Increasingly, many graduate recruitment organisations are using assessment centres, or some form of extended interview process, as a means of final selection. They are regarded as being the fairest and most accurate method of selection, as employers get a chance to see what you can do. Recruiters are able to compare candidates abilities across a range of standardised situations, based on a clearly defined set of competencies that candidates need to possess in order to be successful in that organisation. Assessment centres usually last for one or two days and may include aptitude testing, group selection techniques and presentations as well as a panel or final selection interview.

**Positive Attitude**

Ensure that you maintain a positive approach throughout the assessment centre. Selection is at this stage very much about people-fit so it is critical that you come over as positive, smiling and friendly throughout the whole process. Don’t worry if you feel you have performed badly at any stage, you will have a chance to compensate later on. Also remember that you are being compared against a set of competencies, not competing with the other candidates.

**Informal Interviews**

Many assessment centres contain a large proportion of informal time. This includes lunches, pre-dinner drinks, dinner, coffee breaks, site tours etc. You should realise that you are being assessed at all times, even if they tell you otherwise. As a result, you should be ready with informed intelligent questions about the organisation and with small talk about yourself, your university, your home town etc.

**Work Simulation**

Many companies ask candidates to tackle and complete work-related tasks or problems within a certain period of time. You may be asked, for example, to prioritise a pile of work in a manager's in-tray, or email in-box, and justify your decision to a group. Employers want to judge your skills as a manager - can you negotiate, handle a crisis, meet deadlines and use limited resources of staff, money and materials? The approach you adopt is more important than the solution reached.

**Group Discussions/Tasks**

As a group, you and the other candidates may be given a subject to discuss, or a task to complete. Although selectors’ criteria vary depending on the job's requirements, they will probably wish to assess your communication and personal skills, your powers of reasoning, and ability to think on your feet. You should try to present the qualities of a good group member by asserting your views, whilst acknowledging the comments and contributions of others, keeping to the task/topic time limit and remaining involved throughout the exercise. Try to summarise the arguments that have been made and encourage the group to reach a decision and complete its task. With all group activities, get involved, no matter how silly they seem!

**Psychometric Tests and Questionnaires**

The use of tests and questionnaires in selection is increasing. Some companies use them to supplement the information, which they have gathered from other selection stages. Others use the results as the basis by which they will decide to call you for interview or not. You should be offered feedback on your performance. It is a good idea if you have taken an aptitude test before attending the assessment centre. This helps to familiarise you with the format and practice timings. You can find out more and practice a series of tests at [stir.ac.uk/careers/students/applying/psych_tests/](http://stir.ac.uk/careers/students/applying/psych_tests/)
Formal interviews

You may have several interviews at the final selection stage ranging from individual interviews with a departmental head or line manager to panel interviews with 3 or more representatives from the organisation. These are likely to probe any answers from your first interview that were not totally satisfactory. You should prepare to be challenged on your answers. The normal interview techniques still apply.

Presentations

Employers look for evidence of good communication and presentation skills throughout the selection process but often specifically ask you to give a short talk or presentation, usually on a topic of your choice or a particular issue. You may feel nervous, so set yourself manageable targets. Give a simple introduction to the topic, emphasise 3 or 4 points and end on a strong note. If possible use visual aids like a flip-chart or PowerPoint to illustrate your presentation. Use humour if you feel you can do this comfortably.

Disability

If you have a disability which may affect your performance in any of the exercises mentioned, you might wish to discuss this with the employer in advance so that materials can be adapted appropriately.

To find out more:

The Career and Employability Service runs workshops on assessment centres at appropriate times of the year. See programme on Stirling.targetconnect.net

Want to speak to a Career and Employability Consultants? Book one of our Quick Queries, via the Career and Employability Service website at stir.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/

Other useful web resource:

- prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips/assessment-centres
- sample e-tray exercise available on the Civil Service Fast Stream website at faststream.blog.gov.uk/2016/10/04/fast-stream-2017-the-online-tests/