



The  
British  
Psychological  
Society

# Psychological Testing: *A Test Taker's Guide*



Psychological Testing Centre  
[www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)

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# Introduction

This guide is about taking psychological tests and about the roles, responsibilities and rights of those who take tests. Previous test guides issued by the British Psychological Society (BPS) have tended to focus on the test user and the technical issues underlying tests themselves. While these are essential to the effective use of psychological tests, they were not aimed at test takers and their concerns, interests and rights

This guide is designed to answer some of the questions that you or your child or dependant may have when informed that you or they have been invited to a psychological testing session. This set of guidelines is presented in four main sections:

1. General Information about test-taking
2. Preparation for testing
3. What might happen in the testing session
4. What might happen after the session

# Section 1: General information about test-taking

## What are psychological tests?

It is very difficult to define ‘tests’ in a way that everyone would agree upon. In their Test Use Guidelines, the International Test Commission describes the areas covered by tests and testing as follows:

1. Testing includes a wide range of procedures for use in psychological, occupational and educational assessment.
2. Testing may include procedures for the measurement of both normal and abnormal or dysfunctional behaviours.
3. Testing procedures are normally designed to be administered under carefully controlled or standardised conditions that embody systematic scoring protocols.
4. These procedures provide measures of performance and involve the drawing of inferences from samples of behaviour.
5. They also include procedures that may result in the qualitative classification or ordering of people (e.g. in terms of type).

Any procedure used for ‘testing’, in the above sense, should be regarded as a ‘test’, regardless of its mode of administration; regardless of whether it was developed by a professional test developer; and regardless of whether it involves sets of questions, or requires the performance of tasks or operations (e.g. work samples, psycho-motor tracking tests).

So what does this mean in plain English?

1. Psychological tests are used to assess people in work, in education or in a clinical setting.
2. They are developed using some very technical and complex procedures in order to ensure that they really do measure what they claim to measure and that they do so with a reasonable degree of accuracy.
3. They can be used to assess a wide range of qualities in people for normal thinking and behaviour and for qualities that are outside normal thinking or behaviour.
4. Most psychological tests are designed to be carried out in a formal and standard manner. This ensures that everyone who takes the test is given the same information and the same opportunities. This formalisation of the procedure adds to the fairness of the test.
5. Tests assess by taking carefully selected samples of behaviour that provide evidence of particular qualities (i.e. whatever it is the test taker is being assessed for).
6. The results of the test can be used to place individuals in order of ability, to indicate individual qualities in relation to a group of others, or to place people within a type or category.

7. It is these qualities of the test, together with the technical and statistical ways of developing the questions or tasks, and making sure that the test is consistent and really gives the assessor evidence that is relevant to the assessment, that entitles a test to be called a psychological test.

In general, psychological tests fall into two broad categories.

There are those designed to assess personal qualities, such as personality, beliefs, values, and interests, and to measure motivation or 'drive'. These are known as **measures of typical performance**. These are usually administered without a time limit and the questions have no 'right' and 'wrong' answers. The answers reflect how the person taking the test would usually or typically feel, what they believe, or what they think about things.

Second, there are those designed to measure performance. These are called tests of ability, aptitude or attainment and are known as **measures of maximum performance**. These tests are usually administered with a fixed time limit, and the questions in them do have right and wrong answers.

1. Some of these tests have very strict time limits, to ensure that people cannot complete all the questions in the test in the time available. These tests are designed to see how fast you can work. Usually their questions are not very difficult, but you have to work fast to do well.
2. Other types of maximum performance test have more relaxed time limits, or may have no time limit at all. For these the questions may be quite difficult, or sometimes start off easy and get progressively more difficult as you go through the test. In these tests the emphasis is on how many questions you can get right, rather than on how quickly you work.
3. In most cases, tests fall somewhere in between these two extremes. There will be a time limit, but this will be set to allow most people sufficient time to get to the end of the test.

The important thing to remember is that when there is a time limit, it will be the same for everybody. It is also important to remember that psychological tests of ability often seem to be a lot 'harder' than the tests of knowledge people are used to from school. Typically, if you had done your homework, you would expect to get 80 or 90 per cent of the questions right in a school knowledge test. Psychological tests are designed so that on average, people in the group they are intended for would get about 50 per cent right. So do not be worried if you find you cannot answer some questions, or think you have got a lot of them wrong.

