SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TESTS

Cracking the Assessment Centre SJT

What assessors look for, a reliable method, and two worked examples

What Assessors Are Actually Scoring

SJTs measure judgement against specific competencies - not kindness and not caution.

01 **Client and Stakeholder Focus**

Whose interests matter here, and in what order?

02 **Delivering Results Under Pressure**

Does the response get the job done without cutting corners?

03 **Integrity and Managing Risk**

Do they protect the client/firm even when it's awkward?

04 **Teamwork and Communication**

Is the right person kept informed at the right time?

05 **Commercial Awareness**

Do they weigh cost, time, and reputational trade-offs?

KEY MINDSET

Empathy alone isn't enough if it doesn't move the situation forward.

Action alone isn't enough
if it damages a relationship or breaks a rule.

The right answer usually sits in the **middle** - not the two extremes.

A Reliable Method for Any SJT

Acknowledge → Own → Escalate → Communicate

1

Identify the competency

What's really at stake - money, safety, a relationship, a deadline?

2

Map the stakeholders

Who is affected if this goes wrong: client, team, firm, regulator?

3

Cut the two extremes

“Do nothing” and “escalate over everyone's head” are almost always wrong.

4

Find the middle path

Acknowledge, take proportionate ownership, escalate appropriately, communicate clearly.

5

Check authority, not confidence

Watch for options that sound assured but overstep what the person is qualified to decide.

Consultancy: leans on client relationship management, ambiguity, and delivering under deadline pressure.

Banking: leans harder on risk, compliance, and integrity - flag it even when it's socially awkward or slows things down.

Example 1: The Early Draft Request

SCENARIO

You're a first-year graduate on a client engagement team, three days before a report deadline. The client's finance director calls you directly - not your manager, who is in back-to-back meetings - and asks for the “near-final” draft findings early, informally, so his board can “get a head start.” Your manager hasn't reviewed the numbers yet, and firm policy requires manager sign-off before anything goes to a client.

A Send the draft straight away - he's senior and you don't want to damage the relationship by saying no

B Tell him you can't share anything without approval, and end the call there

C Thank him, explain the draft hasn't been through quality review, and flag his request to your manager immediately so they can call him back today

D Ignore the request until your manager is free, since it's not your decision to make

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CORRECT ANSWER: C — WHY IT WINS

Tests: whose decision this is, and managing risk without harming the relationship.

A fails — unreviewed numbers could be wrong; seniority doesn't override controls.

B is safe but abrupt — leaves the client with no path forward.

D is passive — the client is left hanging with no urgency conveyed.

C wins: acknowledges the client, protects the firm, and escalates with urgency — acknowledge → protect → escalate → close the loop.

Example 2: The Spotted Error

SCENARIO

You're a graduate analyst. While waiting for a meeting, you notice a printout on a shared desk: a senior colleague from another team is about to email a client a financial model, and you spot what looks like a formula error that would materially overstate a projected return. You don't work on that account and have never spoken to this colleague - and the email is scheduled to send in 20 minutes.

A Say nothing - it's not your account, and pointing out a senior colleague's mistake could look like overstepping

B Quietly fix the error yourself in the file if you can access it, so no one is embarrassed

C Go directly to the colleague's manager to report the error, bypassing the colleague entirely

D Approach the colleague directly and privately, explain what you noticed, and let them decide how to verify and act - flagging the time pressure

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CORRECT ANSWER: D — WHY IT WINS

Tests: courage to flag risk, balanced against respecting seniority and ownership.

A is the “do nothing” trap - a material client error is a real risk; seniority isn't a reason to stay silent.

B is worse, not better - editing someone else's work without authority breaks ownership.

C jumps over the person's head without letting them respond - disproportionate, and unverified.

D wins: respects ownership, surfaces the risk to the person who can act, states the time pressure calmly - raise it with the right person, quickly.