

# **THAKUR COLLEGE OF SCIENCE & COMMERCE**

## **Autonomous**

### **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

#### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

##### **What is a Group Discussion?**

Group discussion is an important activity in academic, business and administrative spheres. It is a systematic and purposeful interactive oral process. Here the exchange of ideas, thoughts and feelings take place through oral communication. The exchange of ideas takes place in a systematic and structured way. The participants sit facing each other almost in a semi-circle and express their views on the given topic/issue/problem.

##### **How does Group Discussion differ from a Debate?**

Debate is competitive in nature while group discussion is a co-operative group process. In a debate, a speaker can speak either 'for' the topic or 'against' the topic whereas in a GD, the speaker can express both. The final decision or result in a debate depends on voting while in a GD, the group reaches group consensus.

##### **Why is a group discussion an important activity at college level?**

As a student, it helps you to train yourself to discuss and argue about the topic given, it helps you to express your views on serious subjects and in formal situations. It improves your thinking, listening and speaking skills. It also promotes your confidence level. It is an effective tool in problem solving, decision making and personality assessment. GD skills may ensure academic success, popularity and good admission or job offer. Thus it is important to be able to take part in a GD effectively and confidently. Participants should know how to speak with confidence, how to exhibit leadership skills and how to make the group achieve the goals. The panel which normally comprises of the technical and HR (Human Resource) experts of the company will observe and evaluate the members of the team. The rules of the GD – the time limit, panel's expectations etc are explained after the initial introduction by the panel, soon after the topic or case to be discussed is given to the group members. The panel does not interfere during the discussion, it only observes. The panel at its discretion may provide some time to think over the topic or may ask them to start immediately. Each candidate is supposed to express their opinion either supporting or against the topic. The discussion carries on till the panel signals termination. It is left to the discretion of the panel to extend or cut short the given time.

The objective of a selection in GD is mainly to check your team playing skills. You have to understand the other persons' point of view, while making your point and ensure that your team as a whole reaches a solution or agreement that is both feasible and accepted by all team members.

There are four major areas of evaluation in selection GDs: subject knowledge, oral communication skills, leadership skills and team management.

**Subject Knowledge:** Participants must possess a thorough understanding of the topic on which they are supposed to speak. You must prepare yourself to talk on a wide range of subjects. Be abreast of the current events, national and international affairs, burning social and economical topics, scientific and environmental issues, key newspapers' controversial topics and any experience that may be expected of an educated person. As a member of the group, you are expected to contribute substantially to the discussion. The originality of your ideas, your knowledge and initiative and your approach to the topic or case contribute to your success in the group discussion. The best way to equip yourself is to read daily newspapers, good magazines, national and international journals and also watch new bulletins and informative programmes on the television. Internet is the greatest boon which provides you with everything you are looking for. The World Wide Web is a vast database of current authentic materials that present information in multimedia form and reacts instantly to a user's input. The greater your knowledge of the subject, the more enthusiastic and confident you will be during the discussion. Once you have understood the topic or issue, you should be able to generate ideas as well as organize them so that you present it well. You will have the ability to analyze facts or information in a systematic way. A person putting forward new ideas that may work will be accepted as the natural leader of the group. The panel will observe the ideas put forward, their originality, the depth of analysis and their relevance to the topic. Problem solving skills are essential and do not hesitate to give solutions. Your approach to the case study will be observed keenly by the evaluators.

### **Oral Communication Skills:**

If subject knowledge is important, communication skills is more important as without expression, the knowledge is of no use. As the exchange of ideas in a group discussion takes place through speech, one of the pre-requisites of success in a GD is the ability to speak confidently and convincingly. Good communication skills include active listening, clarity of thought and expression, apt language and proper non-verbal clues.

**Listening Skills:** One of the weaknesses of most human beings is that we love to listen to our own voice rather than listen to others. Listening is as important as speaking in a GD, unless you listen, you cannot contribute to the stated purpose of communication. It is extremely important to listen very carefully, only then you will be able to pick up the thread of discussion and continue. Only active participation as a listener in a group makes a person a good leader. A leader is identified by the panel.

