



Careers Centre

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Your Guide to Assessment Centres

PREPARE FOR
SUCCESS

What assessors are looking for

How to prepare
Groupwork

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Top Tips

For further information check our website
careerweb.leeds.ac.uk

What is an assessment centre?

An assessment centre is part of the application process. It is very popular with employers because they can assess many candidates at the same time and see how candidates react to real tasks.

Assessment centres may include a combination of the following:

- Psychometric tests
- Group exercises
- In-tray exercises
- Interviews
- Presentations

They may last from a few hours to two days, but you should be told in advance the types of activities you will be involved in.

What are the assessors looking for?

They are looking for people who match certain key skills and competencies, who also understand their business and who will fit into their culture.

How to prepare for an assessment centre

Research the organisation. Try to speak to people who work there – recent graduates if possible. You could also try the Leeds Graduate Careers Network <http://www.graduatecareersnetwork.leeds.ac.uk/> which allows you to search for Leeds Alumni in specific areas of work and organisations.

Research the role by reading the job description very carefully and thinking about the skills and competencies required. You will probably already have demonstrated some of these skills in your initial application. Try to contact someone doing the role you are applying for.

Another form of research is to do an internet search on the organisation and 'assessment centre'. This may bring up a forum or comments from candidates who have recently attended. Remember, though that assessment centre tasks may change from one week to the next.

Help from the Careers Centre

We can help with all aspects of an assessment centre.

You can use the Careers Centre drop-in service and Information Room for general advice and book an appointment for a mock interview or to practise a presentation.

We have separate leaflets on interview tips, available from the Careers Centre, or you can download it from the Interviews section of our website.

Check out the Events leaflet, and the Events section of our website for Workshops on:

- Assessment centres
 - Interviews
 - Group work
 - Psychometric testing
- careerweb.leeds.ac.uk

Psychometric and personality tests

Psychometric – or aptitude – tests are a way of assessing your skills in certain areas, typically, numerical, verbal reasoning and diagrammatic reasoning and data interpretation.

Preparing for psychometric tests

We offer free online aptitude and personality tests from two separate organisations. You can practise these tests on-line and by visiting the drop-in service at the Careers Centre.

Profiling for success[®]

Profiling for Success[®] includes a series of tests and questionnaires covering your abilities, potential, style, personality, motivations, interests and approach to relationships. They comprise:

1. Aptitude tests.

The first three tests (numerical, verbal and abstract reasoning) are all timed tests so you will need to do these when you will not be distracted.

2. Personality tests.

The following tests are not timed:

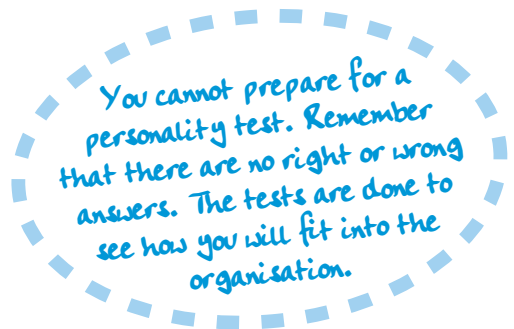
- Learning Styles Indicator
- Type Dynamics.
- Values-based Indicator of Motivation.

SHL[®]

SHL[®] are one of the leading providers of psychometric tests. Many graduate recruiters use their tests to recruit graduates for the role, and to check that you have the particular aptitudes and behavioural qualities required for the job.

These practice tests are available to University of Leeds students and graduates. To request the passwords to use these online tests please email us at CareersCentre@leeds.ac.uk with details of your course, level and student ID or year of graduation. Please also include 'Online test password request' in the subject header of your email. Alternatively, you can call in to the Centre to collect the passwords for these practice tests.

You cannot prepare for a personality test. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. The tests are set to see how you will fit into the organisation.



