

## UNIT 4: GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit you will learn what Group Discussion (GD) means and what its importance is in life in general and business world in particular and also for recruiting employees. You will also learn:

- how GD differs from conversation and debates;
- what the essential requirements are for a successful GD;
- what you need to do and must not do to be a successful participant in GD; and
- certain useful language expressions for participating in and leading a GD.

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### 4.1 WARM UP

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#### Activity 1

Work alone and then discuss with your partner/others in your group the following questions:

- 1 What is group discussion?
- 2 How and why is it arranged?
- 3 How does group discussion differ from other similar activities e.g. conversation and debates?
- 4 Write down your answers in 'note form' in your notebook.

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### 4.2 LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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#### Activity 2

You are going to listen to a recording of a talk. Before listening to it, read the following questions that you have to answer while listening to the recording.

- 1 The focus of the talk is:
  - i Oral communication tasks in the business world
  - ii Group discussion and its importance in business
  - iii Conversation, discussion and debates
  - iv Complexity of modern business

- 2 In this talk the speaker makes the following four points. Number them 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the order in which these occur in the text:
- A Reasons for emergence of 'group discussion'
  - B Importance of 'group discussion' in modern business
  - C Various types of oral communication activities in business
  - D What group discussion means
- 3 Are the following statements true or false? (Write 'T' or 'F'). If false, rewrite the true version/form.
- i Group Discussion members do not come with an open mind to participate in the discussion.
  - ii Group discussion is a democratic form of decision-making process.
  - iii Group discussion leads to development of employees.
  - iv Group discussion benefits the employees but not the management.

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### 4.3 READING COMPREHENSION-I

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Read the text given below and attempt the questions that follow. (Read fast; do not stop at words/phrases you do not understand; keep reading and **guessing** the meanings of words/phrases you do not know from their shape, form, and context and try to get the gist of what the writer wants to say).

- 1 'Conversation' like Group Discussion can take place between two or more persons in a reasonable group. But it differs from Group Discussion in many respects. First, Conversation is a pastime. People often enter into conversation just to 'kill time'. Next, there are no hard and fast rules for participating in a conversation. Moreover, it is not a very disciplined and concerted talk; there is no fixed topic for discussion. The conversation may shift from topic to topic and no one particular topic may be focused upon, developed or closed properly; no foreclosing or closing may be done and no conclusions may be drawn. Finally, the conversation comes to an end when it is time to disperse or when the participants lose interest or their attention is distracted.
- 2 Debates and arguments differ from group discussion in many respects. No doubt there is a topic for debate but the participants come to take part with pre-formed positions; their views and opinions are pre-determined and they fiercely defend them one against the other. In fact the participants are virtually divided into two parties or groups: one those who are in favour of the subject and the others who are against the topic. They have no intention to enter into a joint enquiry and there is no scope for free and open discussion. The session may end in victory/defeat or in a stand off where the two sides still maintain their original positions on the topic/subject.
- 3 Students are trained to participate in debates in schools and colleges and you may be quite familiar with what these are and how they are organized and made orderly in school or college environment. But in reality, these can be quite disorderly and disorganized in spite of best efforts, and can get quite acrimonious and bitter on some occasions.



Activity 3

- 1      What is the main focus of the writer?  
.....
- 2      By now we have described to you what Group Discussions, Debates and Conversations are. List as many similarities and differences as you can find among these three activities.

| GD | Debate | Conversation |
|----|--------|--------------|
|    |        |              |
|    |        |              |
|    |        |              |
|    |        |              |
|    |        |              |

4.4    READING COMPREHENSION-II

4.4.1    Pre-reading

You are going to read a text on Group Discussion (GD). What do you already know about this topic? What more would you want to know? Write these down in note form in your notebook.

Now discuss your points with your partners. Would you like to add more points to your notes? Why/Why not?

Now read the text given below and attempt the tasks that follow. (Read fast; do not stop at words/phrases you do not understand; keep reading and guessing the meanings of words/phrases you do not know from their shape, form, and context and try to get the gist of what the writer wants to say).

