



E-Tray / In-Tray Exercises

E-Tray / In-Tray involves reading / prioritising emails, identifying action required and any deadlines, drafting replies, preparing reports and other actions. These are often used as part of assessment centres by employers to assess your performance in a work related scenario.

What is it?

This can be a paper based (in-tray) or computer based (e-tray) and is likely to be a situation which simulates a task which may be based on the role you are applying for. You will be provided with:

- A description of your role and the situation with aims, objectives, and problems
- An opportunity to make notes of key observations
- An organisational structure for a fictional organisation

How does it work?

You will be required to:

- Deal with reports / emails appropriately
- Select from multiple choice options or required to draft responses
- Prioritise tasks; identify and resolve competing demands or conflicts
- Additional emails / reports may come during the exercise

How and what will be tested?

The in-tray exercise could be testing multiple competencies, often including your ability to analyse, problem solve, planning, organisation, flexibility and decision making. It may also test;

- **Analysis** – Ability to understand tasks and prioritise accordingly
- **Problem Solving** – Resolving or improving the situation based on the objectives, managing resource constraints, other barriers, assessing problems or conflicts between tasks
- **Resilience and Adaptability** – Are you able to cope with the pressure, adapt to changes and use your initiative to achieve the desired outcome
- **Planning and Organisation** – Prioritising the right task, ability to deal with tasks within a set timeframe, manage diary clashes, assessing how you work under pressure
- **Attention to Detail** – Following procedure, considering names and dates
- **Decision Making** – Logic and methodology, evaluation options

- **Communication** – Professional and appropriate written communication in a clear, concise, tactful manner

Tips – How to approach the exercise

Understand what the employer is looking for

Your approach can be based on your own personal style, but it can be useful to understand the competencies that are being assessed – these will be often mention in the person specification, appreciating and understanding these can help with the direction and focus you take to your answers.

Planning and Organisation

You can start by scanning all documents before replying to help you to prioritise and understand how the documents might link and affects other tasks. Consider what tasks need a response and what may not – sometimes certain emails may not require any action, understand the wider context and formulate a plan of action/ make notes of your observation – use this to make key links between important pieces of information. Keep key documents such as the organisational structure as reference points or make notes of key information such as aims, objectives and key problems.

Analyse and Problem Solve

It can be useful to consider what is urgent or significant, who sent it and how important is it against the aims and objectives, when was it sent and what deadlines are there. Once you have scanned the documents you can read all documents thoroughly to develop your understanding and look at the bigger picture. Consider the dates and deadlines as these could help you prioritise and consider what tasks could be delegated; is there someone more appropriate who should be dealing with it?

Time Management

The activity is usually timed and designed to be challenging in order to see how you work under pressure so it's important to keep an eye on time: plan and allocate your time appropriately to scan, read, and respond to each of the tasks. This is also testing your organisational skills.

Decision Making

One of the keys to success is making effective decisions, it can be useful to weight up the pros and cons and how your decision may affect other tasks. There is often not a clear correct answer – sometimes you may not have all the information – therefore you may need to make an educated assumption to make a decision.

Further Research

For further information you can visit the following resources:

- [Assessment Day](#) – E-tray (Information and practice)
- [Assessment Day](#) – In-tray (Information and practice)
- [Graduates First – Login](#) (for UoL Students)
- [WikiJob](#) – E-tray exercise
- [Target Jobs](#) – In-tray exercises
- [Prospects](#) – In-tray / E-tray
- [Assessment Centres HQ \(How to pass your E-tray exercise\)](#) – Includes some useful free resources

For more information contact the Career Development Service:

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