
UNIT 13 PARTICIPATING IN DISCUSSIONS

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to

- understand the purpose of discussions in the recruitment process
- identify the skills and attitudes needed when participating in a discussion
- practise the language of discussions

You will also be provided with

- vocabulary inputs
- quick tips for discussions

13.1 WARM UP

Think about these questions before you begin.

- 1) How often do we get into discussions with strangers?
- 2) What are the usual topics for discussions?
- 3) In a group discussion who is considered impressive or identified in an obvious or subtle way as the leader?
- 4) What kind of conflicts can happen in a discussion?
- 5) How do people infer that the purpose of the discussion has been achieved?

13.2 READING COMPREHENSION: DISCUSSION BASICS

Read this feature article and answer the questions that follow:

Who would say ‘no’ to an invitation to share ideas! Almost everything starts out with “Let’s discuss this, shall we?” “Oh yes.” We love to talk. It brings out the best and the worst in us. People spend significant amount of time interacting with each other and quite a part of it interacting in groups. Politics, food, sports,

music, neighbours, family and philosophy along with everything under the sky and beyond has been spoken about, argued upon and discussed.

Discussions and Recruitment

Recruiters coming up with discussions as an assessment tool must have been the brainwave of management gurus, panicky HRs or psychologists. Whoever thought of it, hit the nail right on the head! Nothing reveals attitudes, behavior and skills as when unlike minds sit down for a discussion.

What are they looking at?

A discussion by its very structure integrates skills that are essential in the workplace – teamwork, leadership skills, goal awareness, task completion and problem - solving skills, to name a few. Let's take an example: if Jamal shouts his rival down in a group discussion is he likely to do the same in a departmental brainstorming session? If Asmit feels that a single idea said in ten different ways helps her keep up her end of the discussion, is she going to be an asset when the creative team of the company meets? If I refuse to listen to a different opinion or “put down” every argument with relish and panic when I am “losing”, am I going to be the same with customers? The answer to all these questions is YES. Imagine the recruiter knowing all of these things about you in the selection round before you have a face-to-face interview! Would they want you in their company? Obviously not. A discussion is a powerful tool because it reveals far more about you than you would imagine.

How to do it right

This is where everyone has an expert opinion. The way I see it, there are things that you must not do – get aggressive for one. Most employers prefer somebody who can manage conflict calmly and productively.

Then again, speaking more doesn't necessarily mean making sense, so keep it brief; get to the point. This of course, doesn't mean using single line statements without any explanations nor does it mean speaking in monosyllables. Competitive discussion groups will not give you time for wordy explanations, it's better to make a point with an impact and make it fast.

The next roadblock is purely your own perception of situations, and that's what makes the difference between a leader and the crowd. It's not you against the group; it's you and the group. The more opponents you see the fewer colleagues you will find.

Be seen and get heard

What happens when there are more than 20 people participating, does everyone get profiled in detail? Not exactly. Watch a football game. When the camera pans the crowd, you can see screaming fans, painted faces and dancing crowds. Some of them stand out- we notice them and remember them. That's recall value.

The lesson is, in bigger groups you need to be able to stand out, be noticed and be recognized as worthwhile competition (and not because of a painted face or hysterics). Discover ways of creating recall value – a good initial statement, effective conflict management and presenting a relevant and interesting opinion are just some of the ways.

In terms of attitude, focus on positive body language, clarity of expression, voice, choice of words, analysis, team building skills, social adaptability, creativity and a certain amount of leadership skills as well.



Activity 1

- 1) Choose the most suitable alternative to complete the sentences.
 - i) Discussions have gained importance as an assessment tool because...
 - a) they are fun to watch and participate in.
 - b) they make the selection process simpler and more streamlined.
 - c) they test integrated workplace skills.
 - d) they test knowledge.
 - ii) Discussions predict...
 - a) how a candidate is going to function in the workplace.
 - b) the success rate of the participant.
 - c) how obedient an employee the participant is going to be.
 - d) who is going to be liked by the boss.

