

UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID CAREERS SERVICE

Interview tests and exercises

Psychometric tests

- used to assess a candidate's suitability for a job
- can include aptitude/ability tests, personality questionnaires
- can be part of a multi-stage recruitment process

Learn more from the Psychological Testing Centre (British Psychological Society)

Aptitude/ability tests

Most common:

- designed to test reasoning and cognitive capability
- verbal - verbal reasoning, analysis and word sort
- numerical - reasoning, analysis and sequential tests
- diagrammatic & spatial reasoning - testing logic, visual thinking & organisation skills
- specific – e.g. syntax for computer programming, data checking or mechanic.

Format:

- completed online or a printed answer sheet
- usually multiple choice questions with time limit
- instructions & some example questions are often given

Online tests are often used first and if successful, followed by a similar test in person.

If you have special requirements it is advisable to declare this beforehand so appropriate allowances can be made.

TIPS:

- ask employer if they will give you an idea about the types of test they use
- try as many practice exercises as possible
- work as quickly and as accurately as you can
- if you get stuck on a question move on and go back later if allowed
- marks may be deducted for incorrect answers - make a sacrifice between speed & accuracy

Practice aptitude tests

Most have free examples, some make a small charge:

- Aptitude Tests Online
- Cubiks Online Assessment
- EfinancialCareers numerical tests
- Job Test Prep - Psychometric Tests
- Kenexa Practice Tests
- Morrisby
- practiceaptitudetests.com
- Psychometricadvantage.co.uk
- Psychometric Success
- Saville Consulting
- SHLDirect.com
- University of Kent Psychometric Test Resource

Practice aptitude tests may also be available at specific employer websites, such as JP Morgan, HSBC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Procter & Gamble and the Civil Service.

Personality questionnaires

- no right or wrong answers
- usually a set of questions, series of statements/options to choose
- possible time limit for completion
- will give employers a profile of your interests, working style and indicate your personality type

NB: You may be presented with the same questions/options repeatedly in different ways. This is to establish consistency & to get a more accurate indication of your preferences.

TIPS :

- try out some example questionnaires in advance
- answer each question in relaxed manner
- be yourself, go with your gut instinct & answer honestly
- don't agonise over a question - move on and come back to it later if you have time

Practice personality assessments:

- Keirseley Temperament Sorter
- Team technology
- Finding Potential
- People Maps

Presentations

You may be given the topic in advance, asked to select your own or be given a topic on the day and a little time to prepare it.

Preparation and research

- find out the format , technology & materials available and how long you will have
- ask who the audience will be - the selectors, the other candidates, or both?
- use PowerPoint or other visual aids if told. If not consider a verbal-only presentation
- make sure you are comfortable with whatever visual aids you are using
- practise your presentation - ideally in front of a careers adviser or someone who can offer constructive criticism

Design

- choose a subject you know well if you are allowed to choose as you will be asked questions
- keep the audience's attention by pitching the content at a level appropriate to them
- what points do you want the audience to leave with? -better to expand on 2 or 3 than to have a long rambling narrative
- do you want to persuade/educate/inspire/inform/influence or all of these?
- have a clear introduction, a main body and a conclusion – a good structure with a logical flow
- be brief with PowerPoint slides - only use bullet points & key words or phrases
- enhance slides with pictures, photos, graphs & screenshots as appropriate
- avoid too much detail, be clear, concise & build your presentation to a strict time frame
- do you want the audience to do something? - don't forget to prepare & bring any materials
- do you want to give out notes to the audience? - when will you distribute them?

Delivery

Delivery is as important as what you say.

- Smile, maintain good posture, act confidently, speak clearly, keep good eye contact & try to relate to each person individually
- introduce yourself and your presentation confidently
- use what works best for you: notes, prompt cards, printed PowerPoint sheets with notes, or a script with timings
- have a few relaxation techniques to use should you find yourself getting anxious. Ask to stop for a few moments whilst you gather your thoughts if needed
- make a brief and clear conclusion, wind down your presentation confidently, don't stop suddenly when you run out of things to say

HINT: Do not go over or stop too early (be aware you may talk faster when you are nervous).

Assessment centres

Can be used as part of the recruitment process, last for 1 or 2 days or longer & are usually held after the first round of interviews.

Remember you are being assessed at all times

Assessment centres can include a number of elements:

- social/informal events - meet a variety of people including other candidates, assessors, recent graduates, the wider staff & management team
 - be friendly but not over-familiar
 - there may be free drinks on offer – don't over-indulge
- information sessions - giving more detail about the organisation and roles available
 - listen carefully, the information may be useful during the rest of the day
- tests and exercises - designed to reveal your ability and potential
 - assessors measure you against a set of competencies
 - each exercise is designed to assess one or more of these

Do not worry if you think you perform badly at any stage - it is likely that you will have the chance to compensate later on.

HINT: If you have a disability that may affect your performance in any of the exercises mentioned, discuss the matter with the employer before attending the assessment centre.

Preparation for the day

- research the organisation's website - especially the recruitment and relevant information
- draw up a list of your main strengths and examples of when you have used them -focus on those most relevant to the role you have applied for
- think of questions you may want to ask
- plan to arrive in good time for the start

HINT: Converse with other candidates - this will help when it comes to group exercises later

What to expect

- you will be in a group that can vary in size from several people to a much larger group
- you may be individually interviewed and asked to take part in a number of exercises, including reasoning tests
- the exercises will be based on the type of work you will be doing in the job
- other exercises may take the form of an in-tray or case study exercise, a presentation and a group discussion (see below)

Your performance

- Be yourself - you are not being assessed on what you know but on how you think.
- Listen carefully to the instructions given at the start of the day
- Always read the information you are given thoroughly
- Stay focused and motivated throughout the day
- You are being measured against certain criteria - not against other candidates

TIP: You may find you have previously unidentified strengths

Examples of the skills and traits that selectors are looking for:

teamwork	communication
leadership	time management
listening	motivation and enthusiasm
data analysis	decision-making
influencing	creativity
integrity	initiative

Group activities

Employers usually use group activities to assess your interpersonal/communication skills.

