assessment
centres
and selection
tests

Flinders UNIVERSITY
inspiring achievement
Flinders University’s Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:

- Are knowledgeable
- Can apply their knowledge
- Communicate effectively
- Value ethical behaviour
- Are collaborative
- Can work independently
- Connect across boundaries

www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities
# ASSESSMENT CENTRES & SELECTION TESTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

“An assessment centre is not a place, an assessment centre is a structured combination of assessment techniques. The techniques vary from centre to centre depending on the selection criteria being used.” Department of Defence - What to expect at an assessment centre.

Graduate employers use a variety of recruitment techniques. This booklet focuses on two methods, which may be used singly, or in combination. They are the Assessment Centre, and Employment Selection Testing. Many (though not all) Graduate Recruiters use these techniques. Although you will usually be advised what the Graduate Recruitment process will entail, always check the organisation’s website and graduate recruitment materials. The examples provided by Flinders students who have been through Assessment Centres referred to throughout this booklet are examples only - there is a diversity of activities and approaches!

“At the Assessment Centre, I underwent an individual interview (that involved answering questions to hypothetical scenarios), an aptitude test (psychological and personality testing) on computer and a group work exercise that involved again a hypothetical issue with a given time limit to come up with a solution and then present to the Assessment Team, thus demonstrating the ability to work within a team environment.” Tammy, Bachelor of Business (Hons), Graduate Officer, Australian National Audit Office (ANAO).

“Once I had made the initial shortlist I had a formal interview. This process involved four components: a traditional interview component, a role playing exercise, an in-tray exercise simulating potential work conditions and a writing task.” Nick, Bachelor of Behavioural Science/ Bachelor of Arts Honours (Criminal Justice), Policy Office, Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department.

“My interview was a one-day assessment in Canberra involving a written test, individual interview and group work.” Rebecca, Bachelor of International Studies (Honours), Graduate (now a Policy Adviser), Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

We have other booklets available covering all aspects of graduate job search. You may wish to obtain your free copies of our booklets from the Careers and Employer Liaison centre, or download them from our website.

• Writing Your Application - CV and cover letters.

• Winning Graduate Applications – responding to application forms

• Addressing Selection Criteria

• Creative Job Search

• At the Interview
• The booklet, ‘Networking - going proactive’ is also available to be downloaded from our website.

2. FLINDERS UNIVERSITY GRADUATE QUALITIES

As a result of successfully pursuing your studies at Flinders University, you will have developed program-specific professional competencies as well as being able to demonstrate a range of qualities.

Flinders University’s Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:
• are knowledgeable
• can apply their knowledge
• communicate effectively
• can work independently
• are collaborative
• value ethical behaviour
• connect across boundaries.

More information about the Graduate Qualities, including descriptions is available at: www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/.

As you conduct your self-assessment and review your educational experiences, consider how you may both demonstrate and draw on these qualities as you embark on the next step in your career.

We are proud that so many Flinders graduates identify with, and can be distinguished by, these distinctive academic, professional and cultural characteristics.” (Flinders University Graduate Qualities statement www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/graduate-qualities_home.cfm)

PART ONE: THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

3. ABOUT ASSESSMENT CENTRES

What is an Assessment Centre?
An Assessment Centre (AC) is a selection process that is often used in Graduate Recruitment Programs. At an Assessment Centre, the candidates undertake a variety of exercises designed to assess various skills, whilst being observed and assessed. The structure and format of the Assessment Centre, and exercises
utilised, could vary enormously depending on the skills being sought and, in particular, in the range of tasks the graduate trainee will face. Some jobs require extensive teamwork, and high levels of customer service; in others, you may have to work autonomously, and the exercises chosen for the Assessment Centre will reflect this.

**Why do some employers use Assessment Centres?**

They are seen as a way of obtaining a fairer, more objective, and more accurate assessment of the candidate compared to a job interview.

Assessors are able to see applicants in a variety of situations, over a longer period of time, to obtain a well-rounded view of the candidate, and to determine if they are the right “fit” for their organisation. Essentially, the assessors get to see what you actually do, rather than relying on what you say you can do at an interview.

**At what stage of the recruitment process will I do the Assessment Centre?**

Assessment Centres may be used instead of an initial interview, or after the initial interview, or as the final stage of a selection process.

**Where does an Assessment Centre occur?**

It may be at a hotel, the organisation’s premises, or at a Recruitment Agency.

**How long does an assessment take?**

We have heard of many graduate Assessment Centres that have gone for half a day. The length of time might vary from two and a half hours to two, or even three, days.

**How many people are assessed at the same time?**

The number of applicants assessed could range from 8 to 20 at a time. The ratio of assessors to those being assessed varies – it could be as high as 1:1 or 1:2, or it could be as low as 4:20.

**What is the role of the Assessors?**

> “Whenever the group worked, they’d have a couple of observers writing down whatever you said. At the end of it they’d have a wad of notes about exactly who did what.” Matthew, Flinders Graduate.

