

# Psychometric Tests

**Psychometric tests** are structured exercises used to measure various aspects of aptitude, competence, skill, sensitivity, memory, intelligence and personality.

Some employers use these tests as part of their recruitment and selection methods. You may also use such tests on a personal level to help with career decision-making. There are two main types of test:

- aptitude tests, which assess your abilities in specific areas such as numeracy
- personality questionnaires, which give a profile of you as an individual.

These may be used at different points in the selection process. Some employers deploy them early on, perhaps interviewing only those who achieve a certain score in an aptitude test. Others use them towards the final stages of the process.

## **APTITUDE OR ABILITY TESTS**

These tests are designed to test your ability to learn the skills and knowledge required for a job. They most commonly assess your verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning abilities and generally take the form of multiple-choice questions which have right or wrong answers. They are administered under exam conditions with strict time limits. For example, you might be given 30 minutes for 30 or more questions. Usually questions become progressively harder and some tests are deliberately designed with more questions than can be completed in the time allowed. Marks are awarded for the number of correct answers given.

Aptitude tests calculate your potential, rather than your knowledge. For example, numerical tests are not necessarily about how accurately you can do algebra or quadratic equations, but are an indication of mental agility and accuracy; to see how quickly your mind is able to understand numbers. Similarly, verbal tests measure your understanding of written text, not (usually) your vocabulary, grammar or spelling.

Some employers request that you do the assessment online at a location away from their offices; others may invite you to their premises for a full or half day of assessments and may use either computers or paper and pencils to administer tests.

There is not usually a pass mark as such. Your score is compared to how other people have performed in the test in the past - what is called a norm group of, for example, other graduates or people successfully doing the job for which you have applied. You are usually expected to do as well as, or better than, the average scores within the norm group.

## **How to approach the test**

In advance:

- Your careers service may run practice test sessions which you might find it helpful to attend, particularly if you are unfamiliar with the test procedure. In addition, this will give you a chance to identify your strengths and any weaknesses that you might want to address. This should increase your confidence in a real test situation.
- Practising the types of questions you will encounter in an assessment will make you aware of how they are structured and what is expected of you and could improve your performance on the day. Your college careers service may have books of practice questions for different types of tests. There are also many practice tests available online and your careers service should have a list of these.
- You could also try having a go at word games, mathematical teasers, puzzles with diagrams etc, as these may help you achieve a logical and analytical state of mind.
- If you have a disability and require special provisions or adjustments, such as extra time, contact the employer about this in advance. In some cases you may be exempt from these tests as it might be considered a reasonable adjustment that the abilities they are testing are measured in another way.

The night before:

- Make sure you get a good night's sleep the evening before the test and plan to arrive in good time at the test location, with a positive frame of mind.

On the day:

- If you usually wear glasses and/or use a hearing aid take them with you.
- Inform the administrator if you are on medication that makes you drowsy.

During the test:

- The test will have some practice questions at the start. Make sure you understand these thoroughly before the test itself begins and, if you do not, this is your opportunity to ask the administrator to explain them properly.
- Try not to be overawed by the formal nature of the test, or to be panicked by the time pressure.
- Read the instructions carefully before starting.
- You need to be both quick and accurate. Strike a balance between working quickly and perhaps making more errors and a slower pace which gives you less time to complete the questions.
- If you are stuck on a question, press on to the next one. However, do not abandon a question prematurely if with a few extra seconds of thought you might solve it.
- Resist the temptation to check each answer too thoroughly as you could waste valuable time if you do.
- If you are not sure of an answer put down your best guess and move on. However, avoid wild guessing - in

some tests marks are taken off for wrong answers.

- Sometimes the questions get harder as you work through them, so do not worry if the later questions take longer to answer.

A large number of employers are now running online tests, as it is more cost-effective. You will be asked to complete and submit the test within a set time period. Online tests usually consist of multiple choice questions to which you respond by ticking the relevant box.