- 1 In recent times group discussion has emerged as an important and potent tool for testing candidates for recruitment as this technique at one go analyzes almost all the behaviour competencies and some of the generic skills we have already described in earlier units. Therefore your awareness of what this technique is, how it works and how to participate in GD becomes essential for a successful performance.
- 2 There are certain conditions that must be met for a group discussion to be successful. Some of these conditions are dictated by the nature of the task, but there are some general points you must remember in order to be a successful participant. These are:
  - a There is only one topic for discussion
  - b All the members must express their views only on **this topic** under discussion.
  - c Members must take turns to talk; they must listen to one another, talk to one another and respond to one another.
  - d They must put forward more than one point of view on the topic.
- 3 Members of the group must also follow certain rules for the success of the group discussion. These are:
  - a **Equality, freedom to express, and respect for participating members.**

The participants are all treated as equals and must have regard for the opinions of each member of the group. The participants are free to offer their opinions without fear or anxiety, pressure, ridicule or embarrassment.
  - b **Reasonableness, orderliness and truthfulness**

All the participants must come to the group discussion with an open mind; they are not to be dogmatic or have pre-determined opinions; they all must be willing to listen to reason and to accommodate others' views on the subject. The participants must observe order and take turns to talk; must listen to others and not shout down opinions they do not like. The participants must speak what they believe to be true; they must not remain silent, be reticent or vague in their views.
- 4 Anything that violates the spirit of free and open discussion or joint enquiry breaches the spirit of GD and one must guard against this. Some examples of breach of rules are –
  - i interrupting the speaker or not allowing the speaker to complete his/her contribution.
  - ii shouting down people whose views one does not like.
  - iii refusing to listen to reason and/or evidence.
  - iv dogmatic in one's own opinion even in the face of evidence to the contrary.
  - v agreeing to a point without believing in it or under duress or threat.

This does not mean that you cannot ‘interrupt’ someone. You can do so at the appropriate moment and without causing offense.

- 5 The discussion group can take up any topic for discussion provided the topic poses a question and requires a joint enquiry. A discussion question invites joint enquiry whereas other forms of discussion e.g. debates discourage it. Hence a discussion question has to be an interrogative sentence, not a word or phrase. It must **not** be framed as a ‘yes/no’ or ‘either/or’ question and must **not** be broad or ambiguous.

#### Activity 4

Read the text once again a bit slowly this time and attempt the following:-

- 1 Suggest a suitable title for the text.  
.....
- 2 Which of your points noted under Pre-reading are confirmed?  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 3 What new things about GD do you learn from this text?  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 4 Are the following statements true or false according to the text? If false, rewrite the true version.
  - i You must not question what the Manager says in GD.
  - ii All GD members, juniors and seniors, are treated equal.
  - iii In GD, it is better not to say anything that may offend the management.
  - iv You should stick to your point of view even if you feel that you are wrong.
  - v In GD, there is only one topic for discussion.
- 5 Are the following topics suitable for Group Discussion? Why/Why not?
  - i Higher education
  - ii Should we develop rural or urban areas in India?
  - iii Tourism
  - iv How can India Become self-sufficient in energy resources?
  - v Research in health issues should be left to the private sector.

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## 4.5 LANGUAGE FOCUS

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Here is some helpful language for group discussions:

- **Stating an opinion**
  - It seems to me...
  - In my view...
  - I tend to think...

- It's obvious that...
- I believe....
- Clearly ...

#### ■ **Interrupting**

- Excuse me, may I ask for a clarification on this...
- If I may interrupt...
- Sorry to interrupt but.....
- 

#### ■ **Handling Interruptions**

- Sorry, please let me finish.....
- If I may finish what I am saying.....
- Could you please allow me to complete what I'm saying.....?

#### ■ **Moving the discussion on**

- Can we go on to think about.....?
- I think we should now move on to consider.....

#### ■ **Expressing Agreement**

- I totally agree
- I agree entirely
- I quite agree
- I couldn't agree more
- Absolutely / precisely / exactly
- I think you're right

#### ■ **Expressing disagreement**

- I don't agree at all
- I totally disagree
- I think quite differently on this
- I don't really think so
- I'm afraid I can't agree with you there

#### ■ **Checking comprehension / reformulating**

- To put that another way...
- If I follow you correctly...
- So what you're saying is...
- Does that mean...?
- Are you saying...?

#### ■ **Making a suggestion**

- I suggest that....
- We could.....
- Perhaps we should...
- It might be worth....
- What about.....?
- Why don't we.....?

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## 4.6 SPEAKING

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Practice your group discussion skills by arranging to meet with your study partners. Select any of these topics and conduct your discussion. Remember to apply the tips we have given you, the do's and don'ts as well as the formulaic language given in the unit. Ask someone to assess you on the basis of the



assessment criteria given in this section. Some excerpts of a possible model are given for the first topic.

- 1        What ails Indian sports?
- 2        Is coalition politics here to stay?
- 3        Should colas be banned for the safety of public health?
- 4        The cable TV invasion.
- 5        Education and success – is there a correlation?