- iii) The wrong set of participant behavior would be...
 - a) competitiveness, leadership skills, shouting a rival down
 - b) recall value, being noticed, being assertive
 - c) aggressive, overly competitive, opinionated, panicky.
 - d) Calm, quiet, submissive
- iv) The best way to be heard is to ...
 - a) speak loudly
 - b) create recall value
 - c) argue
 - d) reach a consensus
- v) It's not enough to have an opinion,
 - a) it's important that everybody agrees with you
 - b) it's important to lead every discussion
 - c) it's important to defeat the opponent
 - d) it's important to express it effectively

2) The discussion checklist

According to the writer the behavioural requirements for a discussion are:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

13.3 VOCABULARY

Activity 2

- 1) Pick out words from the passage that mean the same as the following:
 - i) Scared
 - ii) People in charge of hiring new employees
 - iii) A brilliant idea which occurs suddenly
 - iv) A phrase meaning 'knowing what the ultimate aim is'
 - v) A phrase referring to 'a meeting to discuss lots of ideas and collectively choosing the best one'
 - vi) Responding with single words like *yes, no, ok, all right*; also referring to words with one syllable
 - vii) Something that obstructs progress, stops us from getting ahead
 - viii) Remembering something afterwards
 - ix) Starting something
 - x) Creating a team

13.4 LISTENING COMPREHENSION: THE ANATOMY OF A DISCUSSION

This section deals with how group discussion works as a selection tool – its structure and the assessment criterion.

Listen to the presentation by Ahmad Raja Khan, the HR Director of a management consultancy firm about how a discussion moves and is assessed. Then read the questions given below and listen once again.

Activity 3

- 1) Identify the incorrect statements and correct them
 - i) There must be consensus at the end of a discussion.
 - ii) It's enough to contribute meaningfully and not come into the limelight.
 - iii) We must wait for a chance to speak.
 - iv) Wide reading and extensive knowledge is necessary for active participation.
 - v) Participants need to talk loudly and keep talking to make themselves heard.
 - vi) Quantity is more important than quality.
 - vii) We only need to know what we are about to say. A contradictory idea is not worth thinking about.
 - viii) The more we can dominate the group the better are our individual marks.
- 2) Match the following and complete the sentences on the left

i) If the discussion progresses logically and every point reinforces or leads out from what has been said before	a) it does not create order and is not a positive feature
ii) If the participants interrupt each other too often	b) the purpose of the discussion
iii) An uninvolved, laid back and uninterested style	c) but also needs to be deeply analyzed
iv) It's important to achieve	d) is listless and is marked low on the scale.
v) Information shared needs to be not just the obvious and the surface understanding of the issue	e) the group displays a sense of direction

13.5 THE LANGUAGE OF DISCUSSIONS

Look at the following language structures that you would need to use in a discussion.

Sample topic: Advertising is glorified lying

**Initializing a topic
Starting the discussion**

Good morning/ hello...

General statements

I'd like to inform you about / share with you ...

We're here to talk about...

It is said that/generally believed that...

Let's begin with ...

Questions

Did you know that advertising...?

What makes advertising succeed?

Why do people see ads?

Shock Value

Here's an interesting fact.....

A little known fact about advertising is.....

It is interesting to note that.....

The main body of the discussion includes functions like the ones given below

Inviting responses

**Expressing opinions/ beliefs/
making a point**

We'd like to have your opinion on this...

In my opinion/view... ..

What do you think ...

I believe...

How do you think this happens ...

I'd like to say / to add...

Is this what you meant....

I tend to think...

I (really) think...

It seems to me ...

It's obvious that...

Clearly...

Moving the discussion on

Can we go on to think about...

I think we should also consider...

How about...

What do you think about...

There is another aspect to this issue...

Agreeing

I completely/absolutely/totally agree...

I must agree/ have to admit...

I agree entirely...

I couldn't agree more...

I quite agree...

I think you're right...

I agree somewhat...

I partially agree...

That seems okay but...

Disagreeing

I completely/absolutely/totally disagree...

I disagree entirely...

I don't agree at all...

I must /have to disagree...

I think quite differently on this...

I don't entirely/exactly agree/believe that...

I'm afraid I cannot agree/don't agree...

I have some reservations about this idea...

I can't say I believe that/ agree to that...

Participating in Discussions

Confirming/checking information/ restating for clarity

Is this what you meant...

If I get you/understand you right...

In other words...

Tell me if I got you/understood you right...

Did you mean/does that mean....

To put that another way...

If I follow you correctly...

Could you clarify...

Are you trying to say that/are you saying that...

