

Work sample exercises

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Work sample exercises are group or individual activities that simulate situations encountered in the role to be filled, allowing you to gather information on a candidate's capabilities and experience.

A work sample can be used as a standalone assessment, in an assessment centre environment or as part of the interview.

Work samples often involve the candidate analysing information and providing a verbal or written response individually or as part of a group.

Work sample exercises are useful for:

- giving direct evidence of capabilities that may be difficult to measure using other methods
- assessing several capabilities at once
- assessing capabilities in a context that closely mirrors workplace situations and challenges
- having high validity in predicting how someone will perform on the job.

In some circumstances you may need to make **workplace adjustments** to your work sample exercises for people with disability.

Common work sample exercises

Common work sample exercises are group exercises, role plays, case studies, case interviews, in-tray exercises, written exercises and technical skills assessments.

Group exercises

Group exercises involve candidates working together to develop solutions to a problem or to discuss a topic while being observed by assessors. They are typically used as part of an assessment centre process.

Examples of group exercises include:

- a group discussion on a particular issue such as a policy or current news item
- a case study exercise with a group of candidates given a brief based on a realistic business scenario. Candidates may be assigned different roles, e.g. representing different departments or policy positions.

Role plays

In a role play exercise, candidates are asked to assume a fictitious role and handle a particular work situation that closely mirrors role-relevant scenarios.

Role plays can be used to assess multiple capabilities using direct observation in a context directly relevant to the role.

Role plays generally involve an interaction with a role player who has been thoroughly briefed on their respective role as a customer, manager etc. so the role players are consistent in their response, attitude and behaviours in the interaction.

Examples of role-plays include scenarios such as:

- a candidate for a customer service-focused role dealing with face-to-face queries and complaints
- a candidate for a manager role providing coaching to a team member.

Case study exercises

Case study exercises involve giving candidates information about a work-related scenario and asking them to examine the situation, analyse the material and present their findings, either in a written format or verbally.

Case interviews

Case interviews involve giving candidates a scenario in advance (e.g. one to two days ahead) and asking them to verbally present a proposal or analysis to assessors when they attend for interview. Case interviews often use an actual business situation (e.g. the establishment of a new program) and involve candidates developing and presenting their strategy (e.g. for the design and implementation of the program).

Case interviews allow hiring managers to ask follow up questions and assess a candidate's ability to think on their feet and communicate complex ideas.

They are particularly suited to more senior management, policy or project type roles or roles where strategic thinking and problem solving are important.

In-tray exercises

In-tray exercises simulate administrative aspects of a role. The candidate is asked to assume a particular role as an employee of a fictitious organisation and work through the correspondence and other documentation in their in-tray.

Some examples of activities that could be used for in-tray exercises include:

- managing multiple competing demands in a short time frame
- responding to a written customer complaint
- writing emails to other members of staff
- delegating work to team members.

Written exercises

Written exercises involve candidates reviewing written information (e.g. a case study, position paper or business problem) and writing a response in the form of a letter, email, memo, briefing etc. The written exercise is a good opportunity to test written communication skills in combination with focus capabilities that are important to performing the role.

Technical skills assessments

Technical skills assessments measure a candidate's professional or occupation-specific skills in a particular or specialised area to determine whether they can meet the technical requirements of a role. Technical skills can be assessed using cognitive ability tests or work sample exercises.

An example is a computer programming skills test which requires candidates to write HTML code to create a webpage.

Capabilities commonly assessed using work sample exercises

For guidance on the capabilities that are well suited to assessment through the different types of work samples see [capabilities commonly assessed using work sample exercises](#).

Designing work sample exercises

For information about how to create your own work samples see [designing work sample exercises](#).

