Assessment Centre

Hints and Tips

For Graduates or Early Careers

Your complete guide to preparing for, navigating, and succeeding at modern assessment centres: including virtual, hybrid, and AI-assisted formats.

What Is an Assessment Centre?

An assessment centre is a structured recruitment event, usually the final stage for graduate, graduate-entry, or competitive roles, where a group of candidates completes a series of tasks and exercises over a few hours or up to two days. Employers use them to observe you in action, not just hear about your skills.

Assessment centres now take three main forms (In person, virtual or a mix of both):

In-Person	Virtual
• In-person at employer premises or a hotel	• Completed via video platform (Teams, Zoom, HireVue)
• Face-to-face group exercises and interviews	• Digital collaboration tools for group tasks
• Physical in-tray or written tasks	• Online psychometric and coding tests
• Networking over lunch or coffee	• Asynchronous pre-recorded video responses

What to Expect on the Day

Activities vary by employer and sector, but you can typically expect a mix of the following:

Common Assessment Centre Activities

- Presentations: prepared in advance or given a topic on the day
- Group exercises: discussions, simulations, or collaborative problem-solving
- Case studies: analysing a business scenario and presenting recommendations
- In-tray / e-tray exercises: prioritising emails, tasks, or decisions under time pressure
- Psychometric tests: verbal, numerical, logical, and situational judgement
- Competency or strengths-based interviews (in-person or video)
- AI-assisted video interviews: pre-recorded responses analysed by automated tools
- Written exercises: reports, memos, or short-answer responses
- Social / networking elements: lunch, tours, informal conversations

Good to know: A weaker performance in one exercise can often be offset by stronger results in another. Stay focused and treat each activity as a fresh start.

How You Will Be Assessed

Assessors are typically HR professionals, recruiters, and line managers. They score your performance against a set of predefined competencies and values relevant to the role. They are watching not just what you do, but how you do it, how you treat others, how you respond under pressure, and how you adapt

Key skills employers look for:

Core Skills	Modern Priorities
• Teamwork and collaboration	• Adaptability and resilience
• Communication and listening	• Time management and prioritisation
• Commercial awareness	• Decision-making under pressure
• Analytical and critical thinking	• Digital literacy and tech confidence
• Leadership and initiative	• Emotional intelligence

In group exercises, assessors want to see you contribute meaningfully, not dominate. Invite quieter members in, build on others' ideas, and steer the group constructively if it goes off-track. Volunteering to manage time is a subtle but effective way to demonstrate organisational skills.

Navigating AI-Assisted and Virtual Assessments

Many employers now use AI-powered tools as part of their assessment process. Knowing what to expect means you won't be caught off guard.

AI Video Interviews

- You record responses to pre-set questions. There is no live interviewer.
- AI tools may analyse your word choices, pacing, and facial expressions. Speak naturally and clearly; do not try to 'game' the system.
- Use the preparation time given before each question. Do not rush straight into your answer.
- Look directly into the camera, not at your own image on screen.
- Dress and present yourself as you would for an in-person interview

Virtual Group Exercises

- Test your technology before the day: webcam, microphone, internet connection, and the platform being used (Teams, Zoom, HireVue, etc.).
- Join from a quiet, well-lit space with a neutral background or an appropriate virtual background.
- Use clear verbal cues to invite others to contribute: 'What do you think, [name]?'
- Mute yourself when not speaking to reduce background noise.
- Have a backup plan if your tech fails - know the organiser's phone number.

Online Psychometric and Cognitive Tests

- These are often timed and taken before or during the assessment day.
- Practice on free platforms such as Assessment Day, JobTestPrep, and Practice Aptitude Tests.
- Brush up on percentages, fractions, decimals, ratios, and data interpretation.
- Read each question carefully: time pressure can lead to avoidable mistakes.
- Some tests are adaptive: questions get harder or easier based on your answers. Stay calm and keep going.

How to Research and Prepare

Thorough preparation is the single biggest factor in a strong assessment centre performance. Treat it with the same seriousness as a final interview.

Company and Industry Research

- Start with the employer's website: their values, strategy, recent news, and any published annual reports or ESG commitments.
- Follow the company on LinkedIn and check for recent posts, campaigns, or product launches.
- Read industry press and sector-relevant publications to understand the market context.
- Use Glassdoor and similar sites for honest insight into company culture and what previous candidates experienced at their assessment centres.
- Check LinkedIn profiles of employees who will be present on the day and prepare thoughtful questions for them.

Digital Research Tools

Recommended Research Resources

- Company website: values, strategy, careers pages, and news sections
- LinkedIn: company page, employee profiles, recent activity
- Glassdoor: candidate reviews, interview experiences, culture ratings
- Prospects.ac.uk and Targetjobs.co.uk: graduate employer reviews and role insights
- National Careers Service: nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles
- Industry press: relevant trade publications and news sites for your sector
- Company annual reports / ESG reports: for commercial awareness depth
- AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Perplexity): useful for summarising sectors or generating practice questions, but verify everything independently

Practical Preparation Checklist

- ✓ Revisit your CV and application form so your key examples are fresh in your mind.
- ✓ Reflect on previous stages of the process and act on any feedback you received.
- ✓ Prepare a strong set of STAR-format examples (Situation, Task, Action, Result) for core competencies.
- ✓ If invited to a virtual day, test all technology at least 24 hours before.
- ✓ Contact the recruiter if anything is unclear. Asking sensible questions shows initiative.
- ✓ Check your university careers centre for mock assessment centres, interview coaching, practice platforms or employer events.
- ✓ Use student review websites (e.g. Glassdoor, WikiJob) as a starting point only: formats change and your experience may differ.

On the Day: Hints and Tips

Assessment centres assess you from the moment you arrive: including during breaks and informal conversations. Here is how to put your best foot forward throughout.

Do	Avoid
• **Arrive early (or log on early for virtual days)**	• Dominate group discussions or talk over others
• **Be friendly and natural during lunch and breaks**	• Dismiss ideas without engaging with them
• **Make your reasoning visible to assessors in exercises**	• Leave technology untested until the last minute
• **Invite others into group discussions**	• Treat informal moments as *'off the record'*
• **Volunteer to manage time in group tasks**	• Spend mental energy dwelling on past tasks
• **Stay positive after a difficult exercise**	• Forget to listen as well as contribute
• **Be consistent: assessors compare notes**	• Pretend to be someone you're not

Finally, be yourself. Assessors are experienced at spotting authenticity. The best version of you: prepared, curious, and genuinely engaged is always more compelling than a performance.

After the Assessment Centre

- Send a brief, professional follow-up email thanking the team for the opportunity, it is rarely done and always noticed.
- Reflect on what went well and what you would do differently, regardless of the outcome.
- Request feedback if you are unsuccessful. Specific feedback from assessors is invaluable for future applications.
- Connect on LinkedIn with employees you spoke with, if appropriate.
- If you are successful ask about onboarding, start dates, and any preparation you can do before joining.

Need more support? We're here to help.

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