### **Where can I find out more about particular tests?**

The BPS publishes independent reviews of tests available in the UK. These have focused on test use in occupational settings. However, from 2005 we will also be publishing reviews of tests for use in educational and clinical settings.

The BPS Test Reviews provide detailed descriptions of each test and an evaluation of its key technical properties: reliability, validity, and information relating to interpretation. The BPS test reviews were originally only available in paper format, in a number of volumes that were published every two or three years from the late 1980s. Now they are web-based and available through the BPS Psychological Testing Centre's *Psychological Testing Centre Online* ([www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)).

The BPS reviews are directed towards practitioner test users and require a certain amount of knowledge about testing and the technical language used about the content of the tests. Other, more academic reviews are also available. For examples, the Buros Institute in the USA publishes a series of test reviews in the *Mental Measurements Yearbook*.

Some more details about the different types of tests and where and how they are used can be found in Appendix A.

## How are tests administered?

You are likely to take tests under one or more of a number of different conditions. There are four main conditions under which tests are used:

1. **Open administration.** Openly administered tests are ones that are available for completion by anyone on demand. Examples include the books of tests you might buy in a bookshop, or tests that you can access on a career site on the Internet. These are available to you without anyone having to supervise their administration. In the case of paper-based open tests of maximum performance, the answers are also in the public domain. Such tests can be useful for developing self-knowledge and for exploring your interests. However, you need to be sure that the test you are doing meets the technical requirements outlined earlier, and was specifically designed for use in this open, uncontrolled fashion.
2. **Controlled administration.** This is where you are provided with restricted access to the test session, but the administration is carried out without someone being present to supervise it. This mode is commonly used for typical performance tests administered over the Internet. When the software has been well designed, the software should cover all the questions and issues that are normally dealt with by a test administrator. As for open administration, the test being used should have been technically evaluated for use under these conditions.
3. **Supervised administration.** This is the 'traditional' mode for test administration and provides the level of control needed for maximum performance testing – especially where it is necessary for someone to ensure that test takers do not make copies of the questions or take information away with them. It is also the means by which the tester can ensure that the person who is doing the test is who they say they are and that they have completed the test without assistance from others.

4. **Managed administration.** This is like supervised administration, but with added control over the test-taking environment. There is an increasing use being made of well designed ‘test centres’ where the quality of equipment and availability of skilled trained staff can be assured. Such centres are used for high-stakes tests where there is a high level of need for security (such as licensing and professional certification examinations).

Whichever mode is being used, the tests should be appropriate for that mode of use.

## **What are the rights and responsibilities of the test givers and test takers?**

The International Test Commission has outlined guidelines defining the nature of the relationship between test taker and test user (presented in full in Appendix B). These emphasise the point that both test takers and test users have rights and responsibilities.

In effect, testing is a social contract in which all parties should seek a common shared understanding of the process. At present, the only recourse that a test taker has if they feel that a test has been used inappropriately is to raise the issue with an appropriate professional body such as the BPS or to seek legal advice. The BPS believes that prevention is better than cure. To this end, the following set of principles and related questions provides a means by which each party can contribute to responsible use of psychological tests. Some of these questions are quite complex and may be difficult to answer.

1. **The purpose of testing is clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.**
  - a. What is the purpose of testing in this case?
  - b. What outcomes will the results of the testing help to achieve achieved?
  - c. Why are these specific tests being used?
  - d. What evidence is there that these tests are relevant to the stated outcomes?
  - e. What evidence is there that these tests are appropriate for the people who are to be assessed?
2. **The procedures for testing are clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.**
  - a. Are the tests to be administered in a supervised session or managed test centre or in unsupervised controlled or open modes?
  - b. If supervised, who will administer the tests and what evidence is there that they are competent to administer them?
  - c. When and where will the tests be administered?
  - d. Is the location a suitable environment for the administration of the tests?

- 3. How the test information will be used is clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.**
  - a. How will the tests be scored?
  - b. How will the scores be interpreted (e.g. by a trained test user, or by a using a computer expert system)?
  - c. What evidence is there these people are competent to score or interpret these tests? If a computer does the scoring and interpretation, what evidence is there that the system being used is well designed?
  - d. How will the test scores be communicated and to whom?
  - e. What actions will be taken to ensure that the communication of test scores is accurate and meaningful?
  - f. How will the confidentiality of the test scores be protected?
  - g. Who will have access to the test scores and why?
  - h. How will the test scores be stored and for how long?
  - i. What undertakings are given to ensure that the test scores are not used for purposes other than those agreed with the test taker?
  
