

Here are some of the most important personality traits that a candidate should possess to do well at a Group Discussion:

### **1. Team Player**

B-Schools lay great emphasis on this parameter because it is essential for managers to be team players.

The reason: Managers always work in teams.

At the beginning of his career, a manager works as a team member. And, later, as a team leader.

Management aspirants who lack team skills cannot be good managers.

### **2. Reasoning Ability**

Reasoning ability plays an important role while expressing your opinions or ideas at a Group Discussion.

For example, an opinion like 'Reduction in IIMs' fees will affect quality' can be better stated by demonstrating your reasoning ability and completing the missing links between fees and quality as:

'Reduction in IIMs' fees will result in less funds being invested on study material, student exchange programmes, research, student development activities, etc.

'Moreover, it costs money to attract good faculty, create good infrastructure and upgrade technology.

'With reduction in fees, less money will be available to perform these ,activities which will lead to deterioration in the quality of IIMs.'

### **3. Leadership**

**There are three types of situations that can arise in a Group Discussion:**

- ~ A Group Discussion where participants are unable to establish a proper rapport and do not speak much.
- ~ A Group Discussion where participants get emotionally charged and the Group Discussion gets chaotic.
- ~ A Group Discussion where participants discuss the topic assertively by touching on all its nuances and try to reach the objective.

Here, a leader would be someone who facilitates the third situation at a Group Discussion.

**A leader would have the following qualities:**

- ~S/he shows direction to the group whenever group moves away from the topic.
- ~S/he coordinates the effort of the different team members in the Group Discussion.

~S/he contributes to the Group Discussion at regular intervals with valuable insights.  
~S/he also inspires and motivates team members to express their views.

**Caution:** Being a mere coordinator in a Group Discussion does not help, because it is a secondary role.

Contribute to the Group Discussion with your ideas and opinions, but also try and steer the conversation towards a goal.

#### **4. Flexibility**

You must be open to other ideas as well as to the evaluation of your ideas: That is what flexibility is all about.

But first, remember: Never ever start your Group Discussion with a stand or a conclusion.

Say the topic of a Group Discussion is, 'Should India go to war with Pakistan?'

Some participants tend to get emotionally attached to the topic and take a stand either in favour or against the topic, ie 'Yes, India should', or, 'No, India should not'.

By taking a stand, you have already given your decision without discussing the topic at hand or listening to the views of your team members.

Also, if you encounter an opposition with a very strong point at the 11th hour, you end up in a typical catch-22 situation:

~If you change your stand, you are seen as a fickle-minded or a whimsical person.  
~If you do not change your stand, you are seen as an inflexible, stubborn and obstinate person.

#### **5. Assertiveness**

You must put forth your point to the group in a very emphatic, positive and confident manner.

Participants often confuse assertiveness with aggressiveness.

Aggressiveness is all about forcing your point on the other person, and can be a threat to the group. An aggressive person can also demonstrate negative body language, whereas an assertive person displays positive body language.

#### **6. Initiative**

A general trend amongst students is to start a Group Discussion and get the initial kitty of points earmarked for the initiator.

But that is a high risk-high return strategy.

Initiate a Group Discussion only if you are well versed with the topic. If you start and fail to contribute at regular intervals, it gives the impression that you started the Group Discussion just for the sake of the initial points.

Also, if you fumble, stammer or misquote facts, it may work against you.

Remember: You never ever get a second chance to create a first impression.

### **7. Creativity/ Out of the box thinking**

An idea or a perspective which opens new horizons for discussion on the Group Discussion topic is always highly appreciated.

When you put across a new idea convincingly, such that it is discussed at length by the group, it can only be positive.

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### **8. Inspiring ability**

A good group discussion should incorporate views of all the team members.

If some team members want to express their ideas but are not getting the opportunity to do so, giving them an opportunity to express their ideas or opinions will be seen as a positive trait.

Caution: If a participant is not willing to speak, you need not necessarily go out of the way to ask him to express his views. This may insult him and hamper the flow of the Group Discussion.

### **9. Listening**

Always try and strike a proper balance between expressing your ideas and imbibing ideas.

### **10. Awareness**

You must be well versed with both the micro and macro environment.

Your awareness about your environment helps a lot in your Group Discussion content, which carries maximum weightage.

**Caution:** The content or awareness generally constitutes 40 to 50 percent marks of your Group Discussion.

Apart from these qualities, communication skills, confidence and the ability to think on one's feet are also very important.

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**A group discussion can be categorically divided into three different phases:**

i. Initiation/ Introduction

ii. Body of the group discussion

iii. Summarisation/ Conclusion

Let's stress on the initiation and summarisation:

### **Initiation Techniques**

Initiating a Group Discussion is a high profit-high loss strategy.

When you initiate a Group Discussion, you not only grab the opportunity to speak, you also grab the attention of the examiner and your fellow candidates.

If you can make a favourable first impression with your content and communication skills after you initiate a Group Discussion, it will help you sail through the discussion.

But if you initiate a Group Discussion and stammer/ stutter/ quote wrong facts and figures, the damage might be irreparable.

