

Everything
you need to
know about

Digital Assessment Centres

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What is a digital assessment centre?

Assessment centres are commonplace in the application process for student and graduate jobs, particularly if you intend to apply for a placement year or graduate scheme.

Given the world's situation in 2020 and the government's call for self-isolation, lots of employers will now be exploring ways to keep their recruitment processes running, just using digital means.

Digital assessment centres are one solution to this.

They more or less emulate in-person assessment centres, but require you to consider a few other factors.

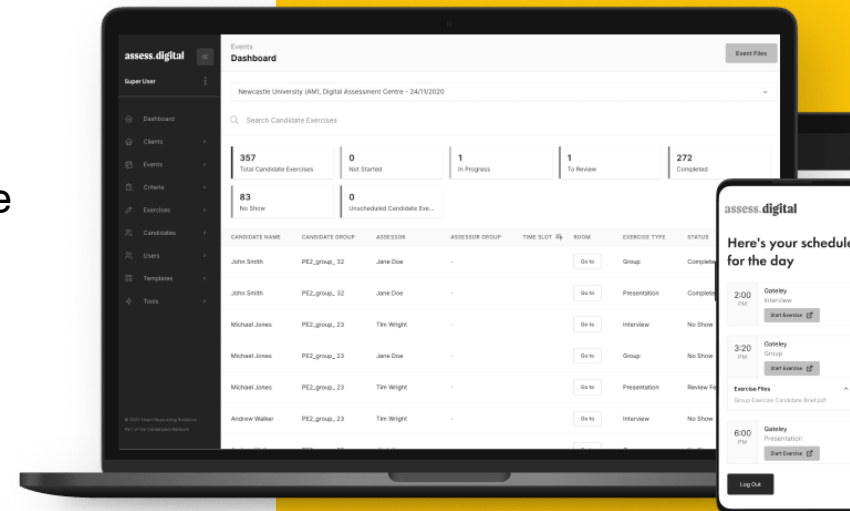


How does a digital assessment centre work?

As you would expect, a digital assessment centre will take place on an online video platform rather than in-person.

The logistics of the day may vary between assessment centres but some parts of it, such as group tasks, interviews and presentations, will be live and others, such as introductions and de-briefs, could be pre-recorded.

You will likely be given details about the day beforehand, such as how to log on and what time slot you've been assigned for certain tasks. You might also have to prepare some work ahead of time and upload it digitally for your assessors to view.



What to expect on the day

The tasks and exercises that will be asked of you on the day won't be too different from those in an in-person assessment centre.

They can be stressful and intense but if you break down each part of the day and prepare accordingly, they'll go much smoother. Here's what to expect.

Remember: It's possible you'll be asked to complete a group exercise during a digital assessment centre. You'll be given time to video chat with your team before presenting to the assessors

Group exercises

What are they?

These range from simple ice-breaker exercises to being given a scenario or set of information to solve, debate on or present as a team.

What will assessors be looking out for?

Skills they could be observing include confidence and communication, problem-solving, whether you listen to and include others, delegation, the quality of your contributions, leadership, persuasiveness and your ability to be diplomatic.

How to impress

- Contribute your ideas with confidence and assurance (whether you feel confident or not)
- Listen to and include others; if someone's not contributing, ask their opinion
- If you agree with another person's point, say so and try to expand upon their thoughts
- Avoid criticising or ignoring someone else's point, even if you don't agree
- Address people by their names: it shows that you're attentive and polite
- Remember that group exercises shouldn't be a fight for attention - work together not against each other

E-Trays

What are they?

E-trays are designed to emulate a real work scenario. You'll be given a scenario and an accompanying series of documents or tasks varying in importance and be asked to prioritise each task, justify your choices and offer an action for each one.

What will assessors be looking out for?

E-trays test your ability to prioritise tasks, process large volumes of information, make decisions, manage your time, work under pressure and organise effectively.

How to impress

- Read through all the information thoroughly before trying to organise it
- Work systematically instead of flitting between pieces of information
- Note down the reasoning for your choices and what actions you will take
- Keep an eye on the time
- Remember that e-trays are as much a test of composure as they are in assessing your competence at work – try to stay calm throughout

Presentation

What are they?

In a digital assessment centre, it's likely that you'll be asked to prepare your presentation beforehand to be presented on the day.

What will assessors be looking out for?

As well as assessing you on the content of the presentation and how well you've met the brief, assessors will want to see confidence, professionalism, strong communication and time management skills.

How to impress

- Keep in mind the main message you're trying to get across and return back to it throughout the presentation
- Ensure the presentation has a clear and coherent structure
- Use visual aids to present key pieces of information, but avoid filling them with too much writing
- Rehearse the presentation (preferably in front of someone, if you can)
- Speak slowly, clearly and with enthusiasm
- Don't just read off a set of notes – look into your camera (as odd as that may feel) to show you're engaging with the audience

Roleplays

What are they?