Interrupting

Excuse me, may I ask for a clarification on this

If I may interrupt ...

Sorry to interrupt but...

If you don't mind, I'd like to complete the thought...

Dealing with Interruptions

If I may finish what I am saying...

Sorry please let me finish...

I'd like to complete what I was saying...

Making a suggestion

I suggest that...

Perhaps we should...

(I think) We could...

It might be worth...

What about/ How about...

Why don't we...

Let's look at it this way...

Moving towards the conclusion

The best conclusion, with or without consensus is one that restates the initial proposition and summarizes the major stand/s that the group has taken. Here are a few ways to start doing that:

So can we agree on ...

We seem to have come to / arrived at a conclusion...

I think we can safely say...

Finally / Fundamentally then...

Are we on agreement on this that

I guess we can agree on ...

I guess/ suppose we can agree to disagree on ...

Can we / why don't we bring all these ideas together

13.6 WRITING AND SPEAKING: A DICE GAME

Activity 4

Play this simple game with a friend. You are player 1. Then, go through each block and write down the answer after consulting **The Language of Discussions**. The startup box is common for both players. Roll a dice and move the given number of blocks. Whichever block you stop at is the position you are at in a discussion. Solve that and move on....

1 Free education till college is the best way to empower our vast human resource frame the initial line	2 You are the second speaker. Discuss the implications of the issue. Ask about group opinion.	3 You do not agree with the opinion of the participant who spoke just before you. Explain why.	4 You must add a point to the ideas given by the earlier speaker / participant
5 There are members in the group who have not participated. Express your view and ask for theirs.	6 Restate the existing idea and introduce a fresh aspect.	7 You are not very sure about what was just said. Ask for clarification.	8 You are in complete disagreement with what is being said. Express yourself.
9 You have been interrupted twice and you need to finish what you were saying.	10 There's a disagreement between two participants and the discussion has come to a standstill.	11 You need to review what has been discussed till now.	12 You agree with the speaker. In fact you have a point that supports him/her.

13 Add a new perspective, move the discussion ahead on a fresh point.	14 Make a suggestion about what should be considered next. 17 The discussion was successful. Congratulations! The conclusion was...	15 You feel there's no consensus. Restate the differing views and move towards a conclusion.	16 There's definite consensus. Conclude the discussion.
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13.7 VERBS FOLLOWED BY A PARTICIPLE AND INFINITIVE

Verbs associated with three of the five senses – sight, hearing and feeling – can be followed by either an infinitive or a participle.

I saw him jump.

Or

I saw him jumping.

I heard him shout.

Or

I heard him shouting

I feel something move.

Or

I felt something moving.

The verbs *jump*, *shout* and *move* in these sentences are infinitives without to, whereas *jumping*, *shouting* and *moving* are participles.

The infinitive suggests a momentary and/or completed action. The present participle suggests a continuing action. It expresses an interest in the doing of the action (i.e. the process) rather than its completion (i.e. the final result)

She could hear her father coughing.

I watched him throwing the ball.

Activity 5

- 1) Complete the following sentences with a number of words which include an infinitive or a participle related to the verb in brackets. The form you choose will depend on the meaning you wish to convey.
 - i) Today I could see the peacock (dance) (where?)
 - ii) The watchman reported to the owner that he had seen (break) (what?)
 - iii) During an earthquake one can feel (shake).

- iv) While I was sitting in the balcony I smelt..... (burn).
- v) I think I know where your car key is. I saw it.....(lie) (where?)
- vi) For nearly an hour we sat completely silent and motionless listening to (play) (where?)
- vii) She watched me (write) my name.
- viii) I heard him (sing) in the bathroom.
- ix) I could see the child (tremble) when his father shouted at him.
- x) I heard him (shout) my name repeatedly.

13.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit introduces you to a group discussion as an assessment tool and provides you with insights into its working. You are also provided with specific skills that you would need to be successful in a discussion and language structures for various functions and steps of a discussion. The vocabulary section reviews relevant vocabulary and the grammar section helps you practise the verb + ing and *to* - infinitive without *to*.