- 4. Procedures for dealing with enquiries and complaints about the process of testing are clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.**
  - a. Who will handle enquiries and complaints?
  - b. Are they competent to handle enquiries or complaints?
  - c. What actions will be taken in response to an enquiry or complaint?
  - d. Will these actions ensure that the enquirer or complainant is treated fairly and ethically?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to know something about the various roles of people involved in testing. As an example, consider applying for a job. As part of the application process you are invited to take a number of psychological tests.

The first of these might be administered over the Internet. You will be sent a username and password by e-mail and asked to logon using the address supplied in the e-mail. When you logon, the computer takes you through the instructions, example questions and then administers the questions. This sort of procedure is very common now for tests of typical performance (where the security of the questions is not a concern) and where timing is not involved.-  
What are the questions you should be asking?

1. How will my results be used?
2. What feedback will I be given?
3. How do I know the test I've been given is a properly constructed psychological test?
4. Has a contact name or phone number been given for me if I have questions or issues I want to raise?

For the second test, you may be invited to attend an assessment centre at the organisation's head office. Here there are lots of other questions you might want to ask before attending that session, the remaining sections of this guide should help you to identify the sort of preparation you can and should make for tests whether they are administered online into your home or administered under very strictly controlled conditions in a test centre.

The above example makes clear that it is not always easy for you to know who the 'tester' is. For a supervised test session, the test administrator is the person you will meet, but they are often only involved in the test administration. Someone else may have made the decision about which test to use and why, and yet another person may be responsible for looking at and interpreting the results. This is why it is important in any testing session for you to be told who the 'responsible' person is. This is the person to whom you should address questions or with whom you should raise issues. If you have not been told who this is, you should ask.

Under the 1998 Data Protection Act, all organisations, in their role as 'data controllers', must identify who has responsibility for your data so that you, as the 'data subject', can ask the questions you need to ask about how your data is going to be handled.

It is the responsibility of the organisation initiating the testing to ensure that the purpose of testing has been clearly communicated to the test taker and that the test taker understands the procedures that will be used for testing, how the test information will be used and to whom it will be communicated.

It is the test taker's responsibility to ensure that he or she understands why the tests are to be used and to raise any concerns that he or she has in advance of testing.

It is also the test taker's responsibility to follow the instructions given and use their best endeavours to provide an accurate and honest picture of themselves.

## **Where can I find out if those doing the testing are competent to do this?**

What does being competent in test use mean? The International Test Commission (ITC) has defined this as follows:

A competent test user will use tests appropriately, professionally, and in an ethical manner, paying due regard to the needs and rights of those involved in the testing process, the reasons for testing, and the broader context in which the testing takes place.

This outcome will be achieved by ensuring that the test user has the necessary competencies to carry out the testing process, and the knowledge and understanding of tests and test use that inform and underpin this process. (*ITC Guidelines on Test Use*, 2000).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> see Appendix B

Tests are used, generally speaking, in three main settings: Work or occupational, educational and clinical.

**Occupational testing.** Two sets of standards have been produced for the competent use of tests in the occupational setting. These are:

1. The Level A Standards, which cover the knowledge and the skills required to administer tests and to use and interpret attainment and ability tests.
2. The Level B Standards, which cover the knowledge and the skills required for using and interpreting tests of personality and other more complex measures of typical performance.

Based on these standards, a number of occupational test user qualifications have been produced.

1. The Test Administration Certificate.
2. The Level A Certificate.
3. The Intermediate Level B Certificate.
4. The Intermediate Plus Certificate.
5. The Full Level B Certificate.

In addition to the standards and the certificates themselves, detailed guidance has been developed for those who assess people's competence for these Certificates. An open learning pack has also been developed for people wanting to acquire the Level A qualification.

**Educational and clinical testing.** Level A qualifications have been developed for the use of tests in educational and clinical settings. Work is in progress on the development of other qualifications in these areas (analogous to the occupational Level B).

The standards developed by the BPS require that, to be declared competent, an individual must be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the psychometric principles underlying test construction, knowledge of the types of tests that are available, when it is appropriate to use them, and to be able to administer, score and interpret tests in order to provide accurate and meaningful feedback to others.

