

GROUP DISCUSSION

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you'll be able to:

- * comprehend what group discussion is,
- * know the importance of group discussion,
- * practice and perform better during group discussion,
- * learn the required communication skills to participate in group discussion,

Introduction

You may have found people discussing social, political, religious, or economic issues at a restaurant, bus stop, canteen, tea stall, club, etc. We too discuss various matters in our daily life with our friends, relatives, family members, and others. Even family members, too, discuss family matters at home. These discussions can be informal as well as formal. Informal discussions take place in informal setting whereas formal discussions take place in formal setting, like at office, a conference hall, or a recruitment centre. The discussions take place to discuss some matter, to exchange views on certain topic, to resolve some problem, to screen the candidates for job, and so on. After heated or cool discussion, the participants build a consensus and finalize the decision. In this chapter, we shall study the characteristics, ways, objectives and process of 'group discussion'.

13.1 Group Discussion

Literal meaning of the word *discussion* is 'an exchange of views on something'. Discussion

occurs when members have differing opinions. Each member presents his/her views. If other member disagrees with the member, s/he presents his/her views. The main purpose of a discussion is to understand various viewpoints of an issue and reach upto a better understanding. This understanding makes us better equipped to deal with the issue.

Group discussion, or popularly known as GD, refers to a situation in which a small number of persons form a group to exchange their views, opinions, knowledge, and information on a particular issue, problem, topic, or situation among the members of the group. The exchange takes place through oral communication. Each member of the group listens to other members as well as gives his/her views. It is a team activity. It is like a football match where player passes the ball to his/her team member and aims at a common objective. The group-members have to interpret, analyse, and argue, so as to discuss the topic or case threadbare as a team.

GD is formal and systematic. There is self-imposed discipline on the discussion and greater responsibility lies on the shoulders of the participants to make it useful. There is no named leader of the group. As the discussion proceeds, one of the participants emerges as a leader. Each participant is given a fair chance to speak and express his/her opinion. Since the number of participants is small, it is not difficult to involve every member in the discussion. There is no place for emotional outburst and display of excitement in this type of discussion. When the discussion takes place, some person(s) can be invited as observer(s). This can be done for two purposes:

- To let the observer(s) learn the process of group discussion.
- To evaluate the contribution made by each member.

Some GD's have a person as moderator who moderates the discussion. S/he acts like a leader and triggers passion among the participants. S/he makes sure that the participants have not been going off the track. After completion of the discussion, s/he provides feedback to the participants, in five point scale, (5 for excellent, 4 for very good, 3 for good, 2 for average, and 1 for below average). S/he rates the participants on the basis of confidence, attitude, communication skills, interpersonal skills, and intellectual knowledge. S/he provides honest feedback to each participant without any prejudice. S/he does not judge any participant by his/her own appearance or academic achievements. S/he remains impartial and free from pre-conceived notions. S/he remains supportive and sympathetic to the members.

13.2 Number of Participants

It is difficult to specify the number of participants that would make the group discussion useful. However, there can be ten to fifteen members in a group, but if there are ten or more members in a group, some tend to avoid participation and remain mere passive listeners. Thus, the group discussion loses its significance because each member is expected to actively participate in the discussion. Researches reveal if the number is kept between 5-

9, fruitful discussion can take place. If there are less than five members, the discussion suffers lack of diversity of views and opinions.

13.3 Ways to Organise a Group Discussion

There are two ways of organizing a group discussion: first, the topic is announced before the discussion, and the participants come prepared for the discussion. Second, the topic is announced on the spot. The participants are given five to ten minutes to collect their thoughts. In both the cases, the exchange takes place in a systematic and structured way. The chairs are arranged in a circle so that every participant can see the expressions of other participants.

13.4 Objectives

GD is a purposeful and goal-oriented activity. Each participant is usually aware of the purpose(s) of the GD beforehand. The goals are generally decided before the conduct of GD. The main objective of GD is to provide a wide range of solutions to a particular problem and reach upto a viable amicable solution. Besides decision making, it helps in eliciting personality traits of the participants. That's why several companies conduct GD's in order to find out the qualities they are expecting from their prospective employees. A group of short-listed candidates is given a topic which is usually debatable and of current importance. The candidates have to speak on the topic within a limited period of time which ranges between twenty to forty five minutes. An observer, appointed by the prospective employer, sits through the discussion and Judges each participant's communication skills, tolerance, leadership qualities, intellectual ability, group behaviour, and approach to solve problems. The candidates are screened on the basis of their performance. A group discussion is also an instrument of education to develop and judge the students' personality traits. It trains the students to function in the professional world efficiently. Many educational institutions also use GD's for the screening of candidates for admission to a particular course. It is used apart from written test/ and interview.

