is talking
- Be flexible
- Be assertive, when required
- Be humble
- Be gracious and appreciate others

- Look for opportunities to: (this will indirectly display your Leadership Traits)
 - motivate the silent peer members to participate.
 - inspire, with a 'out of the box' statement.
 - reason logically
 - play the mediator
 - herd the group, as a whole.
 - impress with your skillful use of language
 - build a bond amidst all the participants
- * Now, Start Practicing for Better Participation.....*

How Institutes Can Help Students Prepare for Group Discussion

We have seen that :

- Group Discussion is a Methodology used by an organization to gauge whether the candidate has certain personality traits/skills that it desires in its members.
- Group discussion is a tool used for Mass Elimination.
- Many top Business Schools and Companies, make Group Discussion as the first criterion for screening the candidates for Face-to-Face Interview.
- Communication Skills and Interpersonal Skills are two relevant Soft Skills that are mandatory if one needs to succeed in Group Discussion Test.

Keeping this in mind, it becomes imperative on the Institutes, whether they offer professional courses or otherwise, at the graduation level, to prepare students for the Group Discussion.

Their success in their career path they have chosen, invariably depends upon their success in Group Discussion for that's the first step they need to take!

So, how can the Institutes help ?

Level I

- Incorporate Group Discussion into the Communication Skills Syllabus.
- To start with, have a small group (about 6)based discussion activities at an informal level, seated in a semi circle.
- Give them a topic (not a serious one!) and just tell them that each member have to share their view on the same.
- Let the faculty be in the background and make notes on the performance of each. This way, the faculty comes to know about the strengths and weaknesses of each student, which in turn will help them to groom them in the right direction.
- A weekly score card is maintained so that the performance of the students can be assessed.
- Explain to the students that a discussion is 'not' a debate. Explain the difference to them.

Level II

- Do not start giving the Do's and Don'ts right at the outset.
- Let them slowly grasp and realize for themselves what the discussion entails.
- Have individual sessions with each student and discuss their performance.
- Give an '*Encouraging Feedback*'; the aim is to help them to work upon their skills, thereby improve themselves in all aspects and '*Not Criticize*' them.
- Ask them to pay attention to their Observational and Listening Skills.

Level III

- Explain in brief about "Non-Verbal Communication". (You can go into details, gradually, as you go along.)
- Show slides of 'Facial Expressions' and interpret the emotions. Students invariably find it amusing and interesting And conscious of their facial expressions !

- Any Non-Verbal Communication has to be accompanied by either a presentation of slides/the faculty can demonstrate the various aspects of Body Language.

Level IV

- Encourage the students to be:
 - Analytical
 Make them assess each other's participation in the discussion, by giving them the criteria for assessment.

* * Under Communication Skills...make them analyze:

- Listening Skills
- Vocabulary
- Use of polite language
- Originality
- Fluency
- Grammatical aspects
- Sense of Humour

Under Interpersonal Skills.... Make them analyze:

- Emotional Control
- Negotiation Skills
- Persuasive Skills
- Objectivity

Under Non-Verbal Skills.... Ask them:

- To interpret the thought process behind the Non-Verbal Communications

** The students are to handover the feedback sheet to the concerned faculty who is running this exercise, for, he/she in turn will be able to assess the student's personality/attitude based on their evaluation of the fellow students.

E.g. they will be able to know if a said student is biased/jealous/opinionated etc.

Remember:

All these activities are to be given *only* after the faculty has explained the concept of each and every aspect and it is clear to the students.

These activities are to be gradually introduced in a phased manner.