A register of those who have been assessed as competent to use the different kinds of tests discussed above is maintained by the BPS. Information about the Register can be obtained from the BPS Offices or from the Psychological Testing Centre Online ([www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)).

## Section 2: Preparation for testing

### Can I have copies of the test to practice beforehand?

In general, the answer is 'No'. For tests of maximum performance, this is not permitted. Such tests have to be kept in secure conditions and access is not allowed to anyone other than those involved in the testing procedures. This is in part to protect the fairness of the testing from being compromised in any way. Practice with the actual test in advance would provide some people with an advantage over other test takers. It would also make interpretation of the test scores impossible. For tests of typical performance (remember, these are ones where there are no right or wrong answers), the issue is not so much one of concern over compromising the test, but more one of not wanting to over-expose the content.

### What can I do to practice beforehand?

Because of the above concerns, for occupational tests most publishers provide practice materials that are similar in form and content to the actual tests. However, the actual questions in the test will be different. Some examples of practice tests can be accessed through on the Psychological Testing Centre Online ([www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)).

The Code of Conduct of the British Psychological Society<sup>2</sup> states that: People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

**Ensure that all test takers are well informed and well prepared for the test session, and that all have had access to practice or familiarisation materials where appropriate.**

If you are taking a test and the tester sends out practice materials you should look at these very carefully. Do not just check to see that you have the correct answer to the practice questions, but ask yourself 'Why is this the correct answer and how did I work that out?' The practice materials are developed to give the test taker familiarity with the kinds of thinking that they will have to use in the testing session so this will be time well spent.

You should be notified well in advance of the test session as to whether practice materials are available. If they are not, then you should be told what types of tests you will be administered. The BPS Psychological Testing Centre Online ([www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)) provides access to a number of sites where you can complete practice materials online.

### How can I best prepare for taking a test?

The most important thing you can do is to arrive at the testing session in a calm and relaxed frame of mind. This can be achieved by having a good night's rest

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C

beforehand, allowing extra time to arrive at the testing centre so that any delays in your journey can be accommodated; and making sure before that you know the time of the test and how to reach the venue. Arrive in time to use the toilet facilities. Once a test begins you will not be able to leave the room – unless there is an emergency.

### **What information should I receive beforehand from the testing organisation?**

The organisation requiring you to do the tests should have provided you with any available practice materials and all the practical information that it is possible to give. This includes the reasons why you are being asked to take the tests, what types of tests they will be, how they will be administered, the date, time and location of the testing session, how long the tests will last, and details of how to prepare for the tests (including practice leaflets if they are available). This information might be provided by letter or e-mail, or given over the telephone or in a face-to-face session beforehand. If the test is to be administered unsupervised and online, check that you do have the capability to do it:

1. Do you have access to a computer with an Internet connection?
2. Does it meet the operating system and browser software requirements specified by the tester?
3. Will you be able to work on it in a quiet setting, free from distractions for the necessary period of time?

If you have any worries about completing a test over the internet, let the tester know as soon as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made.

### **What can be taken into the testing room?**

For supervised test sessions, test administrators may vary in what they will allow into the room and what they will accommodate safely on your behalf. However, they should let you know in advance if you are expected to bring any special clothing or equipment. Normally all you require will be provided. You will of course be expected to bring your spectacles if you wear them.

If you are taking a test which requires you to write the answers you may be allowed to have your own pen or pencil. Other than that it is usual to remove all personal belongings from the desk and use only the equipment provided by the tester.

Some tests require you to respond using a computer or to use a calculator. If you have any problems with the technological aspects of these or are not sure how to operate them, make sure the test administrator knows before the test actually starts.

If you are carrying out a test that requires you to engage in physical activity, then you may have to remove all jewellery for reasons of safety.

## How are people with disabilities treated?

The code of conduct of the British Psychological Society<sup>3</sup> states that: People who use psychological tests in settings are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

Give due consideration to factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability and special needs, educational background and level of ability in using and interpreting the results of tests.

If you or your dependant has a disability and feel that you may need special conditions, it is important that this is brought to the notice of the person responsible for the testing as soon as the testing session has been arranged. This will give maximum time for the assessor to check what special requirements can be provided and what arrangements can be made.

## Can the test be answered at home?

This depends on the test. Those designed for use in Open or Controlled modes can be completed at home. However, you must be careful to ensure that you complete them under the conditions specified in the instructions.