13.9 ANSWERS

Activity 1

- 1) i-c, ii-a, iii- c, iv- b, v-d
- 2) These are some points we identified from the text. You may add some more:
 - Positive body language
 - Clarity of expression and voice
 - Relevant choice of words
 - Analytical abilities
 - Team building skills
 - Social adaptability
 - Creativity
 - Leadership skills
 - Creating recall value
 - Make a point with impact – relevance and immediacy
 - Better conflict management

Activity 2

- i) Panicky
- ii) Recruiters
- iii) Brainwave
- iv) Goal awareness

- v) Brainstorming session
- vi) Monosyllables
- vii) Roadblock
- viii) Recall
- ix) Initializing
- x) Team building

Audio Text

Let's start from the basics. One needs to know what one's objective in the group is. A good definition of your objective is –to be noticed, to have contributed meaningfully in an attempt to help the group reach the right consensus. What does this essentially mean? The **first implication** is that you should be noticed by the panel. Merely making a meaningful contribution and helping the group arrive at a **consensus** is not enough. You have to be seen by the evaluating panel to have made a meaningful contribution. What does that mean in practice?

You must ensure that the group hears you. If the group hears you, so will the evaluator. That does not mean that you shout at the top of your voice and be noticed for the wrong reasons. You have to be assertive. If you are not a very assertive person, you will have to simply learn to be assertive for those 15 minutes. Remember, assertiveness does not mean being bull-headed or being arrogant.

And most importantly, you have to make your chances. Many group discussion participants often complain that they did not get a chance to speak. The fact is that in no group discussion will you get a chance to speak. There is nothing more unacceptable in a group discussion than keeping one's mouth shut or just murmuring things which are inaudible.

The second important implication is that making just any sort of contribution is not enough. Your contribution has to be meaningful. A meaningful contribution suggests that you have a good knowledge base and you are able to put forth your arguments logically and are a good communicator.

The quality of what you say is more valuable than the quantity. There is this myth amongst many group discussion participants that the way to succeed in a group discussion is by speaking loudly and at great length. One could not be more wrong. You must have meat in your arguments.

If you do not start the group discussion and are not amongst the first five speakers and find that everyone in the group is talking for the topic, then it makes sense to take the alternate approach and oppose the topic even if you initially intended to talk for the topic. Second, it helps to have knowledge of how group members who take a stand diametrically opposite to yours will put forth their argument and to be prepared with counter arguments. Everybody else will state the obvious. So highlight some points that are not obvious. The different perspective that you bring to the group will be highly appreciated by the panel.

Be careful that the “something different” you state is still relevant to the topic being debated. Also consider - Can you take the group ahead if it is stuck at one point? Can you take it in a fresh and more relevant direction?

The **last implication** is that you must be clearly seen to be attempting to build a consensus. Gaining support or influencing colleagues is the mantra adopted by many successful business leaders. Nobody expects a group of ten intelligent, assertive people, all with different points of view on a controversial subject to actually achieve a consensus. But what matters is “Did you make attempts to build a consensus?”

The reason why an attempt to build a consensus is important is because in most work situations you will have to work with people in a team, accept joint responsibilities and take decisions as a group. You must demonstrate the fact that you are capable and inclined to work as part of a team.

Activity 3

- 1) Incorrect statements and correction
 - i) There must be consensus at the end of a discussion – there need not be a consensus, although participants must try to achieve it.
 - ii) It’s enough to contribute meaningfully and not come into the limelight – if you are not seen, your contribution is meaningless.
 - iii) We must wait for a chance to speak – we need to create an opportunity to speak.
 - iv) A participant can make a meaningful contribution only if he/she has a good knowledge base and is able to put forth his/her arguments logically.
 - v) Participants need to talk loudly and keep talking to make themselves heard – participants need to use effective language and an assertive attitude to be heard.
 - vi) Quantity is more important than quality – quality is always more important than quantity.
 - vii) We only need to know what we are about to say. A contradictory idea is not worth thinking about. - Every idea is important even one that contradicts your opinion. It will help to come to a balanced statement on the issue.
 - viii) The more we can dominate the group the better are our individual marks. A domineering attitude is marked very low on the individual marks scale.
- 2) i. e, ii. a, iii. d, iv. b, v. c

Activity 5

- i) dancing in the backyard
- ii) Rashid break a window.
- iii) the earth shaking.
- iv) the toast burning.

- v) lying in the top drawer.
- vi) the music playing in the room.
- vii) write
- viii) singing
- ix) trembling
- x) shout