Role-plays are simulated scenarios that allow assessors to observe how you would respond in a real-life situation at work. They're often used if the job you're applying for is customer facing.

What will assessors be looking out for?

Assessors will likely be observing your interpersonal skills like communication and negotiation, and your ability to think on your feet and handle pressure.

How to impress

- Take the exercise seriously and fully embody the character, no matter how silly you feel
- Be natural though - remember you're at an assessment centre not on stage
- Keep in mind what skills assessors would expect to see from a person in your role and try to emphasise those competencies
- Engage with the person you're role-playing with
- Don't panic - if you go blank, take a deep breath and carry on when you're ready or ask a question, it might lead you back to the right place and shows you're proactive

Case studies

What are they?

In a case study exercise, you'll be given a range of documents or a situation and be asked, either verbally or through a written report, to analyse the information and offer advice. This could be individually or as part of a team.

What will assessors be looking out for?

Case studies assess your analytical thinking, judgement and problem solving skills, commercial awareness, innovation and organisation.

How to impress

- There isn't necessarily one correct answer in case study exercises - instead, focus on thoroughly explaining and justifying your decisions
- Work logically and systematically, reading through all the information provided before formulating your advice
- Try to demonstrate some knowledge of the company or industry as reasoning for your decisions
- Keep an eye on the time
- Be prepared to confidently back up your decisions if an assessor critiques them

Psychometric Tests

What are they?

Psychometric tests are online and test your skills, knowledge, values and motivations. They can be aptitude tests like verbal, numerical and logical reasoning and situational judgement, or personality tests.

What will assessors be looking out for?

Assessors will be looking out for personalities that align with their company's values and candidates who score highly, particularly in tests that assess skills most relevant to the role.

How to impress

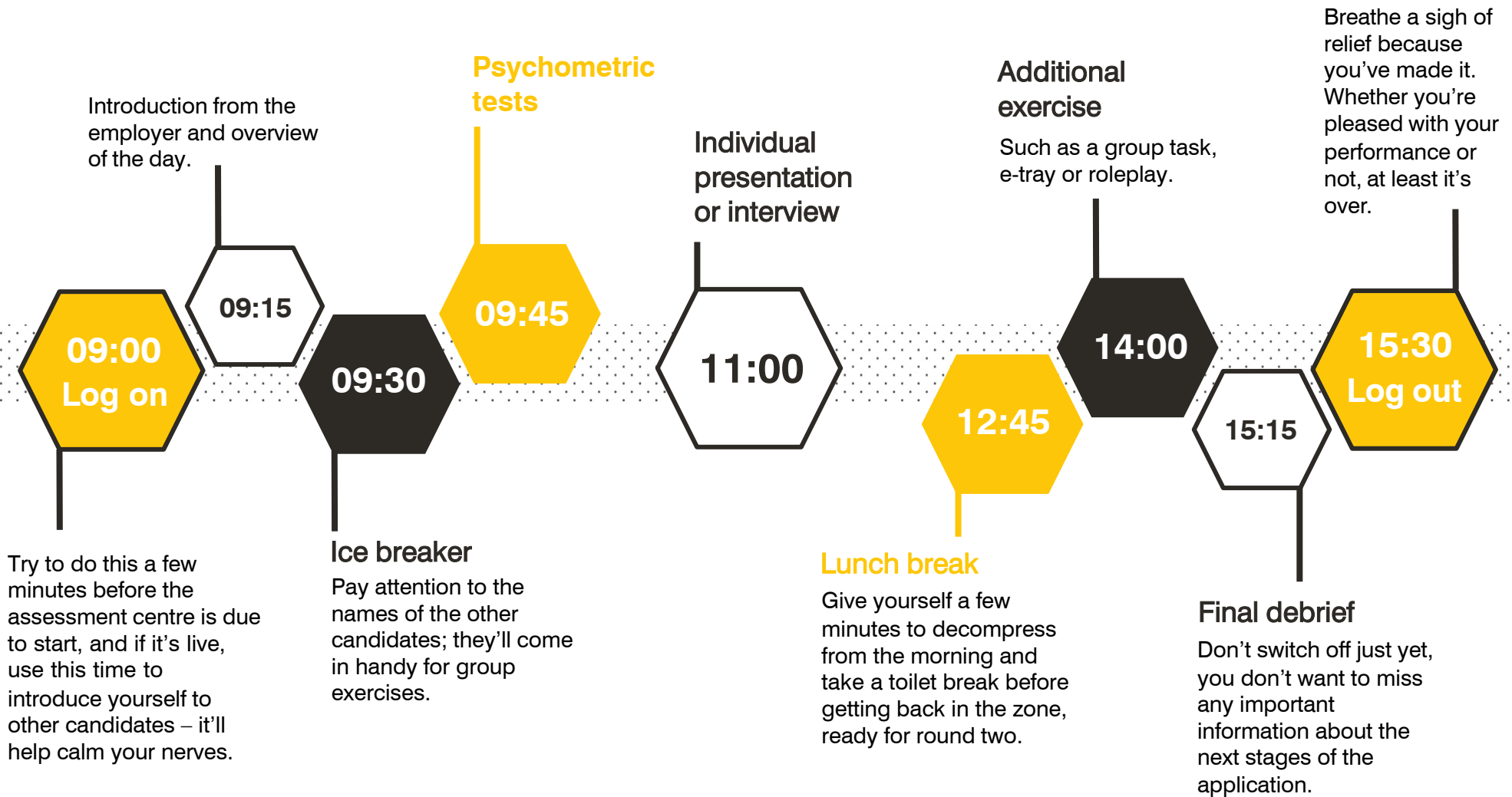
- Practice, practice and keep on practicing until you become comfortable with each test and the types of questions that come up
- Keep an eye on the time
- If you really can't answer a question, keep calm and move swiftly on
- Leave time at the end to check your answers