Your involvement will be observed by assessors and evaluated against pre-set criteria. The assessors could be from a recruitment agency, or from the Human Resources Department of the organisation. They could be managers or other staff who have been trained in this methodology. The assessors will meet to compare notes and ‘score’ each candidate after the AC.
How can I prepare?
Assessors are seeking information about your experiences, skills and personality. As these aspects have developed over a long time, there is limited opportunity for preparation through “cramming”. However, it does help to understand the process and to prepare and practice the aspects that you can.

“When it comes to preparing for a group interview, prepare the same as for an individual interview. Feel confident and be yourself, don't be anything that you are not. If you don't know someone, go up and introduce yourself to them. They are looking for people who can sell themselves and are confident. They also want to know about your analytical, problem solving, teamwork, and leadership skills. But don't be intimidated if someone is dominating the scene. You may have to do presentations, teamwork, role-playing, written work, and have the opportunity for drinks/coffee with partners and recently employed graduates. Try to look as thought you have done this all your life. Interview skills can be learned and improved.” Julie, Commerce Graduate, PricewaterhouseCoopers.

• Find out as much as you can about what will happen at the assessment centre from the Recruitment/Contact Officer.

• Watch the video “The Assessment Centre” (27 minutes) available for viewing at the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre.

• You may also wish to read about effective presentation skills and to practise your public speaking. (See the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre booklet: “At The Interview”).

• Research the employer! Check the web site, and graduate recruitment literature. What is the culture of this organisation?

• As with a job interview, find out where exactly the venue is, and arrange your transport. Give yourself plenty of time to get to the venue. Have your clothes ready the night before and get a good night’s sleep.

• Practise aptitude tests. See Part Two of this booklet for more information.

• If an interview is part of the Centre, prepare for it.

• A comprehensive article on Assessment Centres and Psychometric Assessment is available at: www.graduateopportunities.com/

“I remember the day before I went into my Assessment Centre, I watched the video on Assessment Centres and I got a few notes from it. As a result I was able to stick to the schedule, and manage my time. My Assessment Centre was very similar to the video, and I think the assessors were impressed with my time management schedule.” Loan, BIT, Graduate IT Officer at Australian Taxation Office.
4. WHAT CAN I EXPECT? WHAT EXERCISES WILL THERE BE?

Normally the assessors try to provide as relaxed and informal an environment as possible. At the start of the session, the group may be advised of the purpose of the assessment, and given information about the timetable and format of the day. There could be a mix of individual and group assessment activities, for example:

- social/’less formal’ activities
- group discussions
- practical group tasks
- in tray tasks
- simulations/role plays
- case studies/analysis exercises
- presentations
- interviews
- aptitude and personality assessments.

“I was then asked to attend a group activity that consisted of groups of 5-6 working together to solve a problem. There was an opportunity after this to mingle with employees and partners of the firm that was helpful in getting a feel for how you would fit in around the workplace.” Michelle, Bachelor of Accounting, Graduate, Analyst, Deloitte.

“I also attended several cocktail parties where I had to meet and greet people in a social environment and also participate in verbal, numerical and analytical testing.” Chris, Bachelor of International Business & Bachelor of Accounting Graduate, Analyst Assurance and Advisory, Deloitte.

Specific examples of exercises:
1. A tour of the workplace (be interested and ask questions).
2. Icebreaker exercise to get group members talking.
3. A presentation about the organisation/graduate program
4. Group activities
5. Leadership exercises
6. Outdoor activities
7. Interviews - panel and 1:1
8. Aptitude tests and Personality assessment inventories
9. Technical knowledge tests
10. Candidates may do a presentation
11. In-Tray or E-Tray exercises
12. Report writing exercises
13. Role plays
14. Social activities
‘Social’ or ‘less formal’ Activities
Even here, you may still be under observation! It could be a cocktail party, lunch, morning and afternoon tea breaks - how do you interact with others? Senior management may attend, and/or the current graduate trainees. Mix with as many of the representatives of the organisation and other candidates as possible during these ‘less formal’ times. Make a good impression and avoid any excesses of food, behaviour and alcohol.

Use this as an opportunity to find out more about the organisation and to ask questions in a more informal setting. For example "What work have you been involved in over the last 6 months?" or "What are your most interesting projects as a graduate trainee?" Show a genuine interest in what other people do. It also won’t hurt to be prepared to respond to the question "Tell me about yourself". (See the booklet "At The Interview" for ideas).

Group Discussions and Exercises
Your group may be set the task to discuss an issue or, the group could be asked to imagine that they are a committee or project team. They may work on an activity, address a problem-solving or a hypothetical scenario, undertake a practical task, or resolve an issue and make recommendations.

You could get briefing notes where you are asked to play the role of a particular person. The information you are given may be vague or conflicting. In some Centres, roles may be rotated – for example everyone may have to act as the leader of the team at some stage. On the other hand, no roles may be allocated and you may all get the same information. Ensure that you understand and follow the instructions for the exercise.

Alternatively, the group may have to construct a newspaper bridge, an object using Lego, or a block tower. You may have to meet certain specifications such as height, minimum span, weight-bearing capacity, clearance and so on. This isn’t a test of your aesthetic, architectural or construction skills. In fact, a common mistake is to spend too much of your limited time on the design stage, rather than construction.

