What is a Simulation Exercise?

The term 'Simulation Exercise' is any task that you are asked to do as part of applying for a job that simulates the types of tasks you will be doing. They allow you to demonstrate aptitude related to the requirements of the job and they have been shown to be more predictive of future job performance than an interview alone. You may hear the term 'Assessment Centre' being used: this just refers to more than one of these exercises being used in the same day (and often involving more than one candidate).

Simulation Exercises are varied and are designed to simulate different aspects of the work environment. You may get just one, or you may be asked to sit a few as part of your selection process. They are usually used after the initial stages of the selection process, because of the large amount of time and expense in conducting them, and they usually follow the initial job interview. During each exercise, an observer will rate you on a range of set indicators, using a prescribed performance scale.

At the beginning of the assessment, you should receive an initial briefing about the timetable of tests, location of rooms etc. Prior to each Simulation, you will be given instructions describing the exercise, your role, timeframes, equipment etc, do not be afraid to ask any questions at this stage if you unsure on any part of the exercise.

They can be daunting but only those who have passed through the preliminary interviews and those that the employer thinks are capable of successfully carrying out the jobs on offer are asked to attend. So be confident and positive!

The most common types of Simulation Exercise you are likely to face include:

**In Tray Exercise (and E-Tray Exercises)**

An in-tray (also called 'in-basket') exercise asks you to assume a particular role as an employee of a fictitious company and work through an in-tray of items such as letters, memos, reports, requests, emails and problems. You then decide on priorities and actions. They will usually consist of a range of issues of varying degrees of importance / urgency, some of which may well be related. This exercise is designed to measure your ability to organise and prioritise work.

Some employers use an 'e-tray exercise', which is the same as an in-tray
exercise but is PC-based and uses an e-mail inbox. Like the paper equivalent, these will be a mix of requests, memos, phone messages and information. Some e-tray exercises provide a multiple choice of actions to choose from or potential answers to a simple calculation that has been requested.

**Presentation**

In a presentation exercise, you will be given a topic or possibly a choice of topics and asked to make a presentation of around ten minutes with five minutes at the end for questions. You could be asked to present to the other candidates or just to the recruiters. You may be sent the topic to prepare in advance, or given it on the day. These exercises are designed to measure your presentation skills including your ability to organise and structure information and to communicate your points clearly and concisely.

**Role Play**

You may be asked to role-play a situation similar to those encountered in the job you are seeking. This seems to be particularly common in customer service and sales roles (as well as those roles where the effective management of subordinates is essential). A common scenario is for an actor to play an unhappy customer, with your role being to deal with their complaint. Another is to meet with an underperforming employee, with your role being to address the area of concern in a sensitive and motivational manner.

**Work-simulation**

This is an assessment that requires candidates to perform an exact replica of a task that would be required in the role. For example, applicants for a clerical position may be asked to file information according to a system correctly. Again think about the company and more specifically the department you will be working in.

**How to give your best performance**

In order to achieve the best possible result you should first establish what type of Simulation Exercise(s) you will be facing. As with any selection process, thorough preparation is the key to maximising the outcome of your assessment.

**Further Reference**

Role Play Exercises – please note that internal internet restrictions may prevent access to these links from a work PC

**Sample Simulation Exercises can be found here.** Some are rather simplistic and some (such as the 'Famous People' or 'Building a Tower
out of Straws' tasks) are not best practice, but they give a broad idea of the type of task to expect.

Practice an in-tray exercise here.

Practice an e-tray exercise here.