



## Interview testing: written and other tests

Congratulations! You've passed the first hurdle and have been offered an interview for your dream job. Whether it's a first or subsequent interview, many employers like to ask candidates to undertake tasks or tests to help them in their assessment process.

Hoople has created a number of helpful information sheets on interview testing. This one looks at a range of tests that you may be asked to undertake at interview. For help with presentations or psychometric tests, please refer to our other information sheets.

### Top tips for preparing for testing at an interview

The following pages outline several different kinds of tests, any of which you may very possibly encounter during a job interview.

## 1. Written tasks

Typically, these involve writing an email, letter, paragraph or report on a given topic. Sometimes you may be asked to proofread, review or summarise a document or check an existing document for errors.

Your comprehension and written communication skills are being assessed as is your ability to think under pressurised circumstances.

### To succeed at this kind of task:

- Before you start, read all the instructions and materials carefully
- Think about what you are going to write before you put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. If applicable, jot down some notes or a plan on a piece of scrap paper
- Use paragraph headings, bullet points and concise sentence structure to make your writing interesting and easy to read
- Avoid excessive use of acronyms. Only use them after you've explained what they mean
- Check spelling and grammar carefully. Your literacy skills are being checked, so make sure you've got everything right
- Once you've finished, check your work again carefully
- Don't rush—use the time you've been allocated to do the job properly and to present yourself in the best light

## 2. In-tray exercises

Also known as e-tray exercises (if completed digitally), these are synthesised business scenarios that replicate real life situations.

You will typically be faced with 10-30 different items of paperwork/tasks which you will be asked to put into priority order. These may include emails, letters or phone messages that need a response alongside tasks that have to be completed.

For this type of task you are being assessed on your ability to prioritise and organise your work. You are also being assessed in terms of key competencies such as analysis, decision making, time management and communication. Your knowledge of the particular work area for which you are applying is being tested as the decisions you make will be based largely on your prior knowledge and experience.

### To succeed at this kind of task:

- Read all items carefully before you start. Consider each item in terms of its urgency and importance. Think about the likely risks or consequences of not taking action. This will help you to decide which are the most urgent tasks and hence enable you to prioritise actions
- Be prepared to justify your decisions as you may be asked to explain why you have chosen the particular order for tasks
- Check where you should note any actions, for example on the materials supplied or in a separate document
- Make any notes on actions in bullet form that are easy for others to understand
- You will normally be set a time limit for this kind of activity. Don't panic, think logically, work systematically and carefully. Draw on your experience and apply common sense

### 3. Group exercises

These usually involve 8 – 10 candidates, and are often used in assessment centres or when organisations have multiple vacancies. The recruiter will usually provide an industry or workplace-related problem that requires a solution. Competences being assessed include leadership ability, enthusiasm, decisiveness, team-working, problem solving ability, communication skills and commercial awareness.

#### Typical group exercises are:

- **Ice breakers:** typically task-based activities such as building towers from straws and marshmallows
- **Discussions:** you may be given a business scenario or perhaps a contemporary news article to discuss. Alternatively you may be asked to come to a group decision about a real-life or made up problem. Usually, a leader is not appointed for these tasks, although during the task a leader or leaders often emerge
- **Role-play:** for this type of task, candidates are provided with a particular role, background information and a brief. Commonly, this can be a mock meeting, where each candidate assumes a specific function and is expected to fulfil individual and group objectives

### To be successful in group exercise:

- Make sure you actively contribute to the task. When making your contributions, be clear, concise and confident
- Don't criticise, interrupt or undermine others, but do politely intervene if one member is dominating
- Follow instructions carefully, relating everything to your brief
- Include others. Make sure you contribute without dominating or excluding others
- Offer praise and appreciation for others, building upon their comments where appropriate
- Be prepared to justify your opinions and decisions, without becoming aggressive or overly defensive

## 4. Social events

Sometimes (especially after you've successfully got through the first interview stage) you will be asked to attend an 'informal' session, for example a meal, where you socialise with other candidates and the recruiting team. They're good opportunities for you to learn more about the role and to suss out the competition!

Of course, you are still being assessed so these occasions can be a tricky balance between being yourself and being an interview candidate trying to impress. You should relax and try to appear socially confident and capable of relating to people from all walks of life but don't relax your guard too much. It goes without saying that you should never get drunk at these occasions.

## 5. Other testing

Although we have tried to provide guidance on the most common tests used in interviews, this is not a definitive list. It is therefore possible that you may face other testing techniques that haven't been discussed here.

If you are advised, ahead of an interview, that you will be tested using an alternative method and you would like some advice, contact us as soon as you can and we will do our best to help you to prepare you for it.

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