13.5 Characteristics of Group Discussion

Group discussion has following characteristics:

- (a) **Purposeful Activity** : GD is organized for a specific purpose. The purpose is made clear to every participant beforehand. Every participant takes part in the GD to meet the objective.
- (b) **Interactive**: GD is based on interaction among the group members. It raises a particular issue for a positive exchange of views. Every member presents his/her views on the issue. However the members may have differing opinions, but the interaction takes place in a healthy environment. Basically, it is a cooperative group process. It is designed to reach on a consensus.

- (c) **Equitable Distribution of Participation:** Every member in the GD enjoys equal rights. Each member is important and no one is allowed to dominate the discussion. Every member can present his/her views independently. Members encourage each other to participate in the discussion.
- (d) **Cooperative Atmosphere:** Group discussion takes place in a friendly, cooperative and cordial atmosphere. Group members cooperate with each other, understand and appreciate different points of views, and try to pool them together in order to develop group consensus. However, disagreements do exist but they do not lead to serious conflicts. These differences enrich the process of discussion and broaden the horizon of the group.
- (e) **Shared Leadership:** There is no named leader of the group. The members of the group share and perform the leadership function. They themselves start the discussion, keep the discussion on, check the progress, and encourage other participants to speak.
- (f) **Democratic Process:** GD is a democratic process. No view is forced upon any of the members. The decisions are taken through consensus. However, the discussion takes place to reach up to a consensus, but a large number of group discussions end without consensus of the group.
- (g) **Flexible:** GD is flexible as compared to other forms of discussion. It is less formal in style and functioning. The rules can be changed according to the requirements. There is no restriction of time on any participant. S/he can take enough time to present his/her views.
- (h) **Cooperative Process:** GD is based on mutual cooperation. Every member cooperates with other member(s) and encourages other member(s) to speak.

13.6 Essential Requirements

Group discussion is an effective technique for the evaluation of candidates' personal traits in order to select for a job or admission to professional courses. A candidate(s) is required to acquire certain skills in order to prove him/her. S/he must possess:

- (a) **All-round Knowledge:** Other than subject, the participant(s) must have a wide knowledge of current affairs, burning social and economic issues, scientific advancements, environmental issues, and lot more. S/he must be aware of the environment around him/herself. S/he must have perfect knowledge of the facts related to the topic.
- (b) **Oral Communication Skills:** Group discussion is an oral activity. Every participant(s) needs to be proficient in communication skills. Ability to speak confidently and convincingly is one of the prerequisites of success in group discussion. The observer(s) closely evaluates oral communication skills.

- candidates. S/he generally assesses the clarity of expression, pronunciation, intonation, and effective non-verbal communication.
- (c) **Listening Skills:** A participant should be a patient listener. S/he should first listen to the comments of other participants, wait for his/her turn, and then present his/her views forcefully.
- (d) **Clarity:** Clarity is art of making meaning clear to the audience. It includes clarity of expression and clarity of thoughts. Whatever a member presents should be clear and easily understandable. S/he should avoid indirect expressions, exaggeration, artificial eloquence, and ornamentation in speech. S/he should use direct, clear and specific language to present his/her views.
- (e) **Non-verbal Skills:** Body language makes oral communication more effective. The participant should use non-verbal cues, such as eye-contact, gestures, facial expressions, and so on. Proper eye-contact reflects confidence; shirking of eye contact communicates nervousness, frustration, weakness and insecurity. S/he should also use proper hand movements wherever required.
- (f) **Leadership Qualities:** Every participant should possess leadership qualities. There is no named leader of the group, but a good leader takes self-initiative and establishes him/herself as a leader. S/he must:
- initiate the proceeding of discussion,
 - try to keep the discussion on a right track,
 - promote positive atmosphere,
 - clarify points when required,
 - lead the discussion to a successful conclusion.
- (g) **Analytical Approach:** The participant should have analytical bent of mind and rational thinking. S/he should analyse the situation, problem, condition, and topic. S/he should listen to each participant carefully in order to analyse his/her views.
- (h) **Self-confidence:** The participant should be self-confident. S/he should talk with confidence and self-assurance. His/her body movements should reflect confidence. A participant's confidence may not only impress the examiner(s) but also help him/herself to lead the group. S/he should avoid being boastful and pretending that s/he knows everything. S/he should not forget that overconfidence causes failure whereas under-confidence leads to lack of productivity. S/he should be bold and assertive without being offensive, aggressive, and rigid.
- (i) **Team-management Skills:** Every participant needs team-management skills to be successful in a GD. Employers look for the candidates who can work in a team-oriented environment. The examiners assess whether the participant is a team player who can get along with people or an individualist who is always fighting to save his/her ego.

Team-management skills include- positive attitude, adaptability, cooperation, and coordination.

- (j) **Patience:** The participant should never lose his/her patience. S/he should remain cool and not get provoked. S/he should not show aggression. In spite of provocation, s/he should handle the situation with patience.
- (k) **Systematic Approach:** The participant should adopt systematic, scientific, and realistic approach. S/he should be impartial, rational, and factual. S/he should view the situation objectively and utilize concrete and foolproof illustrations. The ideas and arguments should be backed by relevant facts and figures.

13.7 Process of Group Discussion

Group discussion is a systematic and purposeful oral-process. It is characterized by structured exchange of views on a particular topic, issue, problem, or situation in a formal setting. It is conducted in a systematic way. It consists of three parts:

- Initiation
 - Body
 - Summarization
- (a) **Initiation:** It is the first stage of GD. The group is given a topic to discuss. They are mediated by a person who announces the topic, allotted time, general guidelines and procedures governing the GD. The mediator withdraws to the background, leaving the group free to carry on the discussion without external interference. As there is no elected or designated leader of the group, one of the participants starts the discussion. S/he tells her/his views on the topic and proceeds the discussion. Then other participants take on the discussion.
 - (b) **Body:** This is the second stage of group discussion. This is main part of the discussion. Every participant gets involved in the discussion.
 - (c) **Summarization:** Most GD's do not have conclusion. It rarely happens when all the group members reach onto a consensus. But every GD is summarized. One of the participants summarizes in a nutshell what the group members have discussed. The GD comes to an end with the summarization.

13.9 Examples

1. **Group Discussion on the Topic- 'Need of Distance Education'**
Seven participants- A, B, C, D, E, F, G have been taking part in the discussion.

- A: India has a large number of colleges but formal system of education has failed to reach the masses. Hence, there was an urgent need to develop some system that can meet the rising demand of education. This system was 'education through distance education'. It has proved a boon for India. Numberless people have been getting education through this system. Government has opened open schools and open universities for those students who cannot take formal education or are unable to secure admissions in regular colleges to study further.
- C: You're right! But would they reap the benefits of regular classes? No! They'll not be able to get benefit of classroom teaching.
- D: My dear, it's not there. They attend PCP classes on holidays. They come with their doubts and teachers clear the doubts. Moreover, they study through radio and television. Many open universities relay their programmes through mass media. They send their study material to the students, which is of very high quality.
- C: But what about practicals?
- G: Yes! Many schools and universities provide the facility of laboratories. Students visit the study centre and perform their practical there. They remain open on Sundays and holidays.
- B: this system is beneficial for the students who work somewhere. They take their jobs during week days and attend their classes on weekends.
- E: But do the universities and employers consider their degrees equal to the degrees of regular courses? Some employers consider their degrees inferior to that of regular degrees.
- F: It's not there. Their degrees have equal weightage. The students get admissions, jobs, and promotions on the basis of the degrees provided by the open schools and open universities.
- A: As a developing country, India has several impediments. Some of them are high illiteracy rate, growing population, poverty and limited resources. Two third of India's population resides in villages. Government cannot provide school and college in every village. However the government is trying its best but it's difficult to reach upto every individual with education because of limited resources. Distance education is a boon for those who reside in far flung areas or villages. Moreover, women are not allowed in villages to attend schools or colleges because of orthodox mentality. Distance education provides them the opportunity to continue their studies.
- C: I do agree with all of you. The failure of the formal system of education has led to the inception of distance education. It has absorbed the students who could not find admission in regular colleges, could not continue their studies, or so. It is really beneficial for the students.

2. Group discussion on the topic- 'Need of Examinations'

(Seven persons- Amita, Binni, Chetan, Diwakar, Falguni and Geeta- are the participants.)

- Amita: It is true that examinations cause stress and tension in students' minds, but they are important to find out real skills, talents and knowledge of the students.