Here are some tips:

- Analyse the information you are given, and determine what is relevant, but don't get trapped in the details – they have the potential to sidetrack the group’s discussions. Always remind yourself of the outcomes you must deliver in the available time.

- Decide your objectives and priorities, then make a plan and follow it.

- Be assertive and persuasive, but also diplomatic - take the feelings and views of other people into account.

- Remember that the quality of what you have to say is more important than the quantity.

- Listen to what everyone else has to say, and try to get the best contribution from everyone in the group. Involve the quieter members.
• Find the balance between putting forward your ideas and constructively helping the group to complete the task set. Effective team work is not necessarily about getting the group to adopt your ideas, but also listening to, and using, others’ ideas.

• Make sure the group keeps to time.

“I then waited a month before attending a 4-hour assessment centre with 30 other keen near-graduates. Beforehand, I watched the assessment centre video at the Career Centre and that prepared me very well for being creative and diplomatic in the group exercise discussing budget spending on two proposals (listen to the others, come up with new ideas, and stay within the timeframe). We had a written exercise answering technical degree-related questions (e.g. when to recognise an asset) and a personal interview … I also had to prepare a 15 minute presentation on the State Budget performed in front of two assessment centre officers (practice, practice).”

Nicoline, Commerce Graduate, Graduate Officer, Department of Treasury and Finance.

During Group Exercises, the assessors are generally interested in observing your:

1. Interpersonal skills
2. Communication/negotiation skills
3. Sensitivity to the needs and ideas of other group members
4. Clear and concise presentation of ideas
5. Courtesy to others
6. Problem solving and creativity
7. Time Management
8. Leadership qualities.

Basically - can you work well with other people, and what do you contribute to the team?

“Asessment Centre: This stage involved 3 activities. The first activity was a group task divided into 3 sections, which required the group to individually look at a press release and prepare our own thoughts individually, secondly we shared our ideas and prepared a presentation and the final step was to present out ideas. The next activity was a written task, which required that I respond to four questions with increasing difficulty (as they required greater interpretation of the information provided) and a final summary question. The final task was a behavioural interview.”

Jodie, Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Graduate Certificate in Health (Mental Health Promotion), Graduate Position in the Compass Program, Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

In-Tray or E-Tray
This activity may be set on an individual or a group basis. You are usually allocated a role within an organisation, where you have to work through the items in your In-Tray. You could even be placed in a crisis situation (for example, presenting to the press in one hour on an unfolding environmental disaster). The items in your In-Tray could consist of correspondence, emails, memos, telephone messages, faxes, reports, and requests from your manager.
Your task is to take decisions on each item: determine the issues to be addressed, prioritise your work, draft replies, complete reports, delegate tasks or recommend action to your manager, and so on. Additional correspondence may be delivered during the activity. You may even have to return phone calls!

There may be an interview following this exercise to explore the reasons for your various decisions and actions. The exercise is designed to test how you handle complex information within a limited time, plus assess your organisational, analytical and communication skills. Read the information and check what resources are available to you.

In an e-tray exercise the information is presented on a computer and all responses are entered on-screen. You have to deal with a series of emails (rather than paper-based materials as in the case of an in-tray). You organise and prioritise these then choose the appropriate action to take and type replies to some emails.

An example of an e-Tray exercise from the United Kingdom: www.civilservice.gov.uk/jobs/FastStream/HowDoIApply/e-Tray.aspx

Your time management and prioritisation skills will be paramount in these activities. What are the most urgent and critical items? What items are less important or trivial? What is the scope of your responsibility in this scenario? Is it possible to appropriately delegate some items? Check all dates and times carefully.

**Written Exercise**

Tips: Before starting - plan how you will construct the document, make some rough notes so that your completed work will be coherent, legible and logical. Use suitable formatting (consider the audience). Address all issues that are outlined in the exercise. Consider the selection criteria when framing your answer. Make sure you know what your time limit is and incorporate that into your plan. From Department of Defence Booklet, “Assessment Centres – What to expect”.

**Case Studies/Analysis Exercises**

Here you are required to analyse information and make decisions and/or recommendations. The subject matter may be highly related to the graduate role, for example, interpreting and reporting on financial/statistical information, or preparing briefing notes for your manager. Or the topic could be more general (“What are the pros and cons of students paying for their education?”). There will be a set time frame in which to complete the activity, and reach an outcome. Usually you will have to provide a written report and/or present to the assessors.

This type of exercise may measure the ability to: analyse complex information; generate solutions; and present findings, to think clearly and logically, to exercise your judgment, work under pressure and to communicate clearly in writing.
Role Plays
In these exercises you will be required to play a specific role in a given scenario. Scenarios could include a workplace meeting, a customer service, sales situation, meeting with a client etc. Listen and attend closely. This type of exercise may measure: interpersonal and communication skills, assertiveness, persuasiveness, customer service orientation, and problem solving.

Giving presentations
You may have to do a presentation on your own, or as part of a team. You may be presenting back to the group, or simply to the assessors. See Page 14 for more information.

