

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS



What are they ?

Psychometric tests are designed to measure your intellectual capabilities for thinking and reasoning. There are 2 main types:

Aptitude/ability tests:

Ability tests assess overall ability whilst aptitude tests assess specific individual capabilities. The most commonly used tests assess verbal and numerical reasoning skills, other types will also assess your diagrammatic/spatial reasoning. Some organisations will test all 3, others only one or two depending on the position you have applied for. Tests will generally be either paper and pencil based or computer-based exercises, often in the form of multiple choice questions.

Personality assessments

These aim to measure if your personal attributes are suitable for a particular work environment. They can assess individual behaviour, attitudes or opinions as well as motivation, values and interests.

The best way to approach this type of test is to answer the questions as straightforwardly as possible. Trying to guess what the employer is looking for could be counter-productive – you don't want a job which doesn't suit you!

Why are they used?

During the selection process a variety of methods can be used to give organisations a thorough assessment of your suitability for the post and help them to choose between candidates. These include: application forms/CVs, interviews, assessment centres, presentations and psychometric tests.

It is your overall performance which counts and the tests do not carry any more weight than other aspects of the selection process.

You may find however that some organisations use tests prior to a first interview and there is often a 'pass mark' to achieve before you can proceed to the next stage of the application process.

Psychometric tests have the advantage over other methods of assessment because they:

- are objective and fair
- tend to predict success in the role more effectively
- can provide useful information about an applicant's personality, motivation or what they are capable of doing
- are useful for assessing training and development needs

How to prepare

It is **not** possible to look at the actual tests used by organisations. You are not able to buy these tests, take copies of them or get past papers as this would limit their effectiveness.

There are however a number of things you can do to prepare:

- As part of the Careers Service Careers Programmes two types of sessions are offered: Introductory sessions which give an overview of different types of tests and practice psychometric test sessions. Visit the Careers Service website for more information and details on how to book a place
- Practicing will help to familiarise you with the demands of tests. This should help you to feel more confident
- Make use of books and websites with test questions (see page 4 for suggestions)
- Puzzles including word games and diagrammatic puzzles. These can help you develop an analytical frame of mind
- Brush up on your basic maths. Practice basic arithmetic including addition, subtraction, division, ratios and percentages.
- Reading financial company reports can be good practice
- Verbal reasoning skills are more difficult to practice. Try reading broadsheet newspapers, technical

reports and business journals. Practice extracting the main points from paragraphs of information analysing and summarising their meaning

- Book an appointment with an adviser if you have particular concerns
- If you have dyslexia or if English is not your first language, you should notify the employer in advance of taking the test

Advice on how to approach a test session

- Arrive in good time and make yourself comfortable
- Listen to the instructions carefully and ask the test administrator for clarification if you don't understand
- Follow the instructions you are given exactly
- Make or change answers clearly in the correct manner
- Many aptitude tests are designed with more questions than you can answer in the time allowed. Don't worry if you do not finish all the questions
- Most tests tend not to be negatively marked for wrong answers. If this is the case, the best approach is to take your best guess if you are not sure of an answer. You should take guidance on this point from the test administrator at the start of the session
- If you get stuck, go back to the practice questions and answers at the start of the test
- You will usually be told how long the test will take and how many questions there are to answer. Try not to spend too long on one question, move on if you get stuck. You can return to a question at the end if you have time
- If you have spare time at the end, check your answers
- After the test, ask for feedback
- If you have not done well, remember there may be a number of reasons for this including misunderstanding what you had to do, answering questions too slowly, a lack of practice or feeling tired and unable to concentrate. You may find it useful to discuss your performance with a careers adviser

Useful resources

Websites: the following have useful information on a range of tests and include some which have practice tests:

www.psychtesting.org.uk - The British Psychological Society

<http://www.shldirect.com> - SHL Practice Aptitude Tests

www.gre.org - you will need a GRE (Graduate Record Exam) score if you are applying for postgraduate study in the USA

www.mba.com/mba/TaketheGMAT American and many European business schools need a GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) score with applications

<http://www.gamsat.co.uk/> - Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admissions Test (GAMAST). Used in UK by some medical schools as part of selection procedures

<http://www.keirsey.com> online personality assessment

www.morrisby.com - professional test provider with online examples of ability tests

www.markparkinson.co.uk - lists a wide range of websites which offer personality, ability and aptitude practice tests

www.psychometric-success.com - offers help and advice on psychometric, personality and aptitude test as well as a very wide range of practice tests. Very useful downloadable eBook: 'Psychometric Success'

Loan materials from the Careers Information Centre include:

Psychometric tests for graduates and Practice psychometric tests - Andrea Shavick

How to master psychometric tests - Mark Parkinson

Brilliant selection test results - Susan Hodgson

How to pass verbal reasoning tests - H. Tolley & K. Thomas

Practice Tests for Critical Verbal Reasoning - Peter Rhodes

Succeed at psychometric testing. Practice tests for verbal reasoning (advanced level) - Jeremy Kourdi

How to pass numerical reasoning tests - Heidi Smith

The advanced numeracy test workbook, Graduate psychometric test workbook and How to pass selection tests - Mike Byron

Other resources:

The Times—CD-Rom: Psychometric tests volume 1