Most paper-and-pencil tests and all traditional tests of maximum performance test (whether on paper or computer) cannot be given to the test taker to take at home to complete without supervision and without a qualified administrator.

Where paper-and-pencil tests are being used, administration usually takes place in a group session, where you will be doing the test alongside other people. The groups can be quite large (20 or 30 people), and there may be more than one administrator present to invigilate the session. Special arrangements can be made for special circumstances, but this can only be arranged by discussion beforehand with the tester. Where tests are computer-administered, groups are usually smaller (three or four people at a time) or testing is done on a one-at-a-time basis. The main exception to this is dedicated test centres (such as you would find if you applied for training as pilot in the military or one of the major commercial airlines) where they may be 20 or 30 computer test stations available for group administration of tests.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C

## Section 3: What will happen during the testing session?

Whether you are being tested individually or as part of a group, whether the introduction and instructions are being presented by a person or by computer, there are standard procedures for each test you take and these will be used.

It is usual to expect that there will be a formal welcome in which you will be reminded of the purpose of the test and the length of time it takes. If more than one test is to be administered then you will be told whether or not there will be break between the tests.

The instructions for completing the test are scripted so you need to be prepared for these to be read to you in a formal manner. Pay very careful attention to this. For unsupervised test sessions, make sure that you read the instructions very carefully. Do not skip them. They often contain vital clues as to how you should approach the test.

For most tests, there will be example questions to do. Work through these and make sure you understand them. You often have the chance to repeat the examples if you are unclear. Do so. For timed tests, the timing will not start until the instructions and examples have been completed.

In line with the International Test Commission Guidelines on Test Use, tester and test administrators will expect you to:

1. Ask questions prior to testing if uncertain about why the test is to be administered, how it will be administered, what they will be required to do and what will be done with the results;
2. Inform an appropriate person about any condition that they believe might invalidate the test results or which they would wish to have taken into consideration;
3. Follow the instructions of the test administrator;
4. Be aware of the consequences of not taking a test if they choose not to take it, and be prepared to accept those consequences.

## Section 4: What will happen after the test session

At the end of the session, you should be told what to do with any equipment or materials you have used, and told what you may take away with you (if you are in a supervised administration session). You should also be told, if you have not already been informed, as to what will happen next. When will you be told the results of the tests and what if any detailed feedback will you be provided with?

### **When will the results of the test be given to me?**

This information should be given to you either before or at some point during the testing session.

### **How will I understand what the results mean?**

The Code of Conduct of the British Psychological Society<sup>3</sup> states that the tester should:

Provide the test taker and other authorised persons with feedback about the results in a form that makes clear the implications of the results, is clear and in a style appropriate to their level of understanding.

So you should be provided with some feedback and that feedback should be in a non-technical form that you will understand. If you do not understand it, or need more information, ask for clarification.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C

# Appendix A: What are Psychological Tests and what do they measure?

## Measures of typical performance:

These are used to assess personality, interests, motivation, beliefs and attitudes. Personality concerns the way we characteristically respond to other people and situations: how we relate to other people, how we tackle problems, our emotionality and responsiveness to stress, and so on. While interests are also related to personality, measures of interests focus more on what sort of activities we find attractive and which we would rather avoid. Measures of motivation and need focus on the factors which drive us to action (such as the need for success) or cause us to refrain from action (such as the fear of failure). Many personality and interest measures provide – either directly or indirectly – also provide measures of need.

1. **Personality inventories** or questionnaires are good examples of tests that assess preferred or typical ways of acting or thinking. Test items (or questions) of these traits do not have right and wrong answers. Rather, they attempt to measure how much or how little the test taker possess of a specified trait or set of traits (e.g. *outgoingness, flexibility, decisiveness*) or abnormal phenomena such as anxiety and depression etc. Most instruments designed to measure or identify and assess dispositions are administered without a time limit and stress the need for people to answer honestly and openly.
2. **Interest inventories.** Interest inventories are designed to assess in a systematic manner people's likes and dislikes for different types of work or leisure activity. Satisfaction at work requires not only possessing the necessary skills to do the job competently but also having sufficient interest in it. Like tests of personality, these are not tests in the sense of having right and wrong answers, and hence they are very different from measures of maximum performance to be discussed later.
3. **Measures of drive, motivation or need** can be thought of as having both state and trait components. Some people are characteristically more *driven* than others: some people always seem to be on the go, seeking more and more work or responsibility, while others are the opposite. At the same time, any individual will vary in their level of drive from time to time. Some days they will feel they have more get-up-and-go than on other days. Needs motivate us in that they tend to establish our priorities and our goals. Interest measures also provide some indication of motivation. Generally, people strive hardest at those things that interest them most.

