Psychometric Tests: a guide to sources of information

WHAT ARE PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS?
Psychometric testing is a measurement process used by employers to provide object measures of one or more psychological characteristics. Characteristics such as ability, aptitude and attainment can be assessed by psychometric tests; personal qualities such as beliefs, values, interests, personality can also be assessed. For more information on psychometric testing, visit the British Psychological Society (BPS) website - www.bps.org.uk - and www.psychtesting.org.uk

WHAT TYPE OF TEST MIGHT YOU FACE, AND AT WHAT STAGE?
Aptitude/Ability tests - these are the most common form of test encountered in the selection process and are designed to calculate your potential in a job, based on your ability in some of the skills required for the job. They are usually strictly timed and typically assess your verbal, numerical and/or logical reasoning skills; other types of tests will assess your diagrammatic reasoning and critical thinking skills.

Personality questionnaires - these questionnaires or inventories are designed to assess personal qualities such as personality and motivation. They can provide information about an individual’s likely behaviour across situations. They are generally self-reporting and not usually timed. They feel less like an exam as there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers, so avoid trying to guess what the employer is looking for and follow the guidelines given, e.g. to answer questions honestly.

WHY DO EMPLOYERS USE THEM?
The vast majority of large (FTSE Top 100) employers and a significant majority of medium-sized employers use some form of psychometric testing as part of their selection process.

Employers use tests because they consider them to be an objective and standardised measure, enabling them to produce a short-list of strong candidates in a relatively fair and efficient way.

Tests are designed to be reliable, valid and standardised, helping employers to make an accurate comparison between candidates. Increasingly they are online but some can be paper and pen tests.

The significance of the test result in determining who is offered the job varies greatly. For some employers, test scores have major significance; others look at candidates’ test scores alongside other evidence. Generally, the earlier in the selection procedure you are asked to take the test, the greater the significance it will have on your eventual selection.

DOES PRACTICE MAKE PERFECT?
Students often report that it is stressful to encounter these tests for the first time as part of a selection process. To reduce anxiety, try to find out all you can about the type of tests you may face and do any practice tests that the employer sends you, treating the practice test as seriously as you would the real thing.

Practice can help you feel more confident, be better prepared and aware of the importance of working as quickly and accurately as you can in the test. However, studies show that for most people, practising will only increase the scores slightly.

SOME TOP TIPS
• Get a good night’s sleep the evening before the test
• Do ensure that you follow the instructions exactly as given. Read through the questions and the answer choices very carefully.
• Sometimes it is useful to eliminate as many wrong answers as possible. For example, with numerical tests, a quick ‘guestimate’ may help you to discard several of the options without working out every single alternative.
• Avoid wildly guessing; whilst some tests simply award marks for correct answers, others penalise wrong ones.
• Both speed and accuracy are important. Ensure that you work quickly and accurately to get a good balance without spending too long on any one question; keep a close eye on the clock.
• Don’t worry if you do not finish all the questions in the time, but if you do, go over your answers again to check them.
• If you have a disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, and require special provision, you can discuss this with the employer in advance of the test session – see www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure for more on disclosure of a disability.

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Careers Service
www.imperial.ac.uk/careers
NOT GETTING THROUGH THE TEST STAGE?
If you have not done as well as you had hoped on a test, then remember that there may be a number of reasons for your poor performance. These can vary from feeling tired or under the weather on the day to being unable to concentrate due to personal problems. Sometimes misunderstanding what you had to do or panicking can affect your performance. Poor test results on the day do not necessarily mean that you are lacking in ability; you may like to discuss your test technique with a Careers Consultant.

PRACTICE TEST INFORMATION
The following sites all offer information or practice test materials:

- **Berger Aptitude Tests** - also known as ‘B-Apt’, used by some employers to test your aptitude for IT
  [www.psy-test.com](http://www.psy-test.com)
- **Civil Service ‘Faststream’** - Guidance for candidates taking online selection tests
  [www.gov.uk/faststream](http://www.gov.uk/faststream)
- **Cubiks** - online assessment information and practice sites with free numerical and verbal practice tests
  [www.cubiksonline.com/cubiks/practicetests](http://www.cubiksonline.com/cubiks/practicetests)
- **Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)** - provide a comprehensive set of sample tests for doing postgraduate study in the USA
  [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)
- **Mensa** - IQ tests and puzzles
  [www.mensa.org.uk](http://www.mensa.org.uk)
- **Psychometric Success** - Practice numerical, verbal, abstract, spatial, technical and clerical tests for free
  [www.psychometric-success.com](http://www.psychometric-success.com)
- **Situational judgement test** - practice
  [www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test.htm](http://www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test.htm)
- **Skillswise** - Improve your numeracy and literacy on the BBC website
  [www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise)
- **Prospects** - provides a range of aptitude tests and personality and career development assessment examples
  [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
- **Morrisby** - contains advice and sample abstract, verbal, numerical, perceptual, shape and mechanical test questions
  [www.morrisby.com](http://www.morrisby.com)
- **British Psychological Society** - information on tests and test usage; contains a Guide to testing people with disabilities with links to other organisations which can provide advice in this area
  [www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)
- **Fulbright Commission** - Information about GMAT & GRE from
  [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)
- **Educational Testing Service Network** - Information about TSE; TOEFL & GRE
  [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)

FURTHER INFORMATION
Available from the Careers Service:

- **Paper Aptitude tests from SHL** - Tests are available from the Careers Service to purchase at £1.00 each (GAP 3 Practice Leaflet, Advanced Management Tests Sheet and Information Technology Tests Sheet)
- **Online resources** - [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/psychometrictests](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/psychometrictests) - here you will find the page ‘Practice tests - useful weblinks’ with links to sample tests as well as ‘Top Tips for Taking Tests’
- **Personality Indicator** – Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a questionnaire that looks at your preferences, including gathering information, making decisions and how you relate to and communicate with others. The Careers Service runs regular MBTI workshops. For more information, visit [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/mbti](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/mbti)

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website:
[www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure)