



UK Edition

Making Everything Easier!™

Succeeding at Assessment Centres FOR DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Face an Assessment Centre confidently
- Hold your own in presentations, group exercises and role-plays
- Prepare for and excel at psychometric tests
- Keep your cool in and out of the interview room

Nigel Povah

Chartered Occupational Psychologist

Lucy Povah

Consultant Occupational Psychologist





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**by Nigel Povah and
Lucy Povah**



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About the Authors

Nigel Povah is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and is the Managing Director and founder of A&DC, which is one of the UK's leading HR consultancies in the Talent Management field (www.ADC.uk.com).

Upon graduating from Leeds University in Psychology and obtaining a Masters at London University's Birkbeck College in Occupational Psychology, he decided to pursue a career as a professional chess player. During a five-year spell he represented England on a number of occasions, wrote four books on chess, became an International Master and taught and coached numerous players, including some of England's current crop of Grandmasters.

In the early 1980s Nigel decided to return to his interest in psychology and embarked upon a career in Human Resource consultancy which included stints in recruitment and training, before he founded Assessment & Development Consultants (A&DC) in 1988.

Nigel is widely regarded as one of the UK's leading experts in the Assessment Centre field, having co-authored *Assessment and Development Centres* (Gower). He was also one of the members of the British Psychological Society's Steering Committee who produced the 'Best Practice Guidelines on the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Assessment and Development Centres'.

As well as his executive role at A&DC, Nigel continues to write articles on Assessment and Development Centres and delivers papers at various conferences.

Nigel lives in Guildford with his wife Gill and their children and he still tries to find time to pursue his interest in chess as a keen amateur.

Lucy Povah is a Senior Consultant at A&DC where she has worked with her father for the last five years since graduating from Warwick University in Psychology and obtaining her Masters in Occupational Psychology from Surrey University.

During those five years she's designed and run many Assessment Centres, both in the UK and internationally, for a wide range of public and private sector organisations such as Acas, BAA, Boots, HMRC, Syngenta, and the UK Fire and Rescue Service. These Assessment Centres have been targeted at staff at all levels from graduates through to senior management and executives, where she has enabled organisations to adopt best practice selection processes.

Lucy has a particular interest in Positive Psychology, which focuses on enabling people to take full advantage of their strengths, especially within Assessment Centres.

Lucy currently lives in London, where she splits her time between visiting her family and friends in Surrey and enjoying the attractions of London.

Dedication

To our family and loved ones for putting up with numerous weekends and evenings of neglect; we hope you'll forgive us. We would also like to thank you for your encouragement and support throughout this project and beyond.

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We would like to thank the people at Wiley, including Wejdan Ismail for recognising the value of a book such as this, tracking us down and offering us this opportunity, and Rachael Chilvers for being highly supportive and encouraging us during the writing.

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Finally, we'd like to thank numerous fellow practitioners, including past and present colleagues at A&DC (too many to mention by name but you know who you are), with whom we have exchanged stories over many years, because many of the observations and recommendations within this book are based on their experiences as much as our own.

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Don't Dwell on Disappointments

Relax During Breaks

Be Yourself

Enjoy the Experience!

: Further Reading

Introduction

Welcome to *Succeeding at Assessment Centres For Dummies*! Did you pick up this book because you're due to attend an Assessment Centre and, like most people, you're not really sure what to expect? Well, rest assured, this book will remove the veil of mystique and provide you with a clear appreciation of what Assessment Centres are all about.

Assessment Centres have been around for over half a century during which time they've grown steadily in popularity, mainly because organisations trust them to help them make effective selection decisions. One of the main attractions of an Assessment Centre is that they're one of the most comprehensive and accurate ways of identifying the skills and abilities required for success in a given job. An Assessment Centre enables you to display all your qualities, so you have a great opportunity to show what you're capable of and realise your full potential.

About This Book

Assessment Centres can appear complicated, so we've set about providing you with a clear explanation of how they work and what you need to know, to give you the best possible chance of success.

Having designed and run literally hundreds of Assessment Centres of varying duration and content, we have channelled our knowledge of what exercises aim to assess and what assessors generally look for from your performance, to provide you with some focused advice.