The Interview
You may have a behavioural interview at the Assessment Centre, or the interview could be based on questions about why you chose your degree, what you liked the most about it, liked the least, why you applied to the graduate program and so on. The interview could be 1:1, or there may be a panel of interviewers. Try to find out as much as you can about the nature of the interview beforehand.

Behavioural interview questions aim to elicit specific examples of how you have handled situations in the past (as a predictor of your future performance). For example: “Tell me about a time when you had to work in a team to accomplish a task. What was your role in the team and what was the outcome?”

Answering these questions at interview is much easier if you have thought about it in advance, rather than trying to come up with an example on the spot. To enable you to showcase your skills, identify the skill areas that are sought, and prepare examples of how you have demonstrated each one of them. This is known as developing your STARS - use the following model:

ST: Situation/Task-what was the situation/task? Who was involved? What was your role? Use a specific example.
A: Action-what did you do? How?
R: Result-what was the end result? What did you achieve?

To find out more about graduate interviews, refer to our booklet “At the Interview”.

5. TIPS FOR SUCCESS AT THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

• Participate actively and assume you are being assessed at all times. Show your enthusiasm - ask questions, join in discussions.

• Demonstrate a professional image and manner. Be aware of your non-verbal signals such as eye contact, facial expression, and gestures.

• Focus carefully on all instructions - they may be given verbally, or in writing. Ask if you are not clear about what you have to do.
• Be aware of time limits for activities - don't overrun!
• Don't dominate the conversation - show interest in the other candidates.
• If you feel you have gone wrong in an exercise – remember there will be other activities where you may perform better.
• It is also worth remembering that you are being assessed against set criteria and not against the other candidates. The process is more about you demonstrating the qualities the employer wants, than competing against all the other candidates there.
• Don’t make assumptions about the way you should respond. If you try to guess what the assessors are looking for, you may be wrong. You can only do your best by being yourself at an Assessment Centre; a rehearsed “plastic” image is inappropriate and will be obvious to the assessors.

“If you do make it to an assessment centre, stay relaxed and do not stress if one of the tasks doesn’t go so well. I definitely stuffed up one of the written tasks, but managed to well in the other tasks and was still successful in getting the job.” Josh, Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology (Honours), Graduate Development Program, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

What can I do after the Assessment Centre?
• Reflect on your performance. What could you do differently next time? Each Assessment Centre will provide you with a learning experience.
• What impression have you formed of the organisation? Do you want to work there?
• Ask for feedback.

6. AN ASSESSOR’S PERSPECTIVE

Here are some comments from an assessor in the Recruitment Industry.
1. Be honest and true to yourself.
2. Don’t go ‘over the top’ when interacting with the assessors - keep it professional.
3. Be friendly at all times. Interact, even in the few minutes before the assessment centre begins.
4. Take the process seriously (even in what may seem to be very artificial exercises), and also show that you have thought about the process and what is expected of you.
5. Always address the criteria being sought. The competencies may even be stated to you before the activity begins, for example, time management. Keep these in mind as you work through the activity.
6. For behavioural interviews, develop your STARS, have precise examples.
7. Seek feedback.
8. Remember, this is a fantastic opportunity to look at yourself, to find out about areas that you can develop, and areas that you do well.
What doesn’t work well:

1. Faking
2. Swearing (it can happen).
3. Mobile phones ringing.
4. Candidates wanting to leave two thirds of the way through because they “have another appointment to go to” or “have to change their car park.”
5. Complaining - an Assessment Centre is a long process; there can be delays, and breaks. Take advantage of these times - interact with others, reflect on your performance and how you can improve this.
6. Also, if you asked not to discuss the exercises with the other candidates, then don’t - it will reflect negatively on you if you do.
7. Dominating in a group setting and not being team oriented.
8. Not contributing to the group.

“*The Assessment Centre went from 9-2pm and there were 8 students there in total. We arrived and there was a brief introduction to all the Hudson evaluators, the Westpac representatives, the assessment centre timetable and this specific method of assessing. The first part of the centre that I had to complete was a panel interview with one person from Hudsons and one from Westpac. It went for approximately 40 minutes. Next was a timed diagrammatical test that went for 40 minutes. Whilst I was doing these sections other people were doing different sections. Following this, I had a 15-minute break and then with 3 other students we completed individual verbal and numerical tests. Both 30 minutes long.*

*Then we had a supplied lunch, which all the evaluators were present at. Next, was a group exercise. We were split into 2 groups of 4, and told to discuss a problem, creating an answer that the whole group agreed on. This section was not as hard as I thought it would be, as they were looking more at how we worked in a group, rather than our presentation skills at the end, or how well we analysed a problem. Then there was a question and answer section and the day was over.*

*As all of the other candidates had been to an assessment centre and I hadn’t, I thought that I was definitely on the back foot. However, because I had come to a Drop In at the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre, read through the Assessment Centre and Interview booklets prior to the day and also watched the Assessment Centre video, I was able to get more of an insight into what the day would actually consist of.*

*As a result I was actually contacted by Westpac and they have offered me a position in their graduate program. I am very pleased and excited and would say that all the preparation I did for that assessment was extremely helpful and necessary.*

*Catherine, Bachelor of Business, Business and Consumer Banking Graduate Program, Westpac.*
7. WORK SAMPLE TESTS

Sometimes an interview can involve assessment centre type tasks such as a work sample that you do on an individual basis. For example, prior to an interview one Law student was given 40 minutes to complete a task where they were provided with fact sheets about the area of the law, the facts about a complaint and were then asked to interpret this information and apply it to the case.