**Speaker 1: What ails Indian Sports?**

There is no doubt about the fact that Indian sports have come a long way from what it was in the early days of Independence. However, we also cannot deny that looking at our population and potential, we Indians have not achieved much in the area of Sports. I am of the view that lack of infrastructure is the biggest problem that we face. This is particularly true of smaller towns and the countryside...

**Speaker 2:**

I quite agree with what you say about the lack of facilities in small places. But don't you think that a lot of the facilities available in the bigger towns are underutilized? ...

**Speaker 3:**

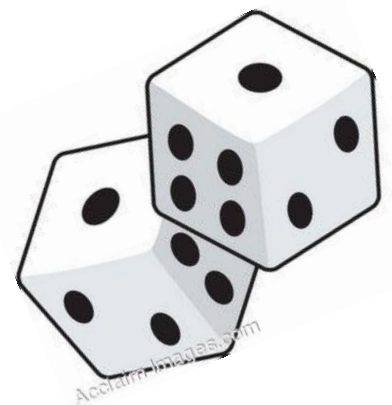
I'm afraid I don't really agree with you there. Many children wish to make use of the infrastructure but the professional sports persons and sometimes the administrators do not really allow everyone to make use of the facilities. Besides the fee for some of these stadiums is ...

**Speaker 4:**

If I may add here, that besides lack of infrastructure, there is also a great deal of political interference in sports. On many occasions the deserving players are not selected. For example take the case of ...

**Activity 5**

Play this simple game with a friend. You are player 1. Then, go through each block and write down the answer. The start up box is common for both players. Roll a dice and move the given number of blocks. Whichever block you stop at is the position you are at in a discussion. Solve that and move on...



Remember to use the language inputs given in the unit. Keep a photocopy of the input in your hand to help you. As you become familiar with these expressions, they will become a part of your language in use. However, this will take some time. Until then don't hesitate to practice with the language input kept before you to lend the necessary support to you.

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| 1<br>Free education till college is the best way to empower our vast human resource... <b>frame the initial line</b> | 2<br>You are the second speaker. Discuss the implications of the issue. Ask about group opinion.   | 3<br>You do not agree with the opinion of the participant who spoke just before you. Explain why. | 4<br>You must add a point to the ideas given by the earlier speaker / participant |
| 5<br>There are members in the group who have not participated. Express your view and ask for theirs.                 | 6<br>Restate the existing idea and introduce a fresh aspect.                                       | 7<br>You are not very sure about what was just said. Ask for clarification.                       | 8<br>You are in complete disagreement with what is being said. Express yourself   |
| 9<br>You have been interrupted twice and you need to finish what you were saying.                                    | 10<br>There's a disagreement between two participants and the discussion has come to a standstill. | 11<br>You need to review what has been discussed till now.  | 12<br>You agree with the speaker. In fact you have a point that supports him/her. |
| 13<br>Add a new perspective, move the discussion ahead on a fresh point.   | 14<br>Make a suggestion about what should be considered next.                                      | 15<br>You feel there's no consensus. Restate the differing views and move towards a conclusion.   | 16<br>There's definite consensus. Conclude the discussion.                        |
| 17<br>The discussion was successful. Congratulations! The conclusion was...  |  |   |   |



### Assessment criteria

The participants of Group Discussions are evaluated by a panel of experts. Here are most of the areas on which they would mark you on their evaluation sheets. It would be extremely helpful to keep these in mind when you participate in Group Discussions.

- ✚ Command over spoken English – it should be logical, coherent, correct, appropriate
- ✚ Knowledge base – authentic information – genuine facts and figures
- ✚ Convincing power – cogent, decent and constructively forceful attitude
- ✚ Discourse management – coping with twists and turns of arguments
- ✚ Body Language – eye contact, body posture, attentiveness
- ✚ Maturity – candidate must not 'bully' others or take undue advantage to prove himself/herself a 'leader'.
- ✚ Listening – intelligent and analytical



- ✚ Supplementing – responding and adding to what another has said before initiating a fresh turn
- ✚ Initiative and Assertiveness

### Beneficial team behaviour

- ✚ Initiate discussions
- ✚ Seek information and opinions
- ✚ Suggest procedures for reaching a goal / consensus
- ✚ Clarify or elaborate ideas
- ✚ Summarize
- ✚ Act as a gate-keeper, direct conversational traffic, avoid simultaneous conversations
- ✚ Subdue dominant talkers, make room for reserved and shy people
- ✚ Keep the discussion from digressing
- ✚ Be flexible and creative in resolving differences



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## 4.7 WRITING

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### Check your progress 1

You have prepared a chart in Section 4.3 under certain headings showing similarities and differences among GD, Conversation and Debates. Develop the points you have noted in the chart to write about 250 words on your findings.

