

Careers and Employability Service

Psychometric Tests

Introduction

Psychometric tests are commonly used by employers as an objective way of assessing candidates during the recruitment process. This handout will explain what they are, how they work and how you can improve your performance. Your objective will be to answer as many questions accurately as possible within the time allowed.

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What are Psychometric Tests?

Psychometric tests are designed to measure your intellectual capabilities for thinking and reasoning. These are the main types you may encounter in the recruitment process:

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; others will also assess your diagrammatic/spatial reasoning or logical processing. Each organisation chooses which and how many tests to use dependent on the role applied for, sometimes tests are customised for the organisation. Tests will be either on-line or paper based, often in the form of multiple choice questions.
- Verbal Reasoning tests usually consist of a piece of text with questions which test comprehension and reasoning skills.
- Numerical Reasoning tests present questions which test your understanding and use of number, including skills such as percentage and ratio.
- Diagrammatic Reasoning tests present abstract information in the form of shapes and symbols and test your ability to analyse and deduce patterns and logical flow
- Critical Reasoning tests are high level analytical tests, most commonly used in law, but also by other organisations, one example is the Watson-Glaser Test.

Personality assessments

- These aim to measure whether 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, but with the work or professional setting in mind.

Situational Judgement Tests

- These are becoming more widely used. The tests assess your judgement in solving work-related problems and are usually designed for the specific employer. Each question involves a realistic work scenario and you are given a range of actions to evaluate, or asked to formulate an action based on the information given. The tests are designed to assess your judgement in work situations.

Specific Entrance tests

- There are a number of specific tests which you may be required to take for entry to certain professional training or university courses such as Medicine and the Bar, or to study in the United States, see the [Resources](#) section for more.

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.

Some organisations use tests as a first sift of applicants and there is often a 'pass mark' to achieve before you can proceed to the next stage of the application process. The 'pass mark' may be varied for different graduate entry routes with the same employer. Some organisations will ask you to take (or re-take) tests as part of an assessment centre or interview day.

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

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Once you are invited to take tests, you may only have a week or so to complete, so it makes sense to prepare in advance. Find out what kinds of tests the organisations you are applying to use, so that you can focus your preparation effectively. Check if you are allowed to use a calculator for the numerical tests.

Contact the company if you need to delay taking the tests due to a serious commitment such as exams, they may be willing to reschedule.

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

Practice will build confidence and familiarity, and should build up core skills (eg with percentage calculations, reading and analysis), as well as speed. Aim to achieve a level of comfort so that you can actually enjoy the challenge, rather than feel negative or unprepared. If the job is worth it, so are the preparation and the tests.

How to build your skills

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- A list of sites offering free practice tests and advice are listed in the [Resources](#) section at the end of this handout
- Puzzles including word games and diagrammatic puzzles can help you develop an analytical frame of mind. Career Destinations holds a large number of practice [books and e-books](#), which include worked examples for you to borrow
- Book a place on the 'Psychometric Tests and How to Prepare for Them' workshop through the Career Destinations Events Calendar
- Brush up on your basic maths. Practice skills such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, ratios and percentages. The [practiceaptitudetests.com](#) website has some useful video explanations of topics such as calculating ratios and percentages. Calculators are normally

allowed

- To develop your critical and verbal reasoning skills try reading quality newspapers, technical reports and business journals, or company reports, especially the financial analysis sections. Practice extracting the main points from paragraphs of information, analysing and summarising their meaning. We also have books to assist with preparation
- Careers have paper copies of a Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal which you can arrange to take in the careers centre

Declaring a disability

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- If you have dyslexia or another disability you can notify the employer in advance and reasonable adjustments should be made in order to minimise the impact of the disability. For example, extra time, large print materials, or other accommodations can be made
- Psychometric tests can be made available in alternative formats such as large print or Braille
- If you would like reasonable adjustments it is helpful to discuss this earlier in the application process, or as soon as you receive your invitation. Often there will be a very short deadline to complete tests and if the deadline expires before you have managed to talk to the employer there may be delays reinstating your application
- You may find it helpful to attend our workshop 'Disability Disclosure (improving your employability)' – ask in the careers centre
- The GraduatesFirst tests on our website can be adjusted for time, up to 25% by you, or if you need longer, ask in the careers centre. See the Resources section below

The test session

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Many aptitude tests are designed with more questions than you can answer in the time allowed. You will usually be told how long the test will take and how many questions there are to answer. Work as quickly and accurately as you can.

