Psychometric Tests
Used in Selection

A guide to:
• Different types of selection tests
• How to improve your performance
• Where to find practice tests

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Psychometric tests are objective measures by which employers can assess individual applicants to help them select the right candidates for jobs. This publication describes how they are used, especially in recruitment to graduate-level jobs and work experience, and provides advice on how to increase your chances of success. It is very common to have to take tests online when first applying to an employer, particularly for graduate jobs or placements with large organisations. In this case, the results are used to decide whether you are invited to interview, or perhaps to complete a full application. Alternatively, many employers use tests later in the application process, typically at an interview or assessment centre, where the results form part of the final selection decision along with the other information collected about candidates.

Whether tests take place at an employer’s premises or online, employers should make it very clear what you have to do and explain the nature of the test before you begin. Any employer using tests should inform you in advance, and prior to a testing session will probably provide you with practice examples.

**Types of Psychometric Tests Used in Selection**

Assessment tests do vary and employers are increasingly developing their own bespoke versions, so the exact nature of tests you may face cannot be predicted. However, the main types are:

- Ability/Aptitude Tests
- Situational Judgement Tests
- Personality/Interest Questionnaires

**Aptitude Tests**

Aptitude tests aim to assess specific abilities and are made up of a set number of questions that are to be answered in a given amount of time. The types of aptitude test you are most likely to come across are Verbal Reasoning, Numerical Reasoning and Diagrammatic Reasoning with the possibility, for certain occupations, of Mechanical and Spatial ability also being tested.

Verbal Reasoning looks at your ability to understand and reason with written information, while Numerical Reasoning refers to your ability to understand and reason with data presented in various numerical formats. Diagrammatic Reasoning (sometimes called Abstract or Inductive Reasoning) relates to your ability to reason with abstract information presented in the form of symbols and diagrams. There is also a trend among some employers to assess Critical Reasoning to find out how well you are able to interpret complex written information using analytical and logical thinking.

The Careers Service’s Profiling for Success includes online practice aptitude tests. These replicate tests used by employers and you receive your results and feedback via email. If you are a student, you can access Profiling for Success from www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/profiling. Alternatively the required log-in codes are available from the Careers Service (contact details appear on the back of this publication).

**Situational Judgement Tests**

A type of test that is becoming more common is the Situational Judgement Test or Situational Judgement Questionnaire. SJTs assess candidates’ judgement in solving work-related problems. Designed specifically for the employer concerned, they simulate typical situations that might occur in the job you are applying to. They then offer several possible actions to deal with the problem. Your task is to either select the most effective response, or in some cases the most and the least effective responses. You can find more on SJTs, including free practice tests at Assessment Day www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test.htm and The European Commission’s Personnel Selection Office http://europa.eu/epso/discover/prepa_test/sample_test/index_en.htm.

**Personality Questionnaires**

Employers use personality questionnaires to help gain a picture of how people match up to specific jobs and organisations. They are concerned with people’s typical or preferred ways of behaving, such as the way they relate to others, and approach and solve problems. Questionnaires explore the broad range of personality characteristics that are generally relevant to the world of work. For employers the benefit is that the same carefully designed and fully researched questions are asked of all candidates and their answers are captured in a fair and consistent way. When used with other forms of assessment they can help to ensure a more thorough exploration of how well a person is suited to a particular job and how they will fit into the existing workforce.

The Careers Service’s Profiling for Success includes online personality assessments which are useful for career planning. If you are a student, you can access Profiling for Success from www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/profiling. Alternatively the required passwords are available from the Careers Service. The assessments cover different aspects of your personality, including a personality type inventory called ‘Type Dynamics’. There are resources in the Careers Service that provide further reading about personality type, once you have completed Type Dynamics.
HOW TO MASTER PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

If you are likely to encounter psychometric tests when you are job hunting it is wise to be as prepared as possible. The ‘Further help’ section of this publication lists resources to help you succeed at psychometric tests. In addition, our careers events include a talk each semester on psychometric tests. Check the ‘What’s On Diary’ at www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/events or watch the online version available via the psychometric tests section of our website www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/psychometric.

Prior to a test session...
• Make sure you know which type of tests are to be used, i.e. aptitude tests and/or personality questionnaires
• Use online or paper-based practice tests including the resources listed later in this publication
• For numerical tests, if you have not studied maths for some time, it is a good idea to revise how to do calculations such as percentages and fractions, and familiarise yourself with the functions of a calculator
• For verbal tests, if you are not used to reading complicated texts that test your comprehension, you could practice by reading quality newspapers or magazines with well argued articles
• If there are any factors which are likely to affect your performance e.g. if English is not your first language or if you are dyslexic, make sure that your test administrator knows in advance
• Inform employers if you have a disability. Psychometric tests can be made available in alternative formats for disabled people e.g. in large print or Braille, or additional time may be allowed when taking tests
If you want to discuss any aspect of psychometric tests with a Careers Adviser, book an advice session at the Careers Service.

