

## **Suggestive Techniques for Better Performance in Group**

### **Discussion**

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#### **Abstract:**

Engineering education is losing its sheen because of unemployability of the technical graduates. There is a huge gap between learning through education system and the employer's expectations of employees. Though the curriculum has been updated and designed to match the corporate needs, students are failing flat on their face when it comes to short listing methods like Group Discussions and in Interviews in campus placements. By focusing on different approaches, facilitators can train the students and pull the students out of their apprehensions about GD and the use of English language. Instead of using the same traditional methods again and again, different techniques that suit the needs of the students can be used for effective outcome. This paper attempts to suggest few techniques that suit the individual needs of the participants.

**Key Words: Employability, Techniques, Group Discussion communication skills and soft skills**

**Introduction:** Globalization has made the business world more professional, looking out for efficient, competent, and highly dynamic personnel to achieve the desired success bringing in both benefits and threats. The industry thus moving on the lines of changing trends has made the job selection process more intense and sophisticated. (Rizvi, 2008, p. 16). Most of the [www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

multinational companies are emphasizing on their employees soft skills (core employability and communication skills). With the organizations not ready to compromise on the standard of candidates that they want to recruit, the hiring scenario has become even tougher thereby emphasizing on the requisite skills. With around one in ten university graduates embarking upon a career in engineering each year, it has become important for them to be wary of the necessary skills and qualities that engineering employers look for when they are hiring. Poor communication skills, lack of problem solving skills, were found to be the reasons as to why a huge percentage of engineers are deemed unemployable.

Campuses have become the hub for recruiting fresh engineering graduates. They have been attracting recruiters as they provide a platform to meet the aspiring candidates and pick up intelligent, committed youth who have the requisite enthusiasm and zeal to prove themselves. In order to find the right candidates, organizations employ various selection procedures. With the growing demand for technical personnel, the need for talented and self-motivated young people capable of multi- tasking has grown. It is easy for the companies to reach a particular college and conduct recruitments there rather than reach out to a whole lot of individuals via newspapers etc. Now this trend is here to stay. It therefore makes a lot of sense to students to prepare seriously and not let go the opportunity to get shortlisted in campus placements. Recruiters adopt different short listing methods according to the skills needed for the job. A few common methods include screening, aptitude, technical tests, Group Discussion, Interview etc.

### **Importance of Group Discussion**

Group Discussion has been gaining importance as an effective tool in problem solving, decision making and personality assessment. Most of the organizations adopt group discussion for quick and effective decision making as compared to individual decisions taken. This technique has also become popular in the assessment of candidates for job selection or admission to professional courses. (Anderson, Nayar, Sen, 2010. p. 161). and are normally short listed for the next round or personal interview as the case may be. This is a tool used to gauge the candidate's personality traits and skills like the ability to work in a team, verbal communication skills, nonverbal behaviour, reasoning ability, leadership skills, initiative, assertiveness, flexibility, creativity, decision making ability etc. It examines how an individual functions as a part of a team, as a member or as a leader, therefore, knowing how

to interact, communicate, behave, listen, participate and contribute in a group becomes an important criteria for selection. (Prasad & Mohan, 2012; Lata & Kumar, 2009, p. 6; Mandal, 2006; Ganguly, 2002; Rizvi, 2008, p. 16)

Most of the engineering graduates are able to clear the screening, aptitude and technical tests with ease. But when it comes to Group Discussion and Interview most of them fail to perform in these two selection rounds. If Group Discussion is chosen as a selection method for short listing it often precedes Interview. Therefore it is important for candidates to clear the Group Discussion round for getting further short listed. The reasons of failure are many, it could be due to lack of knowledge, or lack of proper inputs on the knowhow of group discussion, or perhaps students do not have enough training and practice on the nuances of performing in a GD. Sometimes it is the regional background of their study, lack of an enabling English language environment, peer group, lack of speaking practice in English, lack of correct grammatical structure of sentences, inhibition and stage fear, fear of becoming the laughing stock are a few apprehensions that the students have about participating in a Group Discussion.

### **Role of curriculum**

Efforts have already been made to make the education system responsive to the changing needs of the industry, to bridge the gap between the industry and the academia so that the present and the future generations could be prepared to meet the challenges ahead. The students were given exposure to soft skills and imparted the requisite skills either through an inclusive curriculum or through training programs in most of the engineering colleges. The focus of the engineering colleges should be on reducing these important skill gaps through improvements in curriculum and teaching methods.

Unlike the traditional formal setup of teaching, a new paradigm that suits the needs of the students has to be evolved to prepare learners to be part of the contributing society. Steps should be taken to reform the curriculum focusing more on practical exposure, introducing syllabus to match the current trends and creating awareness among the students on the importance of presenting one self and an overall development in the personality of the individuals including soft skills right from early schooling.