HINTS:

Be aware that you are being assessed from the moment they meet you and during social events. Be well versed on the organisation, its sector, current affairs and prepare interesting questions to ask. Don't just chat to the other candidates.

Throughout the exercise they will observe:

- how well you mix with people
- your ability to work in a team
- your leadership style
- how you negotiate with your peers
- how you get your point across

To demonstrate leadership within a team:

- show you are listening carefully and hearing what is being said
- take the initiative
- facilitate others to speak
- reflect on what has been discussed and summarise periodically if necessary
- stay positive and motivated throughout

Remember: good team working is about working together cooperatively to achieve a common goal.

Practical tasks

You may be asked as a group to use equipment or materials to make something e.g. a tower, using only straws and string. The assessors are usually more interested in:

- how the group interacts rather than the result
- your planning and problem-solving skills
- the creativity of your ideas

HINT Get involved, however trivial you consider the task to be.

Discussions and role plays

You may be asked to take part in a discussion or role-playing exercise which simulates a professional scenario. You will usually be given a briefing pack and asked to play a particular part. You may have to act out the role either with the other candidates or with the assessors either one-on-one or in a group. Assessors are looking for your contribution as well as your communication and influencing skills.

To help you prepare:

- read through and/or listen carefully to all the information and make notes if allowed
- decide objectives and priorities, agree the division of tasks, make a plan and follow it
- be assertive, persuasive and diplomatic - be aware of the volume and tone of what you say
- the quality of what you say is more important than the quantity, don't confuse input with impact and choose your timing carefully
- ensure the group keeps to time, help to steer things back on track if the discussion goes off track
- keep calm, and use your sense of humour where appropriate
- find a balance between advancing your own ideas and helping the group to complete the task
- actively listen to what everyone has to say - use nods, smiles and eye contact
- be inclusive, try to get the best contribution from everyone including quiet members
- if one member is dominating the conversation try to support the participation of others
- use positive language and behaviour
- be conscious of your own style and its impact on the group. If you are chatty you may need to focus on listening, if you are very quiet you need to speak to make an impact on the assessors.

Exercises

Business simulation tasks like case studies and in- or e-tray exercises are designed to examine skills e.g. communication, organisational ability, problem-solving, data analysis, planning, time management and decision making. There is often a time limit on and you may be asked to justify your actions.

Case study exercises

- you will be given documents relating to a hypothetical or real-life situation and are likely to be asked to analyse it and to give a verbal or written report of your recommendations
- the case study could be completed individually or as part of a group
- some employers will set case study exercises as a discrete element of the selection process
- some employers combine them with an interview

HINT: See the McKinsey&Company Case Study Interview Exercise for an example of this process.

Tips for tackling a case study

- practise with sample case studies in advance and brush up on your numeracy skills
- research the organisation, its markets and be up to speed on current affairs
- read the instructions carefully and thoroughly
- read any background information you are given about the organisation, the staff and your role. Focus on key points and make brief notes. This will help you to get a feel for what is important
- scan through all items to get an overall view of everything that will need to be considered
- try to stay calm and keep note of the time to ensure you pace yourself correctly
- work as quickly and as accurately as you can

TIP when presenting your conclusions or discussing your rationale be as clear as possible and don't be afraid to disagree with the selector if you feel you have made the right decision

In-tray/e-tray exercises

These are business simulation exercises in which you are given an in-tray or electronic inbox full of emails, company memos, telephone and fax messages, reports and correspondence. You will be provided with information about the structure of the organisation and your place within it. You are expected to take decisions, prioritise your workload, draft replies, delegate tasks and recommend actions.

NOTE: Each exercise is designed to test how you handle complex information within a limited time. You can demonstrate that you are able to analyse facts and figures, prioritise information and make good decisions under pressure.

TIPS

- keep note of the time to ensure you pace yourself correctly
- read all of the information and instructions carefully and thoroughly – make brief notes
- prioritise according to what is most important and most urgent - decide what can be delegated, forwarded or deferred
- identify key issues and any action that must be taken - detailing how, by whom and any timescales or deadlines
- highlight any resource restraints, conflicts between tasks, or implications for the organisation
- draft a written response, identify the main points of your response and expand concisely. **Keep it brief - it is easy to get absorbed in this task but be wary of time.**
- show you have identified key issues and give your reasons for all decisions you make
- work as quickly and as accurately as you can

Remember: there is often no right or wrong answer.

Online practice tests are available at the following websites:

- Edinburgh University in-tray exercise practice
- Assessment Day - In Tray Exercise
- Civil Service Fast Stream - Example e-Tray Exercise

Essays/written exercises

You are being tested on how you express yourself, spelling, grammar and whether you can communicate professionally and effectively. You may have

- an essay or letter on a topic of your choice or one given by them
- a document to review and improve.

Contact our Careers Advisers:

Campus	Careers Adviser	email	Telephone
Carmarthen	Mark Thomas	mark.thomas@uwtsd.ac.uk	01267 676829
Lampeter	Jane Bellis	j.bellis@uwtsd.ac.uk	01570 424973
London	Maristela Parfitt	maristela.parfitt@uwtsd.ac.uk	0207 566 7600
Swansea	Val Davidge	val.davidge@uwtsd.ac.uk	01792 481222