

# Written Exercises

In addition to interviews, employers often ask candidates to undertake a range of tasks as part of the selection process. A typical selection centre will last a full day, or even be up to two days, and include group tasks and written exercises. Employers will have identified the skills and qualities which are key to success in the job and want to gather evidence from applicants to show that they are competent in these areas. The application form gives some indication of the ability of the candidates to express themselves on paper but written exercises can test a range of other skills. These can include:

- Synthesising large quantities of information and prioritising action
- Analysing a problem and identifying solutions
- Writing concisely and persuasively
- Working under pressure and to set time limits

## TYPES OF WRITTEN EXERCISE

Employers will usually base the exercises they set on topics or issues with some relevance to the job or industry. Typically these include:

**In-tray or e-tray exercises** - These are designed to reflect the range of decisions and tasks that a manager may have to deal with each day. You will be presented with a fairly large quantity of information online, which could include memos, letters, emails, reports and phone messages.

You will normally be asked to prioritise the tasks and suggest how you would deal with each issue. Work through all the material methodically and make notes as you go along so that you can keep track of the range of problems or queries. Don't be tempted to read the whole of a report – instead look for an Executive Summary or Conclusions. Make sure that you have a clear idea of your brief. What is your role? Is there any indication of what you need to achieve or key tasks to be completed?

When you are allocating priorities make sure that you indicate your reasons. Think about the urgency and the relative importance of each of the possible tasks to be done. It can help to sort out the information or tasks to be done into three piles: (1) urgent; (2) can be delegated or forwarded on to a colleague; (3) not urgent. As you prioritise the tasks, bear in mind the impact of your decisions on others – firstly on the business and its customers or clients but also on your colleagues and managers.

**Case studies** - You will be given a large amount of information

relating to an activity or project, for example, the launch of a new product or the relocation of a factory. The task will normally be related to the business of the organisation but doesn't require any significant knowledge about the company. You may be asked to choose a course of action from a variety of options and outline your reasons or put forward your own proposals backed up with evidence from the material which you have been given. At the end of the case study, you may be asked to make a presentation on your recommendations or discuss them with a recruiter.

As with the e-tray exercise, read through all the instructions and the material thoroughly first. There may not be a 'right answer' to the case study, but the recruiter will be looking for a coherent and well thought through argument which utilises the information which you have been given.

**Writing for different audiences** - Employers may want to assess your ability to write for a particular audience in addition to your strengths in analysing information. You may be given details of a particularly sensitive situation or problem, perhaps relating to a client or member of staff. Your task might be to draft a letter or response for a senior manager to use which deals with the situation in an effective but tactful way.

## HINTS AND TIPS FOR WRITTEN EXERCISES

- Don't panic and feel overwhelmed by the information. In all cases make sure that you know what is required and the amount of time that you have to complete the task.
- Remain focused on what you have been asked to do. It can be easy to be distracted by irrelevant information or issues that are not related to the main task.
- Identify what you consider to be the main issues and the information that is most useful. Put the rest of the material on one side.
- Keep an eye on time as you work through the exercise. You can't always absorb all the detail, so try to grasp the key points.
- Present your conclusions in a logical and well-structured form. Don't be tempted to start writing immediately; take a few moments to consider the outline of your answer.
- Be alert to any situations where you would need to demonstrate 'political' awareness and respond sensitively to a particular issue that impacts on others.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

Available from the Careers Service:

- **'At the Assessment Centre' DVD** - provides an insight into the range of activities which take place at selection centres, including written exercises. This and other videos are available via the Careers Service website at [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers)
- **Reference books** - including: 'How to Succeed at Interviews and other Selection Methods' Careers Group, University of London; 'The Job Interview Toolkit', Ann Reynolds & Julie Cooper, 'Vault Guide to Case Interviews' and 'Case in Point' (ask at reception)

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see the information on the Careers Service website:

[www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure)