On the day...
• For online tests, make sure that you are relaxed, have read all the instructions on screen and have tried the on-line examples, if available
• Before you begin the test ensure that you have all the resources you need and will not be disturbed

Pay careful attention to the time allocation in aptitude tests. It is very common for candidates not to complete all the questions in the test, but do aim to work as quickly and accurately as you can
• Read each question carefully before answering. Try to avoid making silly mistakes and do not spend too long on any one question
• In personality questionnaires, there are usually no time restrictions and there are no specifically right or wrong answers. Try to answer as honestly as possible. Avoid giving what you feel is the ‘socially desirable’ answer or the answer you imagine the employer wants. Many questionnaires have an in-built mechanism to check for honesty and consistency in replies

After the test session...
In aptitude tests, employers judge a candidate’s ability by comparing the results against those of a particular group of people who are successful in that role. If a personality inventory has been used, the responses are used to assess the candidate’s suitability for the job and the organisation, and the way you responded may form the basis for questions asked at an interview.
Important: if you fail to progress with one employer, this does not mean you will be unsuccessful with another, as scoring criteria vary between employers. Tests are challenging and it is common for candidates to not meet the level required but practice and familiarity with test procedures can lead to improvement. Remember, too, that not all recruiters use tests and many jobs do not require you to sit them. If you want to discuss issues relating to psychometric tests, book an advice session at the Careers Service.
FURTHER HELP

ONLINE TESTS

Profiling for Success comprises three practice aptitude tests (abstract, numerical and verbal reasoning), and three personality instruments. The log-in codes can be found via www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/profiling or are available on request. More details about Profiling for Success at www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/pdf/profiling.pdf.

SHL Direct www.shldirect.com Psychometric tests publisher with example questions and practice tests, including tests in a number of different languages. Includes verbal, numerical, inductive and deductive reasoning and IT knowledge tests as well as personality and motivation questionnaires plus SJT/online interview.

Cubiks http://practicetests.cubiks.com Verbal and numerical practice tests at Manager/Graduate level. Diagrammatic reasoning practice leaflet also available.

Assessment Day A practice SJT www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test.htm.

e-financial careers www.students.efinancialcareers.co.uk/numerical_test.html 3 sample numerical tests for finance careers, with feedback.

Graduates First www.graduatesfirst.com Free and priced verbal, numerical and logical reasoning tests with links to information on specific tests used by employers in recruitment.

Job Test Prep www.jobtestprep.co.uk Range of priced and free practice tests with tips including a resource for the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Test.

Keirsey temperament sorter www.keirsey.com/sorter/instruments2.aspx?partid=0 Personal development tool that is also a useful way to familiarise yourself with some types of personality inventories.

Practice Test Leaflets Subject to availability - please check at our Reception.

Watson-Glaser critical thinking appraisal - Watson-Glaser is a widely used test of critical thinking skills. Our leaflet contains one example for each of the five tests: inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation and evaluation of arguments, plus additional exercises.

A SELECTION OF BOOKS IN THE CAREERS SERVICE

Books that cover most of the different types of tests are available on loan or on reference at the Careers Service.

Graduate psychometric test workbook - sections on: verbal reasoning tests requiring analysis of passages of information; and numerical based tests, comprising two with individual maths questions and one using tables and graphs. Provides answers and explanations plus help interpreting your scores and a glossary of mathematical and grammatical terms.

How to master personality questionnaires - information on what personality is, how it is measured, and some of the types of personality questionnaires used, with examples.

How to pass advanced aptitude tests - tests and explanations for visual logic, numerical insight, verbal concepts, extrapolation, technical and analytical skills, as well as personality and career analysis questionnaires.

How to pass advanced numeracy tests - lots of example questions and mock tests in quantitative reasoning, data interpretation, and using business data.

How to pass graduate psychometric tests - mainly Maths and English tests. Also has verbal reasoning examples, speed and accuracy tests and an abstract reasoning test.

How to pass technical selection tests - tests commonly used in selection for 'technical' industries, e.g. construction and engineering. Includes practice technical tests in verbal, numerical, diagrammatic and mechanical reasoning, with a glossary of technical terms.

Practice tests for diagrammatic & abstract reasoning - timed practice tests, answers and explanations.

Psychometric tests for graduates - book with the biggest variety of tests including: verbal, numerical, abstract and diagrammatic, spatial, mechanical, accuracy and management tests. Management test examples include: scenarios, brainstorm and 'fast track' tests. The book also includes very brief examples of personality questionnaires.

Psychometric tests (The testing series) - practice tests in verbal, numerical and spatial reasoning; also work rate, concentration, mechanical comprehension and fault analysis tests.

Succeed at psychometric testing - practice tests for diagrammatic and abstract reasoning – lots of timed reasoning tests, with answers and explanations and advice on interpreting your score.

Succeed at psychometric testing - practice tests for numerical reasoning advanced level - provides an explanation of test types including general maths, tables and graphs, and 'quantitative relations'.

You're hired! Psychometric tests - sample tests with advice on how to perform at your best and what employers are measuring.