



WHAT ARE PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS?

Psychometric tests are objective measures by which employers can assess the potential of individuals to help them select the right candidates for jobs. They may have to be taken online or at an interview or assessment centre. In the case of the latter, the results form only part of the final selection process and are interpreted together with all the other information collected about candidates. However, online testing at an earlier stage is used to filter out unsuitable candidates before interview. Success in online tests and applications will then lead to invitations to interviews and assessment centres when, in some cases, repeat tests are taken under exam conditions.

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

THE TWO MAIN TYPES OF PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS IN SELECTION

- Ability/Aptitude 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 is about 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 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 work out problems analytically and logically.

Our webpages www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/psychometric.html include online practice

aptitude tests as part of '**Profiling for Success**'. These replicate online tests used by employers and you receive your results and feedback via email as soon as you complete them. The passwords to access these can be obtained on request from the Careers Service.

Personality Questionnaires

Questionnaires are used by employers to help gain a picture of how people match up to different jobs. 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**' has a number of online personality assessments which are useful for career planning. For more details, visit www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/psychometric.html. The passwords to access these can be obtained on request from the Careers Service.

The assessments cover a number of 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.

WHY DO EMPLOYERS USE PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS?

- To measure a talent/skill or the potential to acquire it
- To measure intellectual capacity for logical thinking and reasoning
- To establish or confirm an applicant's competence for a job
- To compare objectively one candidate's performance with norm levels for a similar population
- As a reliable predictor of how well an individual is likely to perform in aspects of the job

HOW TO MASTER PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

If you think that you are likely to encounter some form of psychometric testing when you are job hunting it is wise to be as prepared as possible, just like any other aspect of how you present yourself to employers.

Help from the Careers Service

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 our students pages. In addition, we provide free access to 'Profiling for Success' (see the information earlier in this handout).

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
- Check whether any practice sheets are available
- For numerical tests, if you have not studied maths for some time, it is a good idea to spend some time brushing up on some of the basic calculations such as percentages and fractions, and familiarising yourself with using 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
- Psychometric tests can be made available in various alternative formats for people with a disability e.g. in large print or Braille, but notice of your requirements is necessary

On the day...

- Make sure that you arrive promptly. Latecomers will not be admitted once the formal administration of a test has started
- Check if negative marking is being used
- Ask whether it is permissible to use calculators for numerical tests
- Pay full attention to the test instructions
- Make full use of the practice exercises at the beginning of each test. If you have questions, make sure you ask them at this stage
- Answer the questions in an aptitude test using the information provided, not any prior knowledge you may have about the topic
- Pay careful attention to the time allocation. It is common for candidates not to complete all the questions in the test, but you must aim to work as quickly and accurately as you can in the time allowed
- Read each question carefully before answering. Try to avoid making silly mistakes and do not spend too long on any one question
- In paper-based tests, make sure that the number of the question you are answering on the answer sheet matches the question number in the booklet, especially if you have omitted any questions
- Try not to be overawed by the formal nature of the test, or to be panicked by the time pressure

- 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. Be as accurate (and honest) as possible. Many questionnaires have an inbuilt mechanism to check for honesty and consistency in replies
- Don't worry if some of the questions in personality questionnaires do not seem relevant
- Don't get someone else to take online tests for you. You may have to re-sit them at an assessment centre

After the test session.....

- If you have completed an aptitude test you should receive some form of feedback
- If a personality inventory has been used, the way in which you answered the questions will often indicate the strength of certain personality traits; your preferred way of relating to other people; and your approach to problem solving. This may well form the basis for some of the questions asked at a subsequent interview
- You will have undergone the experience of psychometric testing and become familiar with what is expected. Familiarity can help increase your confidence in sitting tests and make you feel less nervous if you repeat the process

FURTHER INFORMATION

Useful websites include:

- The Careers Service website www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob has a section on Psychometric Tests including an online 'Psychometric tests' talk and information on the 'Profiling for Success' online assessments
- SHL Ltd (publisher of tests) www.shldirect.com includes example questions and on-line practice tests with feedback
- Online numerical reasoning tests for financial jobs http://students.efinancialcareers.co.uk/numerical_test.htm
- Keirsey Temperament Tests www.keirsey.com and click on Kiersey Temperament Sorter-II. Similar to the Profiling for Success personality type indicator

Selected publications in the Careers Service

- Watson-Glaser critical thinking appraisal leaflet – widely used decision making assessment tool. Leaflet contains examples for each of the five Watson Glaser tests.
- How to pass graduate psychometric tests – M.Bryon
- How to pass advanced numeracy tests – M.Bryon
- Psychometric tests for graduates – A.Shavick
- How to pass technical selection tests – M.Bryon and S.Modha

For a full list of relevant websites, and resources in the Careers Service, see our handout 'Careers Service Support to Students – Preparing for Psychometric Tests'