### **Communicative Language Teaching- Task Based Instruction**

No single model of Communicative Language Teaching can suit and be applied in all settings. Rather, a number of language teaching approaches have emerged. With no universally accepted single syllabus model, language syllabus today needs to include a systematic coverage of the different components of communicative competence, including language skills, content, grammar, vocabulary, and functions. Different syllabus types within a communicative orientation to language teaching employ different routes to developing communicative competence. Some of the different approaches which can be viewed as falling within the general framework of communicative language teaching that are currently in use around the world are process-based methodologies i.e. content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based instruction (TBI). In CBI, content is used as the driving force of classroom activities and to link all the different dimensions of communicative competence, including grammatical competence, to content. Krahnke (1987) defines CBI as “the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teaching the language itself separately from the content being taught.” (p. 65)

Task-based instruction or TBI, creating the right kinds of interactional processes to learn the language is the modus operandi of this method. Instead of employing a conventional syllabus i.e. grammar-based one, advocates of TBI argue that by using specially designed instructional tasks grammar and other dimensions of communicative competence can be developed as a by-product. Most teachers in fact take up different kinds of tasks as part of their regular teaching. However, in planning teaching (i.e., in developing a syllabus) and also in classroom teaching, Task-based instruction insists strongly on the use of tasks and sees them as the primary unit to be used.

Contemporary theories of language learning and acquisition claim that language use through communicative tasks is the driving force for language development (Long 1989; Prabhu 1987). Advocates of such theories (see Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun 1993) suggested, as Norris et al. (1998) put it,

The best way to learn and teach a language is through social interactions. [. . . they] allow students to work towards a clear goal, share information and opinions, negotiate meaning, get the interlocutor’s help in comprehending input, and receive feedback on their language production. In the process, learners not only use their inter language,

but also modify it, which in turn promotes acquisition. (p. 31) as in Brandl (2007) Cooperative or collaborative learning is an approach where students work together in small cooperative teams, such as groups or pairs, to complete activities. Students work cooperatively on a language-learning task or collaboratively by achieving the goal through communicative use of the target language.

### **Suggestive Techniques for GD**

A few techniques have been discussed to benefit the students in improving their performance in a GD. Primarily the student should develop interpersonal relations as this would enable him to make a beginning to speak out and share their thoughts

**Initiation:** Many people face this problem. Even students who are good at speaking do face this problem initially to take off. Here the mentor has a major role to play. The mentor should try and encourage them to take the initiative to speak. Slow learners can be made to speak for short durations on varied topics. They can also encourage them by giving the topic in advance and by asking them to come prepared.

**Word mapping** is for students who find it difficult to speak for short durations. Like minded students can be grouped together and make them to brainstorm words relevant to the topic. This exercise with the help/guidance of the mentor makes the students come out of their shell and builds in them a confidence to participate.

### **The STAD Technique**

STAD, a peer-tutoring technique, is based on raising students' motivation for learning by focusing on cooperation of members within each team, followed by competition among the teams in the class.

The prerequisite to use this technique is that the facilitator must have an idea about the language competence of the students' who would participate. Making use of the information available, the facilitator should list the students from highest to lowest in ranking them with the scoring based on the speaking competence of the students. The class should be divided into four equal groups based on their speaking abilities as best, better, good and poor.

Presuming a batch of 30 students attend the AECS lab for a Group Discussion, the faculty should list the students into teams of four and balance them with a representative from each of the four performance-based divisions. Thus, a heterogeneous team is formed with students from different achievement levels, who can tutor each other. With all the teams equally

balanced, no single team has an advantage in the competition phase. The facilitator should ensure that the students are not informed of their divisional rankings, which are used only as reference groups for the facilitator.

Group members proceed to discuss together, first in pairs and then in fours. Let each pair discuss the topic given for five minutes followed by four members forming a team and discussing it. Often this technique helps the students who have inhibitions to speak in a group. Inhibitions are overcome as there is one-to-one interaction initially with the first pair. In the next step the first pair joins the second pair of students and share their ideas on the topic, at each stage the time allotted is five minutes. These set of four students join another set of four students and participate in the discussion. At this stage the time is enhanced to ten minutes. Worksheets are then distributed to each student to assess their peer group on specific points such as level of participation, knowledge, initiation, contribution to the discussion etc. This technique has the advantage of the peer group assessment, in addition to knowing the parameters on which students are assessed and have an understanding on the mistakes others were making in the discussion.

This technique enables slow learners to take the initiative to participate and prepare students to compete in the next levels with the group. Besides, the students' also learn to assess themselves which is an added advantage as sometimes evaluation by the facilitator is not readily accepted by the students. Communicative competence is enhanced through this technique.

**Focused Listing.** Focused listing can be used as a brainstorming technique or as a technique to generate descriptions. This technique enables those students who have lot of inhibitions to take the initiative of participating in a discussion. In Focused listing the students are asked to generate words to define or describe something. Once students have completed listing words, these lists can be used to facilitate group for discussion. In this activity a group is formed with 4-5 students and

asked to list 5-7 words or phrases that describe or define what a motivated student does. From there, you might ask students to get together in small groups to discuss the lists, or to select the one that they can all agree on.