“Before entering the interview I was given two written questions and I was allowed 15 minutes to prepare a response. … I was asked another 5 unseen questions in addition to the written questions.” Disability and Community Rehabilitation Graduate, Inclusion Consultant, Inclusion SA.

Work sample tests could involve you undertaking exercises or activities similar to those required in the job, e.g.:

- a written exercise
- interpreting a statistical table
- responding to a detailed case scenario/case study.

“I was then called up for a second interview - in this interview I was required to do a variety of work samples (using SPSS, interpreting reports and diagrams) and then complete a personality questionnaire.” Psychology Honours Graduate, Organisational Research/Consultancy firm.

Preparation

Research the role and the organisation to understand the type of work that the organisation does and the work tasks you are likely to perform in this role.

For specific roles in Law, Allied Health, technical areas and so on, it is probably a good idea to review relevant course/clinical work and to reflect on how this may be applied to the organisation.

“Then there was an interview, in which I had to present a 10 minute response to a question they had given me a week prior.” Bachelor of Environmental Management (Hons), Doctor of Philosophy, Policy Officer in a State Government Department.

“(The interview questions included) database specific questions & tasks - i.e. normalising data.” Adam, Bachelor of Information Technology, Business Systems Analyst for a major Australian Transport Company.

“(The interview questions included) an example of a case and other questions to answer in relation to that.” Naomi, Bachelor of Speech Pathology, Speech Pathologist.
8. DELIVERING PRESENTATIONS AT INTERVIEW

Interviews can involve more than question and answer interactions. In fact, you could be asked to perform various tasks at interview, such as delivering a presentation. Presentation tasks can also form part of the activities at an Assessment Centre (individually or as a team presentation). Whether the presentation is 5 minutes or 15, here are some tips on what to expect and how to prepare for conducting an individual presentation.

“The interview consisted of a 5-minute talk on the topic of 'something I am passionate about' and 10 interview questions - which I received 10-minutes reading time to prepare.” Eddie, Bachelor of Behavioural Science (Psychology, Management), Graduate Officer, South Australian Housing Trust.

Giving presentations
Some employers will ask you to prepare a short talk for presentation to the interview panel. You could be asked to bring a prepared presentation to the interview, you may have to prepare it at the interview venue as an ‘on the spot’ pre-interview task, and in some cases you may have no warning and be asked to speak for 5 minutes on a particular topic. At the conclusion of the presentation you may have to respond to questions from the interviewer/s.

You could be given a topic for discussion that may be technically related to your degree and the role. There will usually be a time limit. Here are some discipline-specific examples:
• 15 minute presentation on the State Budget (Commerce)
• 5 minute talk on one of three things - a water bottle, a plant, or a koala teddy bear (Ecotourism)
• presenting on Primary Health Care for a community role (Health).

“I was also asked to prepare a short PowerPoint presentation on what I thought were good teaching practices (about 5 minutes long).” Carlie, Bachelor of Education (Secondary)/Science, Graduate Science Teacher, Irymple Secondary College.

When you are asked to prepare a presentation beforehand, you will usually be advised about what, if any, technical equipment you can use. You may want to take some handouts with you to give to the panel.

For many Graduate Programs you may have to do a group presentation as part of an Assessment Centre activity. For more information, read our booklet ‘Assessment Centres & Selection Tests’.

Planning your presentation
Plan your presentation along A-B-A lines – give an overview of what you’re going to tell them; tell them; and then summarise what you’ve told them.
Assess the time you have available and plan to deliver a few key messages (not more than 3-5). Don’t overwhelm your ‘audience’ with information.

Think about your audience and tailor your presentation to them. This will tell you how technical or general to be with the level of information and its complexity.

**Presentation delivery**

If you have been asked to deliver a prepared presentation, make sure you practice beforehand; ideally with someone who can give you feedback. Check that your presentation runs to time, is paced appropriately (not too fast or slow) and aim to keep to this pace in the interview situation (bearing in mind that you can speed up/slow down in these circumstances).

Speak clearly from notes, rather than memorising or reading from a script. Be careful with use of humour. Create interest with anecdotes, illustrative examples, statistics etc. and remember to make eye contact with the audience periodically as a means to engage them.

**After the presentation**

Expect to receive questions on your presentation. Try to anticipate in advance of the interview what these questions may be. Acknowledge the questioner; clarify/rephrase the question if necessary; answer the question; confirm that your response has answered their question; and thank them for the question.

Further information on Presentations is available from the Student Learning Centre: www.flinders.edu.au/SLC/

"I was short-listed for an interview and had to give a 30-minute presentation on my PhD research before attending an interview for an hour." David, PhD (Chemistry), Post-doctoral Fellow, The Australian Wine Research Institute.