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## 4.8 VOCABULARY

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### Check your progress 2

Read the text and use the right form of the word in the bracket to form a word that fits in the numbered space. The first one is done for you as an example.

The <sup>1</sup>**surest** (sure) way of antagonizing others in the GD as well as the examiner is to appoint yourself as a de facto <sup>2</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (**chair**) of the group. Do not try to impose a system whereby everyone gets a chance to speak in turn. A GD is meant to be a free <sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (**flow**) discussion. Let it proceed naturally. Do not ever try to take a vote on the topic. A vote is no substitute for discussion.

Do not address only one or two persons when <sup>4</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (**speak**). Maintain eye contact with as many members of the group as possible. This will involve others in what you are saying and increase your <sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (**chance**) of carrying them with you. Do this even if you are <sup>6</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ (**answer**) a specific point raised by one person.

**Word Collocations:** In the English language many words occur in groups or pairs naturally or habitually. These are called word collocations. Example: a quick temper. The exercise that follows has collocations with verbs. The first one is done for you as an example.

### Check your progress 3

Match the words in the two columns to make word collocations. The first one is done for you.

|      |             |                       |                             |
|------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| i    | Build       | eye contact           | (Answer: Build a consensus) |
| ii   | Restore     | arguments             | .....                       |
| iii  | Take        | ideas convincingly    | .....                       |
| iv   | Resolve     | contradictions        | .....                       |
| v    | Synthesize  | dissenting viewpoints | .....                       |
| vi   | Accommodate | responsibility        | .....                       |
| vii  | Maintain    | a consensus           | .....                       |
| viii | Summarize   | order                 | .....                       |
| ix   | Provide     | decisions             | .....                       |
| x    | Convey      | a fresh direction     | .....                       |
| xi   | Accept      | your objective        | .....                       |
| xii  | Define      | the discussion        | .....                       |

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## 4.9 GRAMMAR: NON-FINITE VERBS (THE PARTICIPLE)

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Read the following sentences:

- 1 There are no hard and fast rules for participating in a conversation.
- 2 Moreover, a conversation is not a very disciplined or concerted talk.
- 3 Students are trained to participate in debates in schools and colleges.
- 4 Interrupting a speaker is not a nice thing to do.

The underlined verbs are non-finite verbs, i.e. they do not change with the number and person of the subject and do not **express tense**.

The tense in the sentence is expressed by the finite verb. This finite verb functions as noun or adjective.

### Activity 6

1 Underline the non-finite verbs in the following sentences/phrases:

- i Traveling in a train can be a wonderful experience.
- ii She stoops to conquer.
- iii I read the collected plays of Mahesh Dattani.
- iv It was a working lunch so we did not feel heavy and sleepy after it.
- v Mother Teresa picked up the abandoned children and the dying lepers from the streets of Kolkata.
- vi Grandmother told us an interesting story.
- vii The student had a worried look on his face.
- viii They took the injured man to the hospital.

2 Fill in the blanks with the correct participle forms of the verbs given in box:

|       |       |        |       |
|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| wound | tire  | fry    | swell |
| amaze | bore  | value  | shock |
| name  | break | excite |       |

- i The boy sat on a .....chair by mistake.
- ii .....potatoes are tasty to eat.
- iii He took the .....child to the hospital.
- iv Rohit found his job....., he wanted to do something more .....
- v We went for a long walk. It was very .....
- vi In South America, each community has its own .....customs.
- vii My grandmother was an ..... storyteller.
- viii In many societies, story telling is a .....skill.
- ix The doctor looked at the .....ankle.
- x We could hardly believe our ears, it was indeed a ..... news.

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## 4.10 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have seen how Group Discussion has emerged to become a significant tool for decision making, especially for business purposes. We have also seen how GD differs from conversations and debates. Since GD has become a popular medium for recruiting candidates this unit also incorporates tips for

preparing effectively for a successful GD. We have also given you certain words and expressions of English useful for participating in GD as well as for leading a GD.