Group exercises

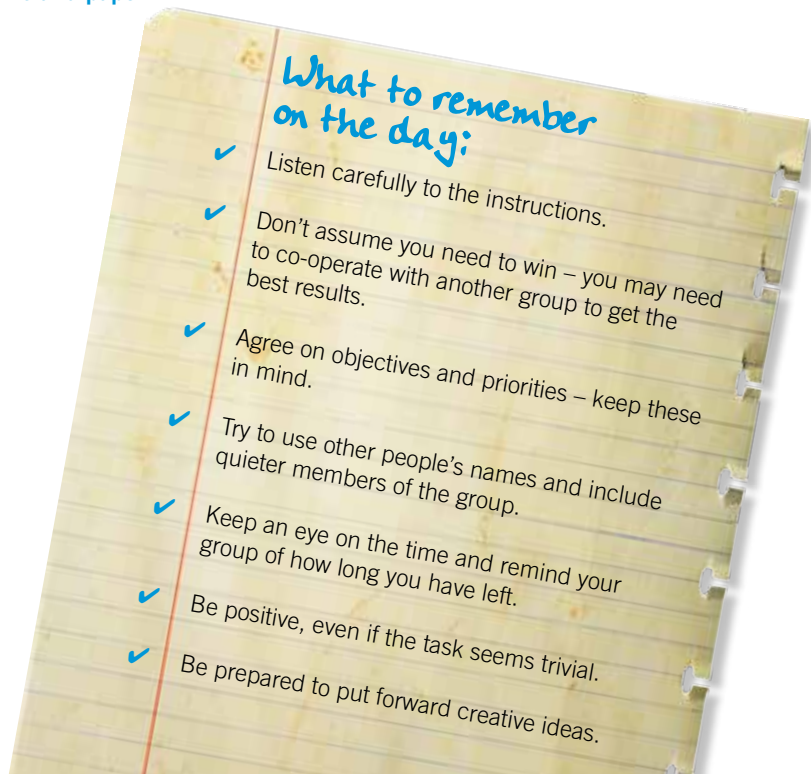
Most assessment centres include one or more group exercises. These can be difficult to prepare for as you generally don't know in advance what the group activity will involve.

Group exercises often fall into one of four main categories:

- **Discuss a general topic, such as “The national speed limit on UK motorways should be higher”.**
- **Debate a work-related problem and come to a joint decision.**
- **Decide on a list of priorities such as who to rescue from a cave or desert island.**
- **Complete a task such as constructing a bridge out of straws and paper.**

The assessors are usually assessing you against the key skills for the role, not against other members of your group. It is important to be yourself as the assessors want to see how you operate in real life situations.

If you are naturally quiet you may need to assert yourself to make your opinions heard. If you are naturally a dominant character, make sure you give others an opportunity to speak.



Case studies, in-tray exercises and written exercises

These exercises are usually closely related to the role. They are designed to examine skills such as communication, organisational ability, problem-solving, data analysis, planning, time management and decision making. There is usually a time limit on these exercises. After the task you may be asked to discuss your decisions.-

Inbox or in-tray exercises

Typically you are presented with an inbox on a laptop with 10 or more emails. You need to sort through and prioritise, then respond appropriately to those emails.

You may also be given other information about the task so that you can respond to the emails appropriately.

- ! Approach the task logically and read through all the available information before you start. Don't worry if the subject is unfamiliar to you; the assessors are looking for your organisational and prioritising skills, as well as the way you analyse and interpret the information in front of you.

Case studies

Case studies can be used as individual and group exercises.

As an individual exercise, you may be given some time to review a case study and then either provide written answers to questions or verbal answers as part of an interview.

- ! Watch the time and make sure you have read all the information provided. You may be allowed to make notes.

Written exercises

There are many types of written exercises so it is important to think carefully about the role and job description to determine what sort of writing will be required. It could be a press release, a webpage, an analysis of complex data, or a reply to a complaint from a customer.

- ! In any written exercise check and double-check your grammar and spelling. Use professional language and set out your writing in a clear and logical format.

How to prepare

It is difficult to prepare for these tests, unless you are told what sort of test it will be. Important things to remember are:

- Read the instructions carefully and understand the task
- Read all the information provided before you start the task
- Use a logical system for the task so the assessors can see how you work
- Check and double check for spelling and grammar when you have finished

For further information check our website
careerweb.leeds.ac.uk

Presentations and Interviews

You may be asked to prepare your presentation in advance and will probably be given a time frame of a few minutes to deliver it. You may be able to use visual aids such as PowerPoint, Prezi, handouts or flip-charts. If it is not clear, you can ask.