Whether or not you are notified prior to interview that there will be a presentation, your best preparation is to thoroughly research the role and the organisation to understand the type of work that the organisation does. Drawing on this contextual understanding will help you to deliver an interesting and targeted presentation.

**9. MORE PRACTICE, INFORMATION & RESOURCES**

The Careers and Employer Liaison Centre presents an information session on Assessment Centres in Semester One each year.

**Videos**

Videos on assessment centres and interview skills are available to be viewed at the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre:

- **The Assessment Centre** (27 minutes) - See actual candidates taking part in a genuine selection day. Different situations are depicted including: a group exercise,
giving a presentation, being questioned on their presentation and an in-depth interview.

• **Why Ask Me That?** (22 minutes) - shows the progression of a typical selection interview. See 2 selectors commenting on the candidate’s performance.

• **Essential Interview Skills** (30 minutes) - answers many common questions about interviews.

• **Getting The Job** (32 minutes) - presents job seeking strategies and language for the job interview for speakers of English as a second language.

• **Making an Impact: the graduate job interview** (DVD - 108 minutes) - shows real students and graduates being interviewed by actual recruiters. It includes extracts from each interview, selectors’ verdicts and candidates reflecting on their own performance.

• **Be my interviewer** - includes interactive videos, and a range of interview topics from which to select, as well as interview tips from our experienced interviewers: www.jobsite.co.uk/bemyinterviewer/
PART TWO: EMPLOYMENT SELECTION TESTS

10. STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SELECTION TESTS

Many large employers use testing as part of their selection process for Graduate recruitment. Selection testing is often conducted by Psychologists or by Human Resources/Recruitment Consultants, who are accredited in administering and interpreting that particular test.

They may be used to preselect a small number of candidates to be interviewed from a large applicant pool. They are likely to be used in conjunction with other forms of assessment (for example, an Assessment Centre, Interview etc). The test may be in a pencil and paper form, or it may be computerised. You may even complete some assessments as part of the online application process.

There are different types of tests depending on the skills being sought. Some of the most common tests are ability or aptitude tests. They assess certain abilities - numerical, verbal, diagrammatic reasoning, critical thinking to name a few. All of the ability tests will have a time limit and there will be a right and a wrong answer.

Personality tests may also be used in graduate recruitment to provide a profile of a personality type or particular characteristics. The personality assessments are generally untimed.

“Online Assessment: This stage required me to complete an online Cognitive Ability test which looked at the extent that critical thinking and problem solving are likely to be my strengths and whether it is more probable that I will apply other qualities to enhance my performance at work.” Jodie, Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Graduate Certificate in Health (Mental Health Promotion), Graduate Position in the Compass Program, Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

Can I perform better?

Most test developers would suggest that their tests couldn’t be studied for. Their theory is that their tests are assessing a “reasoning” of some sort, or an ability that has taken many years to develop and cannot be compensated for in a short period of time. So, they are held to be free of test preparation or practice efforts. Gaining access to the tests themselves is virtually impossible other than in a test session. However some organisations do provide sample tests or test takers’ guides that will help you to become familiar with what will be expected of you when you take the test proper.

On the other hand, some commentators argue that practice questions help you to develop your confidence and speed in tackling the types of questions you may encounter on these tests. You may become more familiar with the format of...
questions, and be able to refine your approach to different sorts of questions so that you are more efficient. You may also feel more relaxed about the process!

**Before the test**

Before the test session, try to find out about the type of tests you will be doing. Try some practice tests (see websites provided further in this article). Remember, while it is useful and interesting to familiarise yourself with the types of tests employers use, do be aware that the standard of the questions may not all be at graduate level and the tests graduate employers use may be different.

Some test publisher sites also have advice on preparation for aptitude tests:

- **Verbal:** do verbal problem solving exercises such as crosswords and word games, or looking up words you are not familiar with and thinking of alternative words with the same meaning.

- **Numerical:** practise arithmetic (addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, percentages and ratios with and without a calculator), reminding yourself of arithmetic principles, for example, using a school text book, looking at tables, graphs and charts and interpreting their meaning in words, doing number games such as Sudoku.

- **Diagrammatic:** complete logic puzzles and games.

Get a good sleep the night before and make sure you arrive in good time for the test session.

**During the test - Strategies**

- There is usually a brief practice session before the testing proper begins. If you are unsure of anything, ask.

- Follow the instructions given to you. Use the equipment/pens supplied – they may be computer scored and answers marked with the wrong type of pen may not be counted. Record your answers exactly as indicated.

- Manage your time. There is a fine line between planning and pacing yourself on a test, and looking at your watch every few minutes. In many tests the questions get harder as you work through the test, so you may need more time per question as you go on.

- If you get stuck on a question, don't spend too long on it, but move on to the next one. However, don't abandon a question too soon, if with a few extra seconds you might have solved it.

- You need to be both quick and accurate but don't race or you will make avoidable mistakes. In some tests, marks may be deducted for incorrect answers.
• Where the test is in a multiple-choice format, try to eliminate as many wrong answers as possible (a quick estimate may help you to discard several options without having to work out every alternative).

