

PLAIN
WORDS

Enter
→

Psychometric Testing

One of a series of free
articles from Plain Words



Psychometric Testing

What it involves and how to make the grade

By Terri Stonham

Recruitment Manager

Nowadays, when you apply for a new job, or go for promotion, you may well have to do a psychometric test. Psychometric tests are designed to assess your abilities, aptitude and personality. Employers consider them quicker, cheaper, and more informative than the traditional interview method of finding suitable employees.

Candidates, however, may find them daunting. But don't worry, there are ways you can improve your chances of getting a good score! First, though, let's look at what psychometric testing involves...

The two most common types of psychometric tests are **personality questionnaires** and **aptitude tests**.

Personality Questionnaires

Personality questionnaires aren't really tests, since they don't have pass or fail scores. They are designed to measure attitudes, habits and values, all of which are subjective. Personality questionnaires are sometimes included in job application forms. Most often you'll encounter them during the second stage of the selection procedure.

If you are asked to fill in a personality questionnaire, the best bet is to fill it in honestly. Don't try to give the "right" answers - because there aren't any! The employer simply wants a good overview of the type of person you are. They can then decide whether or not you would fit in at their company and also get a better idea of the type of work you might be best suited to.

The table below gives a brief idea of the sort of questions you could be asked in a personality questionnaire.

Choose which of the following sums up the way you operate at work:

When making decisions on how to organise my time...

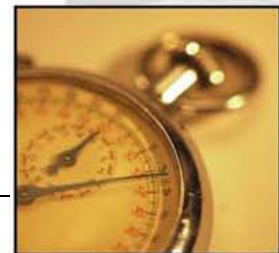
1. I carefully balance demands against deadlines and targets
2. I get started immediately on the most important item

When working in a team...

1. I try to develop a co-operative approach
2. I encourage competition to keep performance high

To try out a full personality questionnaire, used in career development at Fortune 500 companies and others, go to...

<http://www.advisorteam.com/user/ktsintro.asp>



Aptitude Tests

Aptitude tests are designed to give an objective assessment of a candidate's abilities in verbal understanding, numeracy, and reasoning skills. These tests are marked and have a set pass level. But if you fail, and happen to be a promising candidate, you are likely to be reassessed.

Employers use aptitude tests to decide if someone has the abilities needed to do the job on offer. But aptitude tests can be useful to you too. They provide a clear assessment of your strengths and limitations - which is something most of us aren't wholly objective about. You can use this information either to improve your skills or to keep your job searches targeted to the things you're best at.

The exact nature of the aptitude test you do depends on the employer. For specialist posts, such as those in IT, tests may concentrate on specific skills like using simple programming language or checking computer data and syntax. In general, aptitude tests will involve a mixture of verbal and numerical questions. Let's look at these...

Verbal Tests

The most basic types of verbal test involve spelling, or naming synonyms (words with the same meaning) or antonyms (opposites), or finding the odd one out in a set of words. More complicated are analogy tests. These involve identifying the relationship between one pair of words and then picking out another pair of words from a list, which display the same relationship.

Other verbal tests involve filling in words to complete sentences, or interchanging two words to make a sentence read coherently.

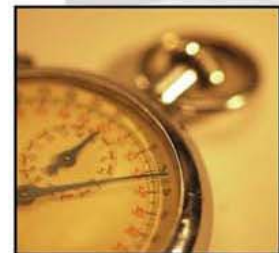
Many verbal tests are used to assess your reasoning skills. You might be asked to make a disorganised sentence flow logically; or you might have to analyse a number of pieces of information and pick out the aspects that will solve a specific problem.

Your verbal analysis and comprehension abilities may also be tested. This would involve reading a given passage from a book or periodical and answering questions about it.

In the table below are some examples of the type of questions you might expect to find in a verbal test:

1) Which of the following words best express the relationship between a word and a sentence?

- A. CELL and ORGANISM
- B. BIBLE and BOOK
- C. ENGINE and CAR
- D. SONNET and TEXT
- E. STEM and FLOWER



The answer is A. This is because more than one cell makes an organism, just like more than one word makes up a sentence (usually). But there's only one engine in a car and one stem per flower; and the Bible is an example of a book, and a sonnet is a type of rhyming text.

2) Swap two words around to make the following sentence read coherently:

“Although career is partly a question of lifestyle, an active interest in it could form the basis of an alternative spirituality.”

The answer is to swap “career” and “spirituality”.