Top tip: Employers will often give you the same tests that you completed at an earlier stage of the application to determine whether you had help or not

Remember:

always complete psychometric tests independently

Example digital assessment centre timetable



Preparing for a digital assessment centre

Read up about the organisation and look at what is happening more widely in the sector.

There'll be opportunities to demonstrate this commercial awareness throughout the day.

- 1** Review the job description and use it to help determine what competencies assessors might be looking for from you. For example, if the job requires liaising with clients, you should aim to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills on the day. If it requires leadership skills, aim to demonstrate confidence and an ability to delegate.
- 2** Look back over your CV or application form to refresh yourself on what information you wrote down about yourself in case an assessor questions you at any point. This is especially important if the assessment centre involves an interview.
- 3** Reflect on your performance at previous stages of the hiring process. Is there a competency you haven't fully shown off yet or something important you want to say?
- 4** Practice what you can ahead of time. You can find example psychometric tests, e-trays and role-play exercises online - get up to speed with these and it'll give you one less thing to panic about on the day.
- 5** Find somewhere appropriate to sit and that's free from distractions. A desk or table is ideal and preferably have a plain (or at least tidy) background behind you. Consider the lighting too – the room should be bright enough so that you can be seen clearly.
- 6** Triple check your technology beforehand, including Internet connection, whether your laptop is charged and its volume turned up and that your camera works.
- 7** Keep your body language looking professional. You'll be more inclined to relax in your home environment, but don't let that reflect in your body language. Sit up straight, avoid fidgeting and stay engaged throughout.

How to tackle nerves

I am an introvert. How do I perform well in group exercises and presentations that almost entirely rely on me **not being an introvert?**

Group exercises aren't about who can speak the most, assessors will be scoring you on teamwork and the quality and relevance of your contributions too. Play to your strengths, demonstrate listening skills or volunteer as timekeeper. For presentations, use open body language and eye contact – that way you'll look confident even if you're not.

I've prepared as much as I can, but I'm worried all my preparation will go out of the window on the day because I'm so nervous.

If your university offers them (ask your Careers Service or lecturer), book yourself onto a mock digital assessment centre. A dry run will be super useful for getting a feel for what it'll be like on the day.

I was feeling ok, then I completely bombed the first task and now I'm panicking that I've ruined my chances.

Assessors aren't going to expect you to be perfect at everything. You'll perform better than others in some tasks and vice versa. Don't let one exercise impact the rest of your session. It's possible to screw up one and pass, so bounce back fast.

How can I stay calm knowing there's multiple other people here competing for the same job as me?

Employers won't necessarily only hire one person. In some cases, they'll hire every person who impresses them, whether that's one candidate or ten, or even place you in an assessment centre with candidates who're applying for other roles. Focus on yourself, that's all that matters.

Our three ultimate top tips for success

- ✓ Dress the part. Wear what you would wear to an in-person assessment centre and look appropriate for the organisation you're applying to. This is usually formal, but can be less so in creative and media roles.
- ✓ Building rapport online is harder than in real life, so if some or all of the tasks are live, take opportunities to make small talk, give good eye contact and smile as much as possible.
- ✓ Prepare well. There are lots of resources online from your Careers Services, online libraries and book stores which will give you an idea of the types of exercises you're likely to encounter. The types of questions you'll be asked in an interview are broadly the same, so consider how you might respond to these ahead of time.

Don't be late.

Log on early and make sure you've tested the equipment in advance. Any tech issues will only make you feel more nervous.

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