**Clarity of Thought and Expression:** Clarity is the art of making yourself clear to the audience. Only when your expressions are clear, you can convince your team and the panel. More than words, it is the tone in which they are spoken that conveys the message. You should not be too loud or too soft. A lively and cheerful voice with appropriate modulations will attract the audience. Proper articulation of words, achieved through phonetic accuracy is very essential slang, and artificial accents are to be avoided.

**Apt Language:** The flow of language must be smooth. Use simple language and avoid long winding sentences. Appropriateness of language demands that there should be no errors of grammar. Do not use unfamiliar phrases and flowery language. Be precise. Be polite and courteous.

**Proper Non-Verbal Clues:** Non-verbal clues include eye contact, body movements, gestures and facial expressions. The panel very keenly watches the non-verbal behaviour of the team. They generally evaluate the body language cues of the team to determine personality factors such as nervousness, co-operation, frustration, weakness, insecurity, self-confidence, defensiveness, etc. A candidate who appears professional is more likely to be noticed by the panel. A confident posture, appropriate facial expressions and meaningful eye contact with the team will create a good expression.

**Team Behaviour:** Your group behaviour is reflected in your ability to interact with the other members of the group. You must be mature enough to not lose your temper even if you are proved wrong. You must be patient and balanced. Your success in a GD depends on how well you play the role of initiator, information seeker, information giver, procedure facilitator, opinion seeker, opinion giver, clarifier, summarizer, social-supporter, tension reliever, compromiser, attacker, humorist and dominator. The selection panel notes the differences in the amount of participation of the members. They observe the silent spectators, the ever dominating but not contributing much, member who participates actively exhibiting his knowledge and the moderate ones. Your ability lies in analyzing the problem well and making others to endorse your view. Finally while appreciating others point of view, you should effectively present yours without contradicting other's opinions. Your ability in convincing the team is your success.

**Leadership Skills:** The success of any team depends to a larger extent on its leader. The panel evaluates a candidate's personal skills which allow him to prove himself as a natural leader in the GD. Though there is no appointed leader in a GD, a leader emerges. Assertiveness, emotional stability, objectivity, self-confidence, decision making, discretion, initiative, good communication skills, patience, persuasiveness and adaptability are some of the leadership qualities that are immensely useful in proving oneself as a natural leader in GD. A good leader should neither be very authoritative nor submissive but must be democratic. Such leaders see to it that all the members in the team participate and when there is a problem, try to deal with it amicably. Leaders should know how to deal with the 'bull dozers', who make noise but do not have any logic.

#### **TO SUMMARIZE:**

##### **Advantages of a GD:**

- Ideas can be generated, shared and tried out.
- Groups provide a support and growth for any endeavour.
- Combine talents to provide innovative solutions.

##### **Roles in a Structured GD:**

- Initiator
- Information seeker and giver
- Procedure facilitator
- Opinion seeker/giver

- Clarifier
- Summarizer
- Social supporter
- Harmonizer
- Tension reliever
- Energizer
- Attacker
- Dominator

**Expectations of the Panel: You should have the following qualities:**

- Team player
- Reasoning
- Leadership
- Flexible
- Assertiveness
- Initiative
- Creativity (out of the box thinking)
- Inspiring ability
- Listening
- Awareness

**Phases in a GD:**

- Initiation/introduction
- The central group discussion
- Summarization/conclusion

**What to do in a GD?**

- Speaking is important; do not sit silently. Speak freely.
- Do not monopolize the conversation or talk too much.
- Give everyone a chance to speak.
- Maintain eye contact with everyone in the group.
- Show active listening skills.
- Do not interrupt anyone while they are speaking.

- Keep the topic on track and don't be irrelevant.
- Encourage someone who is silent to talk.
- Do not argue with anyone.
- Do not debate with anyone, while the group looks on.
- Do not repeat what has been said; be attentive; try to develop on ideas expressed or give out new ideas.
- Clarify your doubts and then proceed.
- Be brief.
- Do not commit grammatical errors while talking.

**Sample topics for Group Discussion:**

- Terrorism in India
- Religion should not be mixed with politics
- Morals & Values among Indians is Degenerating
- With Media Publishing and Telecasting Trivia, Censorship is the Need of the Hour
- We are not serious about saving Wildlife/Environment
- The education system needs serious reforms
- The Internet is an exercise in hype
- Is our Political System Reason for our Backwardness?