• Don't waste time double-checking questions with easy or obvious answers. If you have time left at the end of a test, go back and check your answers.

• Don't be put off if the questions seem difficult - other candidates may find them just as difficult.

• Some tests are designed so that you are unlikely to complete them, so don't worry if you don't answer all the questions.

**Personality Inventories**

Personality inventories attempt to provide a personality overview through identifying a particular set of personality traits. Sometimes you are given a series of statements and asked to mark the one that is most (M) like you and the one least (L) like you. For example:

1. I don't feel that time is wasted on planning
2. I feel uneasy in the company of unconventional people
3. If I'm annoyed with someone I don't show it

For more examples of personality assessments refer to the web sites listed further in this booklet.

Some people sit these tests and answer the questions in the way they think employers want them to answer, rather than being honest about their answers. This can be dangerous in a number of ways. Firstly, there is an assumption that there is a right, wrong, or preferable way to answer a personality question. Secondly, many tests have inbuilt mechanisms to detect faked answers.

**IMPORTANT NOTES: Online tests**

Contained in this section are websites on aptitude and personality assessments – including some samples from test publishers and the websites of other interactive IQ and personality tests. The vast array of tests available on the Internet varies from well-recognised and standardised tests to more informal tests that have not been validated. The latter should not be seen as, or used as, a substitute for a properly validated test that is administered and interpreted by a qualified professional under standardised testing conditions. Read through any introductory information provided about the background, purpose and construction of the test.

Some sites are from countries such as the United Kingdom, America, and Canada, and you may find some cultural/linguistic differences reflected in these tests. Employers using employment selection tests should ensure tests are culturally appropriate and fair.
You may be asked to register, provide personal data, and in some cases there may be a charge for some of the services. Check conditions of use information and privacy conditions if you decide to try any tests online.

11. APTITUDE TESTS

ACER - Graduate Skills Assessment Test (GSA), designed to assess generic skills of students when they begin at university and just before they graduate. Sample questions (Critical Thinking; Problem Solving; Interpersonal Understandings; Written Communication) and answers available at: www.acer.edu.au/gsa-uni/sample.html

Onetest's Cognitive Ability Test example questions:

PreVisor - sample questions for the GMA (Graduate and Managerial Assessment) and FGA (First Graduate Assessment), both of which include verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning: www.previsor.co.uk/products/certifications


SHL Group - tips on how to succeed with Assessment, and examples of verbal, numerical, and inductive reasoning questions: www.shldirect.com/

Testgrid – Verbal, Numerical and Abstract sample tests:
www.testgrid.com/demo/home.tg

Morrisby Organisation - advice on taking psychometric tests, six sets of sample questions: www.morrisby.com/ (link to ‘Practice test’)

Procter and Gamble - download a practice test on questions similar to those used their Problem Solving Test as part of their selection and recruitment processes: https://pg.sitebase.net/pg_images/taleo/practicetest.htm

When you do Practice tests, check your answers against the correct answers. Reflect on any questions that you got wrong and try to understand how to arrive at the correct answer. Some organisations will provide rationales for practice item answers.

Further examples of IQ/Aptitude tests on the web

The following may provide practice for questions and puzzles but some are only intended for a more cerebral leisure experience!

• www.queendom.com/tests/index.html
• www.allthetests.com/
• www.selfgrowth.com/test.html
12. PERSONALITY

Onetest's Emotional Intelligence Assessment example questions:

SHL Group - Personality questionnaire and Motivation questionnaire:
www.shldirect.com/

PreVisor - sample questions from Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, Occupational Motivation Questionnaire: www.previsor.co.uk/products/certifications

Testgrid – Competency and Personality sample tests:
www.testgrid.com/demo/home.tg

Further examples of personality assessments on the web:

• Keirsey Temperament Sorter: http://keirsey.com/
• www.personalityonline.com
• www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/Jtypes2.asp
(Please note that the web sites listed above were current at the time of printing.)

13. SOURCES

We would like to acknowledge the input provided to us by Flinders students and graduates for this booklet, including comments and feedback on assessment centre processes.
Graduate Opportunities 09, Graduate Careers Australia, 2009;
http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Applications_and_interviews/Interviews/Assessment_centres/pleafdi; ‘What to expect at an assessment centre’, Department of Defence booklet; Psychometric testing and your job search by David Southwell; www.ase-solutions.co.uk; www.shl.com/shl/en-int/candidat helpline; www.morrisby.com/
14. APPENDIX ONE: MORE ASSESSMENT CENTRE EXAMPLES

Jasmin, Bachelor Of Psychology (Honours) Graduate, Customer Service Officer, Child Support Agency

“I then attended two assessment centres - which involved an intray exercise, a basic maths test, a role play, a computer test, a second behavioural interview which was very similar to the one conducted over the phone, and team exercise. There are a few hints I’d like to give for assessment centres:

1. Be yourself.
2. Be friendly and make the effort to get know the other applicants when you have spare time.
3. Don’t complain, there was definitely a “bug” in my group, and nobody who complained or was rude got the job, we were definitely assessed on our attitudes and how we interacted with others.”