Numerical Tests

There are many types of numerical test, but all are designed to measure numeracy and logical thought. Some tests involve completing a series of numbers or letters, or a row of dominoes. You might also be asked to solve simple arithmetic calculations *without* using a calculator. Other tests involve assessing your ability to estimate answers to arithmetic problems, when there isn't time to calculate exact answers.

The table below has examples of the kind of questions you may be asked in numerical tests:

1) Fill in the next four numbers in the following series (replace the asterisks with the correct numbers):

2653, 3265, 5326, ****

The answer is 6532. All you do to arrive at the answer is bring the last number in each sequence round to the first.

2) What are the next two numbers in this series?

6, 10, 8, 13, 11, 17, **, **.

The answer is: 15 and 22. This one is a bit more difficult. To get the answer, you need to notice that each alternate number increases by 2, 3, and 4.

For example:

$6 + 2 = 8$; $8 + 3 = 11$ ($11 + 4 = 15$ brings you the missing number)

$10 + 3 = 13$; $13 + 4 = 17$ ($17 + 5 = 22$ brings you the missing number)



Ways to Prepare for Psychometric Tests

Psychometric tests are very much like cryptic crosswords and IQ tests - you increase the odds of getting the right answers if you know *how* to do them. It's not so much a question of intelligence as of *preparation*.

A good way to prepare for verbal tests is to do lots of crosswords and other word puzzles. These can be found in newspapers and there's a whole range of puzzle magazines on the newsstands. For numerical tests, practise doing arithmetical calculations *without* using a calculator. It's also well worth studying data presented in tables, charts and graphs - as you're often asked to analyse these in numerical tests.



I'd also recommend reading the following book...

“How To Master Psychometric Tests”

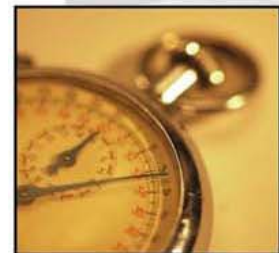
by Mark Parkinson PhD (Kogan Page 2000)

Amazon Link

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0749434201/o/qid=990546425/sr=2-1/026-8431001-0609205>

Parkinson gives the low-down on psychometric testing. He also provides practice tests and shows you how to successfully complete a personality questionnaire. Invaluable.

Good luck! And if you've got any comments or stories about psychometric testing - positive or negative - contact me at: feedback@plainwords.co.uk



Plain Words – The Big Picture

Technical Writing & Course Development

Planning, writing and producing Help systems, HTML, on-line material, traditional manuals. Designing and writing bespoke courses for your products and services, whether tutor-led, CBT or e-learning. Presenting 'train the trainer' or end user courses.



Specialist Search & Selection

Helping you to recruit permanent or contract documentation staff:

- Technical Authors & Editors
- Trainers
- Localisation Specialists
- Information Managers
- Documentation Managers
- Copy Writers
- Project Managers
- Project Coordinators
- Instructional Designers
- Bid & Proposal Writers
- Web Content Developers
- Knowledge Managers

Writing Skills Training Courses

- Structuring & Writing Reports
- Designing & Writing Help Systems
- Writing Winning Bids & Proposals
- Writing Effective Letters & Emails
- Designing & Writing Technical Documents
- Indexing On-line & Printed Material
- Estimating & Planning Technical Documents
- Writing for the Web



Bids Consultancy & Training

Bidworker, a division of Plain Words, is dedicated to providing bids consultancy and training. Writing, editing and formatting of bids and proposals. 'How to Write Winning Bids and Proposals' training course. Plain Words own **bid**worker™ software to automate much of the process of compiling proposals.

"Excellent service, highly skilled authors. All deadlines have been met!"
Giovanni Calamida, European Patent Office

Catalogues

Plain Words **catalogue**worker™ enables you to create high quality printed or online catalogues in minutes. This is a simple and speedy way to create large catalogues that would otherwise need to be built, fully typeset and formatted. It also caters for multi-currency, multi-languages and different discount schemes.



Publicity & Copywriting

Inject selling power into your communications with Plain Words' advertising and PR services. Writing or editing sales copy, web content, articles and newsletters. Publicity campaigns and promotion via the media or through your website.

Other Services

Graphic Design • Printing • Localisation & Translation

Technical Writing • Training • Search & Selection • Bids Consultancy
Call us on +44 (0)1635 202013

©Plain Words Limited 2004. All rights reserved.

