

Intray Exercises

One of the major differences between campus and workplace is that unlike your assignments and examinations with structured milestones and deadlines, workplace tasks and duties can come at any time, anywhere and in any format. Some employers use in-tray exercises to evaluate your response to these scenarios.

What is it

- It is a scenario where you will be asked to assume a role within an organisation.
- You will then be given a collection of fictional documents resembling official company documents relevant to the role you've assumed. You will also receive access to an email inbox.
- These documents are usually in the form of emails, reports, calendars and or work instructions in your "in-tray". It may include customer complaints, telephone call memos, resignation letter, order invoices, bad press for a supplier, etc.
- You will be given a specific time review the documents and emails before you are asked to share with the assessor how you plan to manage the different tasks before you.
- You may also be asked to determine which item(s) you will work on first. The assessment will be based on how aligned your priority list is to a set rubric.
- You may also be asked to identify business challenges and opportunities that you may have noticed from reading the documents and correspondence before you and how you plan on addressing those challenges and opportunities.

What is being tested

- Ability to prioritise tasks based on urgency (and sift out the "chatter", so to speak)
- Ability to connect the dots (for example, how tasks may be interrelated)
- Time management skills
- Analytical skills

How to prepare for it

In-tray exercises are essentially a good simulation of the demands of the job. It is mainly a test of how well you prioritize what's urgent vs what is truly important, sift out the important stuff from the "chatter", and how well you connect seemingly unrelated items.

A good strategy at the start is to lay out the in-tray items in chronological order and highlight important or urgent items. Typically, you will score well for giving the correct priority to certain items, as well as taking appropriate actions on others. Verbalize your thought process on the reasoning behind your priority list to the assessors.

Familiarize yourself with simple models like the Eisenhower 2 by 2 Matrix or the SWOT framework. They will help you sort out the information before you.

Who uses it

You will likely encounter this assessment method if you are applying for the following roles:

- Banking & financial institutions
- Accountancy companies
- Consultancy companies
- Public sector