You may be taking the tests on-line from home or campus; it is still important to follow the guidance. Don't ask someone else to take the tests for you, you are often asked to re-sit them at the Assessment Centre.

Starting the test:

- Arrive in good time, you may not be admitted if you are late. If working at home allow enough time and make you sure you have pencil and paper and a calculator to hand
- Concentration is key, as for any exam, try you ensure you are not tired, hungry or thirsty. If allowed, or working at home, have a drink to hand. You may be required to stay seated for an hour or more
- Switch your phone to silent, or off. A watch will help you to manage the time
- Listen to the instructions carefully and ask the test administrator for clarification if you do not understand
- Follow the instructions you are given exactly
- Most tests tend not to be negatively marked for wrong answers. If this is the case, you could make a 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

Doing the test:

- Mark or change answers clearly in the correct manner
- Keep up the pace, do not 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.
- Be organised in your notes and rough workings, so that you know which question you are working on/have missed out
- If you have spare time at the end, check your answers
- If required to go straight on from one test to another, just take a minute to stand up or stretch and perhaps take a drink before starting the second test
- By the end you should feel drained from the effort of concerted concentration

Common difficulties for numeracy tests

- Not being competent in common skills such as ratio, percentages and currency conversions.

- Not paying attention to the detail of information given or the question:
Miss-reading units or scale from tables and graphs, eg 10,000 viz. 1,000
Rounding, eg 'give answer to the nearest 1000'
Change of units between questions
- Understanding terms such as Gross and Net, Median and Mean

Tips for numeracy tests

- Be very comfortable with percentage and other calculations, including how to do them on a calculator
- Understand common terms, doing lots of practice will help identify these
- Keep tidy rough workings, label results, cross out errors, you may be using the same calculations in more than one question
- Use guesstimates to reduce the number of calculations required – but with care. If you can confidently rule out several answers, this will increase your chance of guessing the correct answer

Common difficulties for verbal reasoning tests

- The text and questions are deliberately confusing or inconclusive
- The text may be on topics you already feel you know a lot about
- Misreading and not paying attention to details may result in multiple wrong answers from the same piece of text

Tips for verbal reasoning tests

- Don't extrapolate or deduce information, you may not have all the information needed to give a definite answer
- Don't rely on your existing pre-conceptions or knowledge, base your answers only on the text provided
- Check for key words such as 'in general'
- Do use any remaining time to check your answers

Tips for Situational Judgement Tests

- Different employers' tests vary a great deal, so make sure you read the instructions for answering the questions carefully. Look closely at the situation, the possible answers and what you are being asked to do
- Familiarise yourself with the employer's values, their mission statement, the work setting
- Keep in mind the competencies being sought for the role applied for, as well as the tasks involved in the job
- Use the information provided rather than making assumptions about the scenario
- Don't linger too long on each question
- Answer honestly, or you may find yourself in an environment that doesn't suit you

After the test

- If you have not done well, remember there may be a number of reasons for this including lack of experience, misunderstanding, answering questions too slowly, or feeling tired and unable to concentrate
- Many candidates fail tests on the first few attempts, it does not mean you cannot do the job, it means you need to improve
- Ask for feedback, try to recollect the types of questions you found particularly hard and refocus your preparation
- You may have to wait a period of time before reapplying to the same organisation, but previous failures are not likely to influence a company's decision or your career path once you are successful

Resources

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- **<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/students/application-support/psychometrics.page?>**
- **Free Tests for University of Southampton students (Practice Tests tab from above link)**
These are designed to provide practice numerical & verbal aptitude tests, personality tests and a learning styles test on-line. These tests have been provided by major test publishers GraduatesFirst, Kenexa and Profiling for Success. Completing personality and

learning styles tests can help you become more self-aware which is important in career choice and progression

- **Websites for information and free sample tests (Further Reading tab from above link)**

Books

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- The Careers and Employability Service holds many books in the centre and on-line e-books with detailed examples, explanations and practice questions for you to borrow or access through Webcat.
- There are also books and e-books to help with University entrance tests including **Medicine and Dentistry**. The catalogues for both can be accessed from the e-books page <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/students/ebooks.page>