Level V

Organizing Mock Group Discussion

- After Level I – Level IV have been carefully followed, monitored by the faculty concerned and when they are satisfied with the progress of the students, they can start conducting Mock Group Discussions, so the students get a 'feel' of how it will be in a 'Live' situation, when they will actually be facing Group Discussion Sessions, in the future, for the purpose of Selection.
- The Faculty may start with the group of students whom she/he feels is ready for the 'formal discussion'. The group can consist of 8-10 participants.
- Choose topics which are either current or interesting for the students.
- Initially, give the group more time to 'plan' for the discussion. It can be given a day prior, so that the students will have the opportunity to gather more information by using the library facility. They can brainstorm the ideas and be better prepared, this will boost their confidence, and their performance in turn would be better.
- Gradually, reduce the 'preparation time', till it reaches the state when the student-participants are given the topic, only when the Group Discussion Session starts and are given about 10 minutes, as preparation time, as will be the situation in the 'Formal Event'.
- Always try to bring variety and spontaneity to the Group Discussion 'Program'.

- Make another group of 3-4 members, who will be the panelist and evaluate the participants of the Mock Group Discussion.
- The concerned faculty member has to ensure that all the students are given equal opportunity and their roles should also be reversed, i.e. participants-judges and vice versa.
- Ensure that a Feedback form is given to the 'judges', who in turn will return the same to the concerned faculty member.
- When the Mock Group Discussion is being conducted, the concerned faculty member should also be present in the background, evaluating the performance of the student-participants at the same time.
- Feedback to the students on their performance should be a *continuous process* and not just once in a while. The aim should be, to bring their performance level to perfection!
- A couple of months before the students are ready to take the final plunge of facing Group Discussion, the Institute can arrange for the entire 'Mock Group Discussion' to be video shot, so that, the same can be replayed to all the participants, thus enabling to watch themselves in action and see how they come across to the panelist.

The panel of faculty members can give them the feedback, based on various aspects, e.g. the approach to the argument, the attitude, the body language, etc. This way, the student also becomes conscious of their flaws and will try to overcome it.

We thus, see that a good Institute can provide a solid ground for the students; to nurture them and give them strong wings, to soar confidently into the outside competitive world.

With so much of quality time invested in grooming the students for the final 20-30 minute round for Group Discussion, when the D-day arrives, all the participants are going to be at ease and confident, full of poise ...

For them, it will be just like attending another 'Mock Group Discussion Session'. Well, it is going to be as simple as that...!

The Interpersonal Skills – As 'by-products' of preparing for a Group Discussion

As part of living in our society, we have to deal with people from all walks of life, in different environments and in different situations.

We need to communicate *all* the time...and interact with people all the time.

Hence, Interpersonal Skills become very vital, if we are to live in a society without hurting the sentiments of those, with whom we interact. Ruffling feathers will not take one far, however, having the right set of Interpersonal Skills....' kind of allows you to have the cake and eat it too...'

While preparing the students to face Group Discussion, we lay stress upon various aspects of Verbal and Non-Verbal Skills which will help them in all Social Interactions, be it, family, friends or business.

Have you not wondered that, why some people are so likeable, while some are tolerated and others just shunned?

It all boils down to the Art of Good Communication. What you say and How you say something, makes all the difference. That's what Interpersonal skills is all about.

Let us now deliberate and see how the preparation for Group Discussion has given rise to a set of Interpersonal Skills, as it's by-product...

- fluency in expression
- clarity of thought
- vocabulary
- negotiation skills
- motivational skills
- leadership skills
- listening skills
- objectivity
- conflict-handling skills
- coordinator
- team player

- creator (ability to think differently)
- sensitivity
- emotional maturity
- sense of humour
- analytic skills
- decision-making skills
- knowledge-based skills
- persuasive skills
- participatory skills
- spirit of tolerance
- spirit of appreciation
- body language

From the list above, it almost seems that to be a *perfect* human being... All that one has to do is...just prepare for Group Discussion!

Exercise

1. a. What is Group Discussion?
b. What is tested in a Group Discussion?
 2. Group Discussion ... a tool for the process of Selection. Discuss.
 3. Outline the Main Features of a Group Discussion.
 4. What are the 'Do's and Don'ts of a Group Discussion.
 5. What are the different roles you can play as a participant in a Group Discussion?
6. How is Interpersonal Skills—a by product of prepare for Group Discussion?