You can dip in and out of this book as you like; don't feel compelled to read it from cover to cover. However, if you've received an invitation to an Assessment Centre, the following approach is useful:

- ✓ If you know very little about the Centre and have never attended an Assessment Centre before, the first three chapters in Part I provide a useful background.

- ✓ If you know what exercises you're likely to face, refer to the relevant chapters in Part II.

- ✓ If you believe that you'll sit a psychometric test and/or perhaps have an interview, head to the chapters in Part III.

- ✓ Finally, as part of your general preparation, follow the advice in Chapters 3 and 13 and read the tips in Chapters 15 to 17 in Part IV.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you as you go through this book we use the following conventions:

- ✓ *Italics* have been used to highlight quotations and definitions.
- ✓ Monofont is used for occasional web addresses which we suggest you might wish to use to access useful information.
- ✓ We use male pronouns in odd chapters and female pronouns in even chapters to be fair to both genders!

Foolish Assumptions

While writing this book we made some assumptions about your knowledge of Assessment Centres, why you might be interested in this book, and what you want to get out of it. We assume that your reason for picking up this book might be one or more of the following:

- ✓ You don't know anything at all about Assessment Centres and you want to gain some understanding, which could range from knowing the basics through to having a fairly thorough grasp of what they're all about.
- ✓ You've been invited to attend an Assessment Centre for the first time and want to know what to expect.
- ✓ You have a pretty good idea of the activities you'll face on an Assessment Centre but you want to be as thoroughly prepared for it as you can, because you're keen to do well.

How This Book is Organised

This book is divided into four major parts. The chapters within each part go into greater detail of specific aspects or elements of an Assessment Centre. Each chapter provides self-contained coverage of that particular aspect, so you don't need to read all of the chapters or read them in sequence. The Table of Contents provides a comprehensive list of everything we cover, enabling you to jump around the book as you like.

Part I: Introducing Assessment Centres

This part provides you with an introductory overview to Assessment Centres. Starting with an introduction to the basic principles and a description of what an Assessment Centre looks like, we then go into greater detail about how they actually work. These first two chapters provide you with a foundation upon which to build your understanding. We also focus on some of the general preparation you can do before your Assessment Centre to ensure you maximise your chances of success.

Part II: Mastering Assessment Centre Exercises

This part explains each of the different types of exercises that are used most frequently on Assessment Centres. Knowing what to expect and how to handle these types of exercise will boost your confidence no end, enabling you to feel you can tackle whatever's thrown at you.

Part III: Excelling at Non-Exercise Assessment Centre Activities

This part covers interviews, psychometric tests and various briefing sessions. Attending an Assessment Centre is likely to be one of the most insightful events of your career, so we also cover how to ensure you make the most of the opportunity to learn from this enriching experience.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

This part provides a series of general tips that apply to the Assessment Centre as a whole, rather than being aligned with any specific aspect of a Centre. We start by covering some practical tips about how to impress the Assessors, because your success at a Centre is very much in their hands. We then provide some suggestions about how best to behave, with appropriate warnings about behaviours to avoid! Finally, we offer some classic tips about how to ensure you're at the top of your game, so you can leave the Assessment Centre feeling positive and knowing you gave it your best.

Icons Used in This Book

We use a number of different icons throughout this book to draw your attention to particular pieces of information.



The knotted string highlights particularly important information to remember.



This icon relates to technical stuff that you don't necessarily need to know and can skip over if you want to. However, we include it in case you want to understand the underlying theory behind some of the points covered.



This icon refers to useful ideas and suggestions.



The bomb signals something to be careful about and highlights behaviours to avoid.

Where to Go from Here

What to read next? The choice is yours. You can just dip in and out of the different chapters, depending on which bits appear most relevant and useful to you. Or you can go down the traditional route and read this book from cover to cover.

We hope that this book helps you to perform more effectively in an Assessment Centre, so you can achieve your ambition of getting that job or promotion you want. Give the best performance you can, and remember to always be yourself. Good luck!

Part I

Introducing Assessment Centres



'He's certainly keen and in very good time —
his assessment is not until next week.'

In this part . . .

For many people the term Assessment Centre conjures up an image of somewhere that you go to be prodded and probed until your innermost secrets are exposed. Little wonder that being asked to attend an Assessment Centre can be an intimidating prospect for the uninitiated!

This part aims to remove the mystique of Assessment Centres, so you can attend armed with the confidence to succeed.