#### **Some tips for online tests**

- Make sure you understand the instructions; you will have some practice questions to complete before you start on the real thing.
- Avoid someone interrupting you. Make sure you are in a quiet room and will not be disturbed. This might mean informing others around you that you will be taking an online test and you would appreciate their support.
- Sit in a comfortable chair with a well-positioned table and adopt a relaxed posture.
- It is also very important to make sure your computer connection is a good one.

#### **Tips for maths tests**

If you have not studied maths for some time, it is a good idea to spend some time refreshing your memory. You are often not allowed to use a calculator, so brushing up on your mental arithmetic can save you time and give you confidence. You may want to glance at Maths books aimed at school pupils just to check the basics.

- Go over your times tables.
- Remind yourself of some fundamental calculations such as percentages and fractions.
- Check that you can do long multiplication.
- Practise estimating answers; even with a calculator this can help make sure you are on the right track.
- Questions are often based on your ability to interpret data presented in tables - get hold of a copy of the Financial Times, or a similar journal, and spend time becoming familiar with reading tables of information.
- Do not worry about more advanced maths such as algebra or equations. These will not be tested unless the employer tells you explicitly that this is the case

#### **Tips for verbal tests**

- These are more difficult to improve easily but you could get some practice reading complicated texts about subjects you do not understand.
- Try extracting the main points from passages of information and summarising their meaning.
- You could read friends' textbooks, magazines such as The Economist (for non-economists!) or some unfamiliar novelists such as James Joyce or Dickens.

### **PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRES**

Unlike aptitude tests, there are no right or wrong answers in personality questionnaires. Selectors use them to identify characteristics that are appropriate to a specific job role, not to look for one ideal type. Personality questionnaires can explore the way you tend to react to, or deal with, different situations.

They can, therefore, help to indicate the way you might relate to other people; your work style; your ability to deal with your own and others' emotions; your motivations and determination; and your general outlook.

#### **Some tips for personality tests**

- Be yourself. You will not know exactly what personal qualities the selectors are seeking. Quite often they are looking for a variety of different personalities rather than just one profile. In addition, the questionnaires usually contain checks which will highlight inconsistencies in your approach.
- Employers will not usually give these questionnaires a lot of weight, as they are not as reliable as some other selection methods. However, recruiters may use your profile to structure your interview questions. For example, if your profile suggests that you are not good at teamwork, they will ask you questions about teamwork in the interview.
- The questionnaires are usually untimed, but it is recommended that you put down your first reaction to the questions rather than spend time pondering their meaning.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

#### **Books:**

- *How to Succeed at Interviews and Other Selection Methods*, The Careers Group, 2007
- *How to Master Psychometric Tests*, Mark Parkinson, Kogan Page, 2008
- *How to Pass Graduate Psychometric Tests*, Mike Bryon, Kogan Page, 2007
- *How to Pass Professional Level Psychometric Tests*, Sam Al-Jajjoka, Kogan Page, 2004. (Contains practice tests for the IT, finance and recruitment sectors)
- *How to Master Personality Questionnaires*, Mark Parkinson, Kogan Page, 2000
- *The Times Book of IQ Tests*, Philip Carter & Ken Russell, Kogan Page, 2005
- *How to Succeed in Psychometric Tests*, David Cohen, Sheldon Press, 2007
- *The Ultimate Psychometric Test Book*, Mike Bryon, Kogan Page, 2006

#### **Useful websites:**

- [www.shldirect.com](http://www.shldirect.com) the website of one of the UK's largest test providers contains verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning tests - timed practice and feedback given
- [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/tests](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/tests) general information on what to expect, plus some typical questions, links to more practice tests and advice on assessment centres and interviews
- [www.psychometric-success.com](http://www.psychometric-success.com) provides the chance to try numerical, verbal, abstract, spatial and mechanical tests and looks at the rationale behind each type of test

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