

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING

Depending on the organisation, psychometric (or “psych”) testing can form part of the job selection process. Testing may take place at any stage throughout the process but is usually between interview(s) and offer. This tip sheet aims to explain the different types of tests and their purpose. You will learn what to expect in each of them, the level of difficulty and how your scores are interpreted.

INTRODUCTION

Psychometric tests are a standard and scientific method used to measure your mental capabilities and behavioural style. Tests are designed to assess your suitability for a role based on the preferred personality characteristics and aptitude (or cognitive abilities ie “smarts”). Employers may use the information collected to identify hidden aspects of candidates that are difficult to extract from an interview. Depending on the timing, the results may be used to guide the questions to be asked in a future interview or a reference check.

TYPES OF TESTS

Personality Tests

People often dread personality tests because of their fear of the unknown and what may be revealed. Personality tests measure your behavioural style, preferences and motivators - for example, whether you prefer working in a group or independently or whether you prefer taking charge over situations or following others. There is no right or wrong answer because they measure preferences. These tests are usually not timed.

- Some personality tests incorporate specific questions to detect your level of honesty. One of these honesty scales is called “social desirability”. These questions deal with less desirable behaviours that most people would have demonstrated at least once in the past, such as “I have never told a white lie, even to save someone’s feelings”. A test-taker who denies these common less desirable behaviours may receive a high social desirability score which is used to identify people who may be trying to fake the personality test.
- Personality tests are designed to include several questions measuring an identical personality trait. Hence, it is important to respond consistently.

Egs: OPQ, NEO PI-R, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI).

Aptitude Tests

Aptitude tests measure your work-related cognitive capacity (“smarts”) - usually verbal, numeric and abstract reasoning. The concept is that each question has only one correct answer and it is possible that all test questions can be solved – the difference between people is how quickly they can complete the test correctly.

This is why these tests are often timed. Only 1-5% of the population can solve all the test questions correctly within the allowed timeframe.

- The most difficult questions in aptitude tests are usually placed at the end. However, every question is worth the same number of points. This means that there is no bonus for figuring out a hard question over an easier one.
- Don't stop working until the time runs out. If you have finished and have time, go back (if allowed) and re-examine the questions you were unsure of. We also suggest you double-check your answers to the very first questions. These questions are generally very easy so many people can make simple mistakes.
- In some aptitude tests, you can't skip questions. In this case, if you hit a mental block, you have to guess the answer to the question in front of you. Some test-takers waste more than a third of their time bogged down on a handful of tough questions. You have to learn how to guess, move on, and cut your losses after spending more than a few minutes on a question.

Egs: Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT), Watson Glaser, Ravens.

Verbal Aptitude or Reasoning Tests

A verbal reasoning test is one of the most commonly used tests to measure your decision-making, problem-solving, strategic thinking and suitability and potential for the role or organisation generally. There are several types of verbal reasoning tests.

- Ensure you are rested and in a place with no distractions.
- Read each question/instruction carefully as they can change between questions and sections.

Eg: Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal.

Numerical Aptitude or Reasoning Tests

A numerical reasoning test measures your ability to interpret, analyse and draw logical conclusions based on numerical data presented in graphs and tables. A numerical reasoning test is not designed to measure your mathematical ability but your ability to use numerical data as a tool to make reasoned decisions and solve problems.

- Aim to complete all the questions in the numerical reasoning test, but don't stress if you don't. The test is designed so only a small percentage of test-takers can answer all questions correctly within the time limit.
- Get familiar with the basic functions on your calculator. Numerical reasoning questions are designed to measure your ability to interpret numerical data and use this data to make informed decisions. They are not measuring your math skills. Therefore, in most cases you will be allowed to use a calculator. Check beforehand if this is the case.

Eg: Rust Advanced Numerical Reasoning Appraisal (RANRA).

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T 1300 our eap (1300 687 327)
E info@convergeintl.com.au
convergeinternational.com.au

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Abstract Aptitude or Conceptual Reasoning Tests

The abstract (or conceptual) reasoning test measures your lateral thinking skills or fluid intelligence. This is your ability to quickly identify patterns, logical rules and trends in new data, then to integrate this information and apply it to solve problems. It measures what most people would refer to as the ability to “think on your feet”.

Employers use your results to learn the extent to which you are capable of:

- Learning new skills efficiently.
- Thinking strategically about problems and developments within the relevant field.
- Analysing new information quickly, integrating it to the overall scheme of things and applying it to solve work-related problems.
- Processing and analysing new work-related data in a logical manner.

Egs: Raven's Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM) and Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM).

Mechanical Aptitude or Reasoning Tests

Mechanical aptitude tests, or mechanical reasoning tests, are usually administered for technical and engineering positions. These tests measure your ability to understand and apply mechanical concepts and principles to solve problems. Each test question offers you a mechanical scenario that might include acceleration, gravity, friction, pressure, moments, energy transformation, kinetic and potential energy, work and power, levers, pulleys, screws, gears, springs etc.

TESTS FOR MANAGERS

Psychometric testing for managers will usually concentrate on leadership skills and/or emotional intelligence (being able to recognise, understand, use and manage emotions appropriately).

Examples: Baron EQ Test, MSCEIT, Lominger Leadership Suite.

ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Formal psychometric tests may involve supervision and/or explanation by a psychologist. Other tests can be undertaken without supervision (eg on the computer at home) and are referred to as “self-directed” tests.

You may be required to attend an assessment centre so you can be supervised while undertaking your test(s). This can take anything from a half-day to three days. Being requested to attend a centre and undertake a battery of involved and unfamiliar tests can provoke tension and pressure in most people.

- In most cases, you will be asked to take a series of tests including timed and non-timed tests. While you are allowed to complete all the tests in one sitting, you should have a break between each test. Having a break will help you to build your mental capabilities and avoid fatigue that can impair your performance.
- Maintain a serious and concrete attitude throughout the course of your assessments.

GENERAL ADVICE

- Practice makes perfect. As with any other test, practising aptitude tests and becoming familiarised with the personality test reduces stress and other factors that can skew your results.
- Don't be tempted to believe that your behaviour and responses are considered genuine only if you answer test questions without preparation. Preparation is critical to ensure you demonstrate your full potential.

PRACTICE TESTS

Two websites with practice tests are:

- www.cebglobal.com/shldirect/en/practice-tests
- www.psychometricinstitute.com.au

ARE YOU ENTITLED TO YOUR RESULTS?

Psychometric tests are expensive and the cost is usually met by the potential employer. You can always ask for feedback on your assessments. Keep in mind, many clinical psychometric tests will require you to be “debriefed” by a psychologist or accredited test provider.

The results may form “personal information” protected by the Privacy Act 1988 and therefore be accessible by the individual. However, if you have signed an agreement directly or indirectly (ie by proceeding with the test in an online assessment) foregoing any rights to feedback, then the organisation is not obliged to provide you with information on your results. If no such agreement has been made, it is important to negotiate with the organisation to provide a brief summary of the findings of the psychometric assessment.

Adapted from www.psychometricinstitute.com.au and assisted by our friends at Safe Select.

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