## Measures of maximum performance

**Measures of maximum performance** measure how well people can do things, how much they know, how great their potential is, and so on. Many of these

measure general, rather abstract, characteristics (e.g. *verbal fluency, spatial orientation, numerical reasoning*) while others may seem more applied (*clerical speed and accuracy, programming aptitude*). The distinguishing feature about such tests is that they tend to contain questions, problems or tasks for which there are right and wrong (or good and bad) answers or solutions.

Maximum performance tests can focus on what people know or can do (attainment tests) or what they are capable of knowing or doing (tests of ability). Tests of Attainment are used to assess knowledge and skills acquired through education and instruction. Examples include tests of literacy, reading, mathematics knowledge, foreign language proficiency or skill mastery in a craft. Such tests tend to be narrowly defined in content and targeted at the achievement of specific standards, for example typing speed.

## Areas of application

In addition to these categories of tests, broad distinctions can also be made in terms of the settings in which psychological tests are most frequently used. These are:

1. The Occupational Setting in which tests are used in careers guidance, to help select personnel, to assess their training and development needs, and in promotion.
2. The Educational Setting in which tests are used to diagnose learning difficulties, assess levels of educational attainment, learning and instructional needs, and for entry into secondary and tertiary levels of education.
3. The Clinical Setting in which tests are used to identify and assess emotional and behavioural conditions and disorder as an aid to determining appropriate treatments or therapy.

In each of these three main settings, one can further divide the areas of application. In all three settings, tests are used for three principal reasons:

1. They provide a standardised method for assessing and diagnosing individuals.
2. They provide such information more efficiently than most other methods of assessment (e.g. interviews or observation).
3. They provide access to the measurement of qualities that are difficult to assess through other means.

In contrast to physical measurements such as height, length, mass or speed, psychological tests measure qualities that are less tangible. Even when there is observable evidence of a condition such as a reading problem or behavioural disorder, the extent and causes of such problems may not be clear from the physical evidence available. So, in contrast to the manifest, observable features of physical measures (i.e. they can be experienced directly by our senses), psychological tests often measure qualities that are hidden, covert or latent (i.e. they cannot be directly or so easily experienced through our senses). As such,

psychological tests may provide the only reliable and efficient means of assessment.

### **Interpretation**

Scores (e.g. 16 out of 25 items correct) obtained on tests are typically converted into a 'standard' form to facilitate their interpretation. This may be carried out by using tables of 'norms' or by reference to criterion scores.

Norms provide information about the distribution of scores in some population (for example, 'UK working adults') and scores can be converted into numbers that show how a person has performed relative to this population. Instead of saying the person got 16 out of 25 correct, we might say they performed at a level equivalent to the top 30 per cent of the UK working adult population. Norms are important because the latter type of statement is more meaningful and useful than the former.

### **Fairness and bias**

Tests are intended to discriminate between people - to show up differences where these are real. What they should not do is discriminate unfairly. That is, show differences where none exist, or fail to show differences that do exist.

It is possible that factors such as sex, ethnicity or social class may act to obscure, mask or bias a person's true score on a test. If this is the case, the observed test score may not be an accurate or valid reflection of the quality assessed through the test. This has been a concern of test designers for a considerable time, and an entire body of psychometric research has been devoted to developing methods for evaluating whether a test score is biased against different population subgroups.

Two people (or two groups of people) may get different scores on a test either because there is a real difference between them or because the test has a bias that causes the scores of one to be greater than the scores of the other. It is bias that test developers seek to remove or minimise in the design of tests, not differences.

## Appendix B: ITC Guidelines for developing contracts between parties involved in the testing process<sup>5</sup>

Contracts between the test user and test takers should be consistent with good practice, legislation and the test user's policy on testing. The following is provided as an example of the sort of matters such a contract might cover. The details will vary as a function of the assessment context (e.g. occupational, educational, clinical, forensic) and local or national regulations and laws.

Contracts between test user, test takers and other parties are often implicit and unspoken (at least in part). Making clear the expectations, roles and responsibilities of all parties can help to avoid misunderstanding, harm, and litigation.