If you initiate a Group Discussion impeccably but don't speak much after that, it gives the impression that you started the Group Discussion for the sake of starting it or getting those initial kitty of points earmarked for an initiator!

When you start a Group Discussion, you are responsible for putting it into the right perspective or framework. So initiate one only if you have indepth knowledge about the topic at hand.

### **There are different techniques to initiate a Group Discussion and make a good first impression:**

- i. Quotes
- ii. Definition
- iii. Question
- iv. Shock statement
- v. Facts, figures and statistics
- vi. Short story
- vii. General statement

#### **~ Quotes**

Quotes are an effective way of initiating a Group Discussion.

If the topic of a Group Discussion is: Should the Censor Board be abolished?, you could start with a quote like, 'Hidden apples are always sweet'.

For a Group Discussion topic like, Customer is King, you could quote Sam (Wal-mart) Walton's famous saying, 'There is only one boss: the customer. And he can fire everybody in the company -- from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else.'

#### **~ Definition**

Start a Group Discussion by defining the topic or an important term in the topic.

For example, if the topic of the Group Discussion is Advertising is a Diplomatic Way of Telling a Lie, why not start the Group Discussion by defining advertising as, 'Any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services through mass media like newspapers, magazines, television or radio by an identified sponsor'?

For a topic like The Malthusian Economic Prophecy is no longer relevant, you could start by explaining the definition of the Malthusian Economic Prophecy.

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Asking a question is an impactful way of starting a Group Discussion.

It does not signify asking a question to any of the candidates in a Group Discussion so as to hamper the flow. It implies asking a question, and answering it yourself.

Any question that might hamper the flow of a Group Discussion or insult a participant or play devil's advocate must be discouraged.

Questions that promote a flow of ideas are always appreciated.

For a topic like, Should India go to war with Pakistan, you could start by asking, 'What does war bring to the people of a nation? We have had four clashes with Pakistan. The pertinent question is: what have we achieved?'

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Initiating a Group Discussion with a shocking statement is the best way to grab immediate attention and put forth your point.

If a Group Discussion topic is, The Impact of Population on the Indian Economy, you could start with, 'At the centre of the Indian capital stands a population clock that ticks away relentlessly. It tracks 33 births a minute, 2,000 an hour, 48,000 a day. Which calculates to about 12 million every year. That is roughly the size of Australia. As a current political slogan puts it, 'Nothing's impossible when 1 billion Indians work together'.'

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Approximation is allowed in macro level figures, but micro level figures need to be correct and accurate.

For example, you can say, approximately 70 per cent of the Indian population stays in rural areas (macro figures, approximation allowed).

But you cannot say 30 states of India instead of 28 (micro figures, no approximations).

Stating wrong facts works to your disadvantage.

For a Group Discussion topic like, China, a Rising Tiger, you could start with, 'In 1983, when China was still in its initial stages of reform and opening up, China's real use of Foreign Direct Investment only stood at \$636 million. China actually utilised \$60 billion of FDI in 2004, which is almost 100 times that of its 1983 statistics.'

### ~ **Short story**

Use a short story in a Group Discussion topic like, Attitude is Everything.

This can be initiated with, 'A child once asked a balloon vendor, who was selling helium gas-filled balloons, whether a blue-coloured balloon will go as high in the sky as a green-coloured balloon. The balloon vendor told the child, it is not the colour of the balloon but what is inside it that makes it go high.'

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Use a general statement to put the Group Discussion in proper perspective.

For example, if the topic is, Should Sonia Gandhi be the prime minister of India?, you could start by saying, 'Before jumping to conclusions like, 'Yes, Sonia Gandhi should be', or 'No, Sonia Gandhi should not be', let's first find out the qualities one needs to be a good prime minister of India. Then we can compare these qualities with those that Mrs Gandhi possesses. This will help us reach the conclusion in a more objective and effective manner.'

## **Summarisation Techniques**

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But every Group Discussion is summarised. You can summarise what the group has discussed in the Group Discussion in a nutshell.

Keep the following points in mind while summarising a discussion:

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Group Discussion basically means searching your team player, leadership, communication capability.

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## **Group Discussion Tips**

The job of the examiners present there in the session is to keep an eye on the proceedings and judge the abilities of the candidates as well. Unlike the examiners, your duty is to impress the panel members with your excellent group discussion skills.

Here are some basic tips that would help you do well in the group discussion session.

1. Try to keep your calm and never shout at the top of your voice. You should also see to the fact that the group is hearing your ideas. You will have to bring out your chance to speak and also let others speak.
2. You will have to be assertive to make a mark in the group discussion session.
3. Try to practice GD sessions as much as possible at home with friends or family members before appearing for the final round. This would help you earn confidence.
4. You will have to make a meaningful contribution and for that prior preparation is quite essential. You should be a good communicator and well aware of the current affairs.
5. Candidates with good reasoning ability are sure to get through the verbal test.
6. You need to be flexible and open to ideas put forward by other participants.
7. New ideas by participants are highly appreciated by the panel members. So it won't be a bad idea to present your new ideas and perspectives.