

# 17. Psychological Assessment

## Objectives

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- Understand how and why personality is assessed
- Compare objective and projective assessments
- Distinguish between aptitude, achievement, and interest tests

## Vocabulary

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achievement test	objective psychological tests	psychological test	test anxiety
aptitude test	projective psychological tests	standardization	validity
battery		state	
norm			

## Background

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Testing of an individual's physical, intellectual, and mental abilities has been happening for centuries in virtually all cultures worldwide. However, it was not until the twentieth century that effective attempts were made by psychologists to psychologically test and assess personalities in general. This chapter informs students about psychological tests, which are used to assess mental conditions and personalities, unlike more traditional tests for aptitude, achievement, or interests.

Students find out that, since the 1940s, psychological tests have been used to help specialists diagnose problems and mental disorders. Eventually, employers began to use personality assessments—a type of psychological test—to evaluate an individual's overall potential and work ability. Students learn the general types of psychological assessments—interviews, behavioral observations, and standardized testing—as well as the many ethical concerns involved in psychological testing. Students become aware of the limitations of tests and of important test standards such as reliability, validity, standardization, and norms. These factors are important in considering the overall effectiveness of these sometimes-controversial assessment tools.

The chapter thoroughly examines the two main types of psychological tests commonly used in test batteries—objective and projective tests. Evaluating different kinds of tests, students learn that standardized, objective tests require minimal practitioner interpretation, while more exploratory projective tests rely heavily on a psychologist's subjective opinion. Students need to note that these tests—and tests in general—are used as tools in making general personality assessments, but do not always accurately reflect the person's true intelligence or mental state.

Students next learn about the nature and effectiveness of well-known aptitude, achievement, and vocational interest tests. Students discover the strengths and limitations of each testing area considered. They review helpful tips on relieving test anxiety and consider the issue of how far test results should go in making diagnoses.

### Further Resources

- Aiken, L. R. *Assessment of Personality*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989.
- Gould, J. S. *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: Norton, 1981.

## For Discussion

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### Review

1. What are three types of psychological assessments?
2. What are three different kinds of reliability standards in psychological testing?
3. What are three different kinds of validity standards in psychological testing?
4. What are four different types of objective psychological tests?

### Critical Thinking

1. If you were a psychologist, which type of general psychological assessment would you consider most effective—interviewing, behavioral observation, or standardized testing? Why?
2. What kinds of problems could arise if a psychologist did not act ethically with test results?
3. If you could take one of the psychological tests reviewed in this chapter, which would you choose? Why?
4. In what ways are psychological tests or personality assessments fallible or even dangerous? Why?
5. Do you think that aptitude tests are effective in gauging a teenager's overall potential? What other factors are important in this process?

## Activities

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### 1. Personality and the Workplace

Divide students into two teams, with one side representing corporate interests and the other individual rights. Have each team develop arguments for and against personality tests at the workplace. Hold a class discussion.

### 2. Objective vs. Projective Testing

In pairs, challenge students to examine and research objective and projective psychological tests and list benefits and limitations of each in their attempts to assess personalities. Which do students think is most effective in building self-awareness and aiding in the diagnosis of problems? Why?

### 3. Internet: Personality Sites

Direct the students to research Web sites that are either for the advancement of personality tests or critical of them. Have students evaluate the views and claims of each source in an effort to develop their own opinion of the issues involved. Encourage an open class discussion.

### 4. Special Sources: Test Your Personality

Ask students to use the library to find samples of psychological tests (new, old, short, or long) pertaining to personality. Have students take these tests, and then evaluate and discuss their results. (Answers will vary.)

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As you read Chapter 17, write an answer to each question below.

1. In what ways are psychological tests used?

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2. What kinds of characteristics do good psychological tests have?

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3. Which do you think is more effective and reliable, objective or projective psychological tests? Why?

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4. If you are a psychologist using a projective psychological test, what are you aiming to do?

