

Assessment Tools Overview

Listed below are a number of commonly used types of assessment tools. The best assessment tool or tools to use will depend on the type of position, the competencies being assessed, and the overall assessment strategy.

Occupational Questionnaires

Online questionnaire ratings of applicants' training and experience have enjoyed increased popularity in recent years due to their low cost and ease of use with automated staffing systems.

Best Use: This assessment tool is best used as an initial method for winnowing the applicant pool to a manageable number before using another, more rigorous assessment tool or tools, such as structured interviews or a work sample.

Consideration: These questionnaires are not ideal for entry level positions (where applicants would not be expected to have as much work experience to draw from), and are better utilized to assess the technical skills of experienced professionals. Since they are self-rated, they are prone to response inflation from applicants.

Structured Interviews

Structured interviews are a popular assessment method because of their high validity and personal nature. The primary features that separate structured interviews from other types of interviews (and makes them a much better predictor of future job performance) is that all candidates are asked the same predetermined questions in the same order and are evaluated using the same rating scale and behavioral benchmarks.

Best Use: Structured interviews can be very effective at assessing "soft skills," such as teamwork or interpersonal skills.

Consideration: Because they can be time and resource intensive, structured interviews are best used near the end of a multiple hurdle assessment process.

Biodata

Biodata measurements are based on the principle that past behavior predicts future behavior. Candidates respond to multiple choice questions about past events and behaviors that are shown to measure characteristics related to successful job performance.

Best Use: Biodata is useful for entry level positions when applicants would not be expected to have much work experience.

Consideration: Due to their psychometric complexity, biodata instruments are best developed by professional organizations with experience in test development.

Cognitive Ability Tests

Cognitive ability tests measure competencies related to thinking and processing information. The SAT and GRE are examples of cognitive ability tests used in academia.

Best Use: Cognitive ability tests are highly predictive of ability to learn new information and performance in complex jobs.

Consideration: The main drawback of cognitive ability tests is that they are historically prone to subgroup differences, so they are best used in combination with other types of assessment tools to reduce the potential for adverse impact. Due to their psychometric complexity, cognitive ability tests are best developed by professional organizations with experience in test development.

Job Knowledge Tests

Job knowledge tests consist of questions designed to measure the mastery of technical skills or subject matters. Licensure and certification exams are examples of job knowledge tests.

Best Use: They are typically used in situations where an applicant must possess a highly technical competency that cannot be learned on the job.

Consideration: Job knowledge tests are fairly difficult to develop and maintain in-house, and are best procured off-the-shelf from a professional organization with experience in test development.

Personality Inventories

Personality inventories are self-rated, multiple choice questionnaires designed to elicit information about applicants' motivations, interests, and work styles. They are not used to diagnose or reveal medical conditions related to personality.

Best Use: They are typically used for positions involving a great deal of personal interaction or work in team settings.

Consideration: Due to their psychometric complexity, personality inventories are best developed by professional organizations with experience in test development (though they are typically less expensive than other types of off-the-shelf assessment tools).

Situational Judgment Tests

Situational judgment tests present candidates with a work-related scenario and ask them to identify how they would handle the situation.

Best Use: These types of tests are typically used for managerial positions or jobs requiring a great deal of interpersonal interactions.

Consideration: Costs for situational judgment tests will vary depending on their format (e.g., paper and pencil format is less expensive than video simulations). Due to their psychometric complexity, situational judgment tests are best developed by professional organizations with experience in test development.

Work Samples

Work samples ask candidates to complete tasks or activities that mirror the actual tasks employees perform as part of their job. Examples of work samples include having applicants to a clerical position transcribe a memo or asking for a writing sample for a position involving a lot of written communication.

Best Use: These types of tests are typically used for high stakes managerial positions or near the end of a multiple hurdle assessment process.

Consideration: The amount of resources required for a work sample will depend on the types of tasks performed, level of simulation of tasks required, and number of observers or raters needed.