To prepare your presentation, think about:

- Aim of your talk and key points to get across
- Time available
- Audience
- Resources

When writing your presentation, think about:

- Structure and content
- Introduction – include your name and subject of presentation
- Main theme – be clear about your main points, address the audience's needs, use examples
- Conclusion – summarise your main points, prepare a good ending

When practising your presentation, think about:

Delivery

- Rehearse as much as possible, and remember to time yourself
- Make eye contact with your audience
- Use prompt cards if necessary, but don't read from a script
- Prepare a strong start and finish and remember to smile
- Think of likely questions and how to answer them

Visual aids

- Find out what is available and if there is a choice, use what you're most comfortable with
- Make sure you know how to operate any equipment before you start
- If you use PowerPoint, bring a hard copy of your presentation in case of any technical problems
- Consider providing a handout

Interviews

There are different types of interview and you may be told in advance what to expect. These are some of the terms used to describe different types of interview:

- Group (more than one candidate)
- Panel (more than one interviewer)
- Motivational (why that role, that organisation, that career – what motivates you)
- Competency (evidence of competencies or skills required for the role)
- Behavioural (how you would behave in certain situations)

For any interview, the key issue is PREPARATION. These are the key areas to cover:

- The role (job description)
- The organisation (look at website, but also look at news about them)
- The sector (competitors, current issues)
- The skills required (with examples for each)
- Strengths and weaknesses

FAQs

Q How can I prepare for a written test?

A Look at the job description and think about what sort of writing you will need to do. It may be reports, press releases, web pages or proofreading. You will then be able to practise that type of writing. Ask at the Careers Centre if you need further help.

Q Can I use PowerPoint or props for my presentation?

A If it is not clear, you can contact the organisation and ask what facilities are available. You can also ask them if you can use your laptop, but check that there will be a projector. If you are not confident about using PCs and laptops, you can always use your own props or handouts.

Q Am I competing against all the other candidates?

A Not necessarily. They may hire all of you, or none of you. It is best to work with the other candidates so that the assessors can see how you function in a team.

Q I have been invited to an assessment centre that includes lunch. Will I be assessed over lunch?

A Assume that you will be and be on your best behaviour at all times during the day!

Q Will I get feedback if I am not successful?

A If you do not receive feedback on the day, you should ask as soon as you hear that you are not successful. After all, the assessors have taken notes of your performance.

Q What are the competencies I need to demonstrate?

A The competencies should be clear from the job description or from the employer's website. If they are not clear, check at the Careers Centre.

Q Can I prepare for the social event?

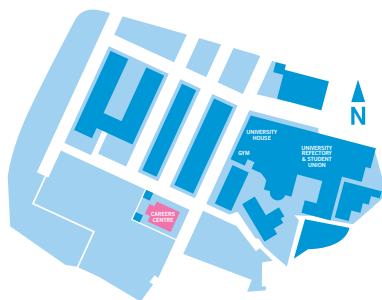
A Not specifically, but you could watch the news and read newspapers in the week before so that you can talk about current events. Be sure to be aware of any recent news stories that may affect that organisation, or industry sector.

Top Tips for Success

1. Prepare for an assessment centre by researching the role, the organisation and the sector.
2. Prepare specific examples of the required skills and competencies, using the STAR model (Situation, Task, Action, Result).
3. Remember that all tasks will be designed to assess you against the competencies.
4. Engage with the staff and other candidates from the minute you walk through the door.
5. Try to use other people's names.
6. Check and double check any written tests.
7. Remember that you are not usually competing against other candidates – but working with them.
8. Act naturally and be yourself.

Further information

For further information visit the Careers Centre website
careerweb.leeds.ac.uk



The University of Leeds Careers Centre

5-7 Cromer Terrace
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT
(we're around the corner
from the Students' Union)

Opening hours: 9.00am – 5.00pm
Monday to Friday

T: 0113 343 5295

W: careerweb.leeds.ac.uk



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University of Leeds
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Leeds LS2 9JT

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