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5. What is the difference between aptitude tests and vocational interest tests?

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Find the best answer for each item. Then circle that answer.

1. What is a measurement of personality factors such as intelligence, behaviors, cognitive functioning or aptitudes?
  - a. physiological test
  - b. psychological test
  - c. attitude test
  - d. college entrance exam
2. Which term refers to a set of tests that assess information about a variety of behaviors and cognitive processes in different ways?
  - a. battery
  - b. discharge
  - c. apparatus
  - d. standardization
3. What do you call a person's present mental and physical condition?
  - a. trait
  - b. state
  - c. symptom
  - d. aptitude
4. What is the term for administration and scoring of tests according to established standards?
  - a. replication
  - b. validation
  - c. normalization
  - d. standardization
5. What is the term for the standard pattern of results on a test given to many people?
  - a. trait
  - b. state
  - c. norm
  - d. median
6. What are tests that can be scored without interpretation?
  - a. objective psychological tests
  - b. projective psychological tests
  - c. subjective psychological tests
  - d. contemplative psychological tests
7. What are open-ended tests that ask a person to interpret ambiguous drawings and pictures?
  - a. projective psychological tests
  - b. subjective psychological tests
  - c. strategic psychological tests
  - d. contemplative psychological tests
8. What kind of test is designed to assess what one has already learned or can do?
  - a. achievement tests
  - b. aptitude tests
  - c. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
  - d. Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)
9. What kinds of tests attempt to predict ability to learn or do something new?
  - a. attitude tests
  - b. aptitude tests
  - c. California Psychological Inventory (CPI)
  - d. 16 Personality Factor Test (16PF)
10. What is the state in which a person has difficulty retrieving what he or she knows?
  - a. dyslexia
  - b. hypertension
  - c. attitude adjustment
  - d. test anxiety

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Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

1. The term *psychodiagnosis* was used \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. by behaviorists to discredit personality tests
  - b. by psychoanalysts to approve personality tests
  - c. to describe tests that determine intelligence
  - d. to describe tests that determine personality factors
2. Psychological tests do NOT \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. diagnose psychological problems
  - b. uncover causes of problems
  - c. treat and prevent mental disorders
  - d. determine treatment
3. \_\_\_\_\_ are in written form and are typically made up of true/false statements and sentence completion questions.
  - a. Interviews
  - b. Behavioral observations
  - c. Standardized tests
  - d. Diagnostic assessments
4. When taking psychological tests, you should NOT \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. know why you're taking the test
  - b. expect results to be private
  - c. know purpose and uses of test results
  - d. prepare thoroughly to maximize test results
5. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to high correlation in scores a person gets on the same test taken at different times.
  - a. Test-retest reliability
  - b. Internal consistency
  - c. External consistency
  - d. Equivalent-forms reliability
6. \_\_\_\_\_ validity in a test helps to predict the success of someone in a particular situation.
  - a. Content
  - b. Construct
  - c. Predictive
  - d. Cognitive
7. \_\_\_\_\_ tries to identify personality types but doesn't pass test-reliability standards.
  - a. Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)
  - b. California Psychological Inventory (CPI)
  - c. NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI)
  - d. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
8. \_\_\_\_\_ is an objective psychology test that helps to diagnose mental disorders and limit test-taker dishonesty.
  - a. Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)
  - b. California Psychological Inventory (CPI)
  - c. 16 Personality Factor Test (16PF)
  - d. NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI)
9. This statement regarding projective psychological tests is NOT true: \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. they are open-ended, but can be standardized
  - b. they are designed for diagnosing disorders
  - c. Rorschach's inkblot test predicts a person's present emotional state
  - d. Thematic Apperception Tests (TAT) offer good starting points for discussing problems
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is a forced-choice test that aids in determining what area of study or field of work a person is most interested in.
  - a. American College Testing
  - b. General Education Development
  - c. Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory
  - d. Kuder Preference Record

### Essay Question

How important should test results be in making clinical diagnoses?