For their part, the test user will endeavour to:

- b.1 inform test takers of their rights regarding how their test scores will be used and their rights of access to them<sup>6</sup>;
- b.2 give adequate prior warning of any financial charges that may be entailed by the testing process, who will be responsible for their payment, and when payment will be due;
- b.3 treat test takers with courtesy, respect and impartiality regardless of race, gender, age, disability, etc.;
- b.4 use tests of proven quality, appropriate for the test takers, and appropriate for the assessment purpose;
- b.5 inform test takers prior to testing about the purpose of the assessment, the nature of the test, to whom test results will be reported and the planned use of the results;
- b.6 give advance notice of when the test will be administered, and when results will be available, and whether or not test takers or others may obtain copies of the test, their completed answer sheets, or their scores<sup>7</sup>;
- b.7 have a trained person administer the test and have the results interpreted by a qualified person;
- b.8 ensure test takers know if a test is optional and, when it is, the consequences of taking or not taking the test;
- b.9 ensure test takers understand the conditions, if any, under which they may re-take tests, have tests re-scored, or have their scores cancelled;
- b.10 ensure test takers know that they will have their results explained to them as soon as possible after taking the test in easily understood terms;

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<sup>5</sup> From the International Test Commission Guidelines on Test Use (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Legislation varies between countries on this issue. For example, the current UK Data Protection Act provides rights of access to data stored on computer different from those for data written on paper.

<sup>7</sup> While tests and answer sheets are not normally passed on to others, there is some variation between countries in practice relating to what test takers or others are permitted to have. However, there is much greater variation in the expectations of test takers concerning what information they will be given. It is important that contracts make clear what they will not be given as well as what they will.

- b.11 ensure test takers understand that their results are confidential to the extent allowed by law and best practice;
- b.12 inform test takers who will have access to their results, and the conditions which scores will be released;
- b.13 ensure that test takers are aware of the procedures for making complaints or notifying problems;

The test user will inform test-takers that they are expected to:

- b.14 treat others with courtesy and respect during the testing process;
- b.15 ask questions prior to testing if uncertain about why the test is to be administered, how it will be administered, what they will be required to do and what will be done with the results;
- b.16 inform an appropriate person about any condition that they believe might invalidate the test results or which they would wish to have taken into consideration;
- b.17 follow the instructions of the test administrator;
- b.18 be aware of the consequences of not taking a test if they choose not to take it, and be prepared to accept those consequences;
- b.19 ensure that, if required to pay for any the testing service(s), payment is made by the agreed date.

# Appendix C: BPS Code of Good Practice for Psychological Testing

## Responsibility for Competence

People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

1. Take steps to ensure that they are able to meet all the standards of competence defined by the BPS for the relevant Certificate(s) of Competence, and to endeavour, where possible, to develop and enhance their competence as test users.
2. Monitor the limits of their competence in psychometric testing and not to offer services that lie outside their competence nor encourage or cause others to do so.

## Procedures and Techniques

People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

3. Use tests only in conjunction with other assessment methods and only when their use can be supported by the available technical information.
4. Administer, score and interpret tests in accordance with the instructions provided by the test distributor and to the standards defined by the BPS.
5. Store test materials securely and to ensure that no unqualified person has access to them.
6. Keep test results securely, in a form suitable for developing norms, validation, and monitoring for bias.

## Client Welfare

People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

7. Obtain the informed consent of potential test takers, making sure that they understand why the tests will be used, what will be done with their results and who will be provided with access to them.
8. Ensure that all test takers are well informed and well prepared for the test session, and that all have had access to practice or familiarisation materials where appropriate.
9. Give due consideration to factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability and special needs, educational background and level of ability in using and interpreting the results of tests.
10. Provide the test taker and other authorised persons with feedback about the results in a form that makes clear the implications of the results, is clear and in a style appropriate to their level of understanding.
11. Ensure test results are stored securely, are not accessible to unauthorised or unqualified persons and are not used for any purposes other than those agreed with the test taker.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Psychological Testing Centre (PTC) would like to thank the authors of this document: Dave Bartram and Pat Lindley.

Sections of this Guide have been adapted from:

Bartram, D. & Lindley, P. (2000). *The BPS 'Level A' Open Learning Programme*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

Steering Committee on Test Standards. Version 2.1, October 2005.



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PTC02/01.06