Examination is a measuring stick that is used to test the performance of students. Examination provides the students an opportunity to showcase their talent and skills.

inni: I agree with my friend that examination is a measuring stick, but, by judging the students' performance on a common platform, their individual talents are overlooked. Even to this day, students are judged on common platform of annual or semester examination. How can we know about the talents of a person within three hours?

hetan: But examinations are essential for students. They get motivated to secure good marks in the exam. They concentrate on their studies before examination. Examination gives them the spirit of competition and they study hard.

iwakar: But, children, at a very young age, start to take tension and stress of the exam. This hampers physical growth and mental development of the child. The examination system is so designed that they learn by rote method and never understand the concept. They wish to fare well to come up to the expectations of their parents and teachers. Sometimes untoward happenings, like sickness, accident etc, ruin their chance of scoring good marks in exam.

hetan: But, examinations help the teachers and parents to judge the child's knowledge and amount of labor put in by the child in gaining it. They also make the students strive for excellence. Examinations keep the children always on their toes. They wish to fare well to come up to the expectations of their parents and teachers. They clear their doubts before the exam. Peer pressure also makes them feel the need to outdo the others.

alguni: But parental expectations and peer pressure take load on them. It is also found that parents make their love conditional to the performance of their children in their examinations. This makes the children feel pressurized. Failure in examination prompts many students to put an end to their lives.

eeta: Assessment of examinees' performance depends entirely on examiner. Very often, the questions, prepared by a teacher, are found to be 'out of syllabus' which affect the children's marks. Sometimes, the examiners merely rush through the answer books without assessing them properly, in order to check more than specified number of answer books. The swinging moods of the examiners also play a part in the marking of the answer sheets of the examinees. Such actions lead to wrong assessment of examinee's efforts.

mita: Examinations teach writing skills, time management, how to express thoughts and opinions, and so on. Students, who are good at studies, maintain their record in all the examinations. Jobs are also awarded on the basis of written examinations and viva-voce tests.

roti: A degree, acquired from a reputed university, does not guarantee a job. Nepotism, bribery and being inexperienced in the practical field, pose problems before the modern youth in securing a job. As a result, they take to crime and become offenders of law.

There are certain flaws in the examination system as well. The teachers restrict their responsibility of imparting knowledge only limited to syllabus. No efforts are made to give all-round knowledge to the students. The student's knowledge is restricted only to the limited range.

It is evident that examination has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, there are many flaws in the present examination system, but we cannot deny its importance. There is a need for a new pattern which would impart education through training. There is need to evaluate a student's performance during the whole year or semester. This could make the examination system more acceptable. Parents should also understand the potentials and limitations of their children and keep their expectations at a reasonable and attainable level.

Group Discussion on the topic- 'Impact of TV Serials'

(Five persons- Ashok, Shreya, Swati, Mahesh and Rohan- are the participants.)

Hallo everybody! We are here to discuss the impacts of TV serials. As all of us know, television is the most reachable means of mass entertainment that has gripped the nation by wide range of coverage and has been yielding fast and great impact on the society. With the expansion of TV network, the culture of TV serials appeared. These serials have many interwoven stories or sometimes past and present is amalgamated to extract maximum publicity among the viewers. These are so popular among urban, semi-urban, and rural populace that sometimes viewers miss a professional appointment but not the serial. Most of the serials are set in high society, sophisticated settings, with modern furniture, expensive dresses, jewelry, cars and luxurious life-style. Serials set trends among the young people who ape everything, which appeal their instinct. They watch latest fashion and etiquettes in the serials and follow them.

But this pomp and luxurious life-style has been degrading the youth. They try to grab these luxuries by hook or crook. They take short cut route to become rich and use unfair means to grab it. It is because of the impact of serials.

But serials also inculcate moral values among the viewers. We can take examples of the serials, 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata'. These religious serials provide information on our past in a new perspective especially to the young generation. Historical serials, like 'Akbar the Great', 'The Sword of Tipu Sultan' and 'The Great Maratha', supply the saga of our past.

I agree with my friend, but what about the serials based on Saas-Bahu saga. These are set in the traditional Indian social household environment, particularly highlighting the joint family aided and with myriad problems, ranging from petty clashes to intrigues and adultery. These are responsible for the disintegration of social values and joint-family system. Adventurous serials, like 'Shaktimaan', create

waves among the children and they try to act like the character in the serial. Many children had to lose their lives in the pursuit. In order to add sensation, the producer tries to give a new fillip that shows something unhealthy or unconventional.

Rohan: It cannot be denied that serials kill time, a very precious period for young lots as well as for the professionals. But serials have greater place in modern life. There is a greater need that the serials must be intended to preserve social values rather than spoiling them in the race of minting money.

↔ Exercise

Write the content of the group discussion, on the following topics:

1. India should opt for nuclear energy.
2. Human cloning should be allowed.
3. English should not be the medium of instruction in schools and colleges.
4. Multinational corporations Are devils in disguise.
5. Terrorism should be dealt with heavy hand.
6. Position of Women in India.
7. Movies have negative effect on the youth.
8. Love marriage is more favorable than arranged one.
9. Demonetization has failed to achieve its objective.