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## 4.11 ANSWERS

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### 4.2 Listening Comprehension (Tape script-1)

- 1 There are different types of oral communication activities in business world such as conversations, group discussions, debates, participating in meetings and seminars, giving lectures, making presentations, negotiating business deals and so on and each one of these has its own characteristic qualities and requires training and skill to handle them. Here in today's talk we'd confine ourselves to considering only one of these that is 'group discussion'.
  - 2 Group discussion has emerged as an important tool for making decisions in modern times not only in modern business settings but also in other fields as well. In the past there used to be mostly one-man enterprises and the decision-making vested in this one man and there was a general antipathy to discussion. But in modern times life has become quite complex in all spheres: political, social, economic and so on. Moreover, the spirit of democracy has been steadily gaining ground in the minds of the people.
  - 3 In such a scenario, Group Discussion has become a necessity as this technique has many advantages for both the management and the employees. This technique helps the management in getting maximum ideas in minimum possible time. Group discussion is a very important and useful tool as it enhances the personal and professional growth of employees at all levels because group interaction trains them in the decision-making process. Moreover, they get a sense of participation in the management and they learn to work as a team which is very useful for the success of any modern business. The decision made becomes everybody's decision and not the one imposed upon them from above and this is a great asset for the Management since all employees will want to see that the decision made is fully implemented and thus it will enthuse them with motivation, dedication and devotion.
- 

### Activity 2

- 1 ii
- 2 1C; 2D; 3A; 4B.
- 3 

|     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| i   | F | All the members come with an open mind.            |
| ii  | T |  |
| iii | T |  |
| iv  | F | GD benefits both the management and the employees. |

### Activity 3

- 1 The main focus of the writer is to establish how group discussions are different from conversations and debates.

| Group Discussion   | Debate   | Conversation   |
|--|--|--|
| Involves two or more people                                | Involves two or more people  | Involves two or more people  |
| It is a formal discourse                                   | It is a formal discourse.  | It is an informal discourse. More like a pastime.  |
| There is a specific topic to be discussed about.           | There is a specific topic to be debated on.  | There is no specific topic for a conversation. It shifts from time to time.                            |
| Participants come with a more open mind and are receptive. | Participants come with pre-formed positions.   | Participants come with a more open mind and are receptive  |
| There are some rules to follow in a discussion.            | There are some rules to follow in a debate.  | There are no such rules for participating in a conversation.   |
| A conclusion has to be drawn at the end of a discussion.   | It may end in victory/defeat or in a standoff where the two sides still maintain their original position on the topic. | No conclusions may be drawn. It ends when its time for participants to disperse or they lose interest. |

#### Activity 4

- 1 Requirements of a successful group discussion
- 4 True and False:
  - i F (You must question but using language politely and skillfully)
  - ii T
  - iii F (You must say what you feel is true but use your language skillfully to sound polite and inoffensive.)
  - iv F (You must be flexible and change your views if evidence to the contrary is given.)
  - v T
- 5 Suitability of topics for group discussion (you can have your own opinions):
  - i **Higher Education:** A topic framed and worded like this is broad and vague and hence not suitable for group discussion.
  - ii **Should we develop rural or urban areas in India?** This topic is worded as 'either/or' one and hence not suitable for group discussion.
  - iii **Tourism:** This topic is framed simply in one word and hence the topic is vague and not suitable for GD.
  - iv **How Can India Become self-sufficient in Energy Resources?** This is a suitable topic as it poses a predicament to the members and requires a joint enquiry for making a decision.
  - v **Research in Health issues should be left to the private sector:** Such a topic is good for debate and not for discussion as people can speak either 'for' or 'against' the topic and may come up with pre-determined propositions and views.

## Check your progress 2

- |             |               |             |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1-surest    | 2-chairperson | 3-flowing   |
| 4-speaking. | 5-chances     | 6-answering |

## Check your progress 3

- |      |             |                       |
|------|-------------|-----------------------|
| i    | Build       | a consensus           |
| ii   | Restore     | order                 |
| iii  | Take        | decisions             |
| iv   | Resolve     | contradictions        |
| v    | Synthesize  | arguments             |
| vi   | Accommodate | dissenting viewpoints |
| vii  | Maintain    | eye contact           |
| viii | Summarize   | the discussion        |
| ix   | Provide     | a fresh direction     |
| x    | Convey      | ideas convincingly    |
| xi   | Accept      | responsibility        |
| xii  | Define      | your objective        |

## Activity 6

- 1 The non-finite verbs:
- i Traveling in a train can be a wonderful experience.
  - ii She stoops to conquer.
  - iii I read the collected plays of Mahesh Dattani.
  - iv It was a working lunch so we did not feel heavy and sleepy after it.
  - v Mother Teresa picked up the abandoned children and the dying lepers from the streets of Kolkata.
  - vi Grandmother told us an interesting story.
  - vii The student had a worried look on his face.
  - viii They took the injured man to the hospital.
- 2 i- broken, ii- fried, iii- wounded, iv- boring, exciting, v- tiring, vi- naming, vii-amazing, viii- valued, ix- swollen, x- shocking