The same activity could be used for the whole class as well. Initially form a group of 4-5 students who are well versed or have idea on the topic of discussion. Let them list out the

words or phrases relevant to the topic on the board. Divide the rest of the class into small groups of 4-5 students and give these hints to discuss upon. This technique enables the slow learners to take initiative and have a fair idea on the given topic.

**Jumbled Hints:** Make the students read the newspaper headlines of the week or ask them to come prepared on the topics that have come up in the newspaper that week or perhaps the facilitator can give some topics and ask the students to come prepared. When the students enter the lab, divide them into groups of five each. Here again the facilitator is at discretion in adapting different techniques to form the groups according to the need.

Once the group is formed the facilitator gives a group of words on small pieces of paper relevant on a particular topic that has come up in the newspaper. A time limit is set for the team to arrange the words or phrases in order. In the given set time the group has to arrange the words and arrive at a consensus on the topic in 5-7 minutes. The students are supposed to arrange them in a meaningful manner to make some sense and discuss on the topic. In the process the students shed their inhibitions and come together in arranging the words to make some sense. If the students have already seen the newspaper they would be able to contribute to the topic immediately. Once consensus is reached, each student has to contribute to the topic in a structured manner for which 10-15 min is allotted. The time limit is left to the discretion of the facilitator as it depends on the topic given and the level of students at the discussion.

The facilitator has to prepare a list of words or phrases that match the issue in the newspaper on 5-6 topics to match the number of groups formed. Each group is given a different issue so that the students are serious about their preparation.

The students are evaluated on the number of points they contributed, their leadership qualities, initiation, team management skills, communication skills and attitude.(adapted from Nagaraj, G, 2008)

**Mapping Body Language.** This technique enables learners to gain practical exposure to the nuances of body language by mapping their ideas on the body language against their performance in a GD. Body language is one attribute on which most students need expertise and practice to start using the right body language from knowingly to unknowingly.

In this technique the learners are made to study their body language through their performance in a GD and compare the same with their pre conceived thoughts about a particular posture shown vide a picture.

This technique begins by showing a poster/video clip that demonstrates an appropriate or inappropriate body language in a group. The clipping is numbered and the learners are made to write their understanding of this clipping by mentioning appropriate or inappropriate and their view of the correct body language to be maintained. This exercise is a conscious effort made to make students focus on body language. The number of clippings to be shown is left to the discretion of the facilitator. Now form small groups of four to five students and give them a topic for discussion. The discussion is vide graphed and shown to the group to compare their body language and their peer group against the answers they have given for the video clips shown. Learners can compare the results and work on their weaknesses.

**Fluency Technique- 4/3/2 Technique:** 4/3/2 is a useful technique for developing fluency and includes the features that are needed in fluency development activities. In this technique, the learners' at first choose a topic or are given a topic which they are very familiar with. If the learners are using this technique for the first time it is ideal to choose a topic that involves recounting something that happened to them. This will enable them to recall the order of the events chronologically leaving less scope for any mistakes or faltering while speaking. The learners work in pairs. Learner A tells a story to Learner B and has a time limit of four minutes to do this. B just listens and does not interrupt or question Learner A. When the four minutes are up, the teacher says, "Change partners"; Learner A then moves to a new Learner B. The teacher says "Begin" and Learner A tells exactly the same story to the new partner but this time has only three minutes to tell it. When the three minutes are up, the teacher says "Stop. Change partners." With a new partner, Learner A now has two minutes to tell the story. During the three deliveries of the same story, the B learners do not talk and each listens to three different people. When the A learners have given their talk three times, the B learners can now go through the same sequence, this time as speakers.

Research on this activity shows that the learners' speed of speaking increased during the talks (as measured by the number of words per minute), the hesitations they make decrease (as measured by hesitations per 100 words), and surprisingly their grammatical errors in the repeated parts of the talk decrease and they tend to use several, more complex grammatical

constructions in the last of the three talks than they did in the first talk (Nation, 1989, p. 381). Yang, Yingjie I. J (2014, p. 206) opines, it is not good to practice speaking fluency when learners are not totally prepared for it. Rossiter et al. (2010) maintained that rehearsal and repetition with consciousness definitely enhances oral fluency. Facilitators should try to do some rehearsal activities, or adapt the 4/3/2 activity into 5/4/3 or 3/2/1 based on the competence of the student and the length of the topic. It is left to the choice of the facilitator to change the format of the 4/3/2 activity, without giving the concept of relevance a miss. Whichever format is followed concept and relevance should be followed to avoid using irrelevant words and use relevant words and expressions when practice speaking fluency.

**Conclusion:** With many students failing to perform in group discussion, which forms an important short listing method, the facilitators should adopt various techniques according to the needs of the student. These techniques should enable the participant to overcome their problems to fare through the GD as a selection method. The facilitators should typecast the students and resort to implementing the technique that best suits them in the given period of time.

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