Law/Arts Graduate, Graduate Officer, Cabinet Office, ACT Chief Minister's Department

“After that there was an Assessment Centre in Canberra. The Assessment Centre involved a group exercise where we were monitored and assessed, then some aptitude testing (Maths and English problems), a panel interview and a work simulation task. The work simulation required us to read statistical data and an article on statistical trends and then write a report summarising what we have read and our recommendations.

The Assessment Centre was pretty daunting. They give you a variety of tasks to do with very limited time; it's designed to see how you cope under pressure. I would recommend learning as much as you can about the organisation before you go - websites have much of the information you'll need. I would also speak to the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre about interviewing techniques and watch the video they have on Assessment Centres.”

Mia, Bachelor of Arts, Assessment Centre for the Victorian Public Service

“There were 30 candidates attending the Centre, and we were divided into two groups of 15. The number of assessors varied according to each activity, sometimes it was 1:1, sometimes it was even 2:1. It went for half a day (from 8am until lunchtime). The beginning was relaxed; with the candidates having coffee together - the assessors were not observing this.

The first activity was in our group of 15. We were given several tasks concerning issues relating to various departments. We were instructed to break into sub groups (of three). The group had to determine who did what tasks.
I was in a subgroup looking at an issue for The Department of Justice for 15 minutes. We had to consider the proposition of reducing funding in prisons for providing rehabilitation and allocating it instead to areas outside the prison system. We then presented our decision back to the group, with our rationale. As a large group we then had to present the decisions of all of the subgroups to the assessors - we had to decide on how to do the presentation and who would be the spokespeople.

Each candidate also was required to do an individual presentation. We were given 45 minutes to read a document, and to make notes. The presentation was 5 minutes and was delivered in a separate room, to two people (one from the organisation, the other from the recruitment agency). The topic was - “What are the pros and cons of students paying for their education?”

There was also aptitude testing, for one and a half hours, on computers (verbal and numerical tests, and one on personality). Plus, there was a behavioural interview.

Here are some suggestions based on my experience:
• Practise for the aptitude tests - with the verbal tests there were some words I had never heard of before! And the numerical one required me to do long division, and convert decimals by hand, something I haven’t done since school.
• Attend closely to all instructions; make sure you understand what it is you have to do.
• Try not to be distracted by the assessors.
• If you have to do a presentation, set your notes up clearly, have a structure and follow it, even practise it mentally if you have the time.
• Before you even go to an Assessment Centre, get as much experience as you can in groups - work experience, extra curricular involvements…
• Prepare. Get as much insight into the Assessment Centre process as you can and demonstrate your ‘package’ (skills, qualities etc) to the selectors.”

Michael, Commerce, Graduate, on an AC for the Victorian Public Service

“It was attended by approximately 10 candidates. For the introductory exercise we were given 5 minutes to individually prepare, and then deliver, a 2-minute presentation to the group on a positive or a negative situation we had encountered and what we did about it.

We then had a group activity where we had 15 minutes to discuss an issue in small groups of 3 or 4. The discussion was about identifying the characteristics and abilities of successful graduate trainees that will progress to management positions in the organisation. We then had to present our findings to the main group.
The final activity was an individual one. We were presented with a scenario. We had to use the information in the scenario to write a report for our Manager. The scenario was that there are 7 projects currently running. Two of them are critical and vital. Of these two, one is running to budget and time. The other is both over budget and time. The other 5 projects are at various stages, but are not performing. How do you report this to your manager? Approximately two thirds of a page was allocated for the report, and hints were provided on various factors to take into account.”

Hayley, Bachelor of Justice and Society attended an Assessment Centre for the Department of Finance and Administration

“The Assessment Centre went for four hours, and there were 10 candidates. We were divided into two groups of five, and we stayed in that group for the whole day, so we got the chance to feel comfortable with the other group members.

One group did aptitude tests (numerical, verbal) while the other did interviews. The interviews were one to one, and were quite informal. We were asked why we had chosen our degree, what we liked the most about it, what we liked the least, why we had applied to the graduate program …

There was also a group activity. The group was in the role of a committee handling a fund, with a certain amount of money in the reserve bank account. Money was owed to a nearby restaurant, and the restaurateur had threatened legal action. In addition a $30,000 ski trip had been proposed for the new graduate trainees. The committee had to make decisions on cutting back on the trip to fund the legal bills. The group activity provided considerable scope for your creativity. We then had to report back on the committee’s decision.

There was also a timed written test (individual task). We were given 6-7 pages of information on 3 Sydney airports. We had to summarise the information on one of the airports in an email. The summary was to form the briefing notes for your manager (who was attending a meeting on this).

The whole experience felt pretty informal where everyone was really friendly and supportive. I felt really comfortable and at ease for most of the time. I was also offered feedback on how I went.”

Linda, Honours in Laws and Legal Practice, Bachelor of Biotechnology, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry’s Assessment Centre

“The next stage involved an online IQ test that tested a variety of different skills. After this, attendance at an assessment centre occurred. The assessment centre consists of another IQ test, group tasks, essay, presentation and an interview.”