

Psychometric tests

Overview

This leaflet is designed to tell you more about psychometric testing, its use in graduate recruitment and how you can optimise your chances of success if you are asked to take a test.

Why employers use psychometric tests

Recruiters look for efficient, cost-effective ways of selecting candidates for interviews and/or assessment centres. In some cases, psychometrics can support this.

Where a test measures a key skill or ability required in a job, it can be an accurate way of finding the best-suited candidates. This can lead to recruitment decisions which are more objective and equitable. Many graduate employers are choosing to implement some form of psychometrics as part of their recruitment.

What types of test are there?

Ability

These include verbal and numerical reasoning. Diagrammatic reasoning is also used, often in selection for IT programming roles. Ability tests can feature multiple-choice questions, administered in strictly timed exam conditions. Answers will be marked as correct or not, and on some tests, marks may be deducted for wrong answers.

Aptitude

These measure your potential to be able to do something, rather than a skill you have already mastered. An example of these would be OPP's ABLE (Aptitude for Business Learning Exercises) series, designed to be relevant to work contexts.

Situational Judgement Tests

Also known as "Interview-style tests", these are being used by a growing number of graduate recruiters to assess your ability to make good judgements in workplace situations. The tests present individuals with a series of work-based scenarios together with several possible responses. You are asked to rate each of these responses or select the most and least appropriate.

Personality

These are not strictly tests as there are no right or wrong answers. Candidates are asked to agree or disagree with statements or to choose an answer which is least/most like them. To avoid candidates trying to give the most desirable answers, there are strong elements of cross-checking built in. The result is a profile describing the candidate's personality along a number of dimensions.

Paper and pencil versions

Paper and pencil tests are less commonly used nowadays but usually take place at the employer's premises or at a central venue. These can be at the first interview or the assessment centre stage.

On-line tests

The real cost benefit to employers of psychometric testing has been to put the tests online. You might be asked to do online tests at the same time as your initial application or at the next stage, after your form has been screened. You are given a password and asked to log on at a time and place convenient to you. There will usually be practice material to complete, but once you start the actual test, you will not be able to take a break until you have finished it or your time is up.

Feedback can be immediate or emailed to you. Sometimes, employers ask a sample of candidates to take the same test again at the assessment centre. This is designed to keep a check on candidates who might have had extra help!

Aston students and graduate can practise on-line testing for free using either of the following packages

- **Profiling for Success**
- **PSL Online Psychometric Tests**

Both are accessible free of charge to Aston students and recent graduates via our website, visit: www.aston.ac.uk/careers, **Careers A to Z, Psychometric Testing.**

The pros and cons of psychometrics

Tests are perceived to increase the fairness of selection decisions, as everyone is judged on the same merits. This is particularly true where effort has been made to use tests free from cultural bias. Tests can provide an accurate measure of your ability in an area relevant to the job, rather than judgements based on general exam results taken years ago. The online versions can also speed up recruitment decisions.

However, tests can make candidates anxious and if you are weak in the areas they are testing, you may face a significant hurdle to get through to the next stage.

How test scores are interpreted and used

Psychometric tests are not pass/fail in the usual sense. Your scores are interpreted and the result is expressed in comparison to a "norm group". Typically a norm group will be composed of other UK graduates' scores. It could have been formed from the scores of previously successful entrants to the company or from the general population.

When receiving feedback on your results, it's useful to know which group you were compared against. Some employers may also impose a different cut-off point or policy. For example, one employer may insist you score at the 50th percentile in order to go through to the next stage. Another might just select the 20 highest scoring applicants overall to call to the assessment centre. Generally speaking, the earlier psychometric tests are used in the selection process, the more weight they have in the decision-making process.

How to prepare

- Follow the suggestions below and use the material referred to in the resources section to get the best possible results.
- If you can, find out exactly what tests you will be taking. It may tell you in the correspondence you are sent, or you may have to phone and ask. The name of the test developer will allow you to find a description of the likely test on their website.
- If you have a disability or additional needs which could affect your test performance, you should contact the employer as soon as possible to let them know. They should be able to make suitable arrangements e.g. it is common practice to allow more time for each test for candidates with dyslexia.
- Use any practice material you are sent, and then try to locate similar material using the resources below. You won't be able to get a copy of the full test, as these are kept strictly under wraps as part of the conditions of holding a test licence.
- If you feel your numeracy is weak, the Math Centre Numeracy Refresher booklet is an excellent resource to help you brush up on percentages, ratios and fractions and can be accessed on the Math Centre website www.mathcentre.ac.uk
- You can also get support on numeracy practice from the Learning & Skills Centre 1st floor library.
- If your verbal reasoning is rusty, get in the habit of reading a quality broadsheet newspaper every day. Find a patient friend to test your understanding of some of the articles.
- On the day itself, get yourself into a positive frame of mind – experience shows this can affect your results.
- Listen VERY carefully to the instructions. You can ruin everything by filling in the wrong sections or getting confused about what's required.
- Ask the test administrator if you are not clear about anything.
- For timed tests, strike a balance between speed and accuracy. Leave any overly-difficult questions

and move on. Don't bother to calculate how much time you have for each question – timed tests are often designed for you not to finish them. Aim for a sense of “quiet urgency”.

- Employ a best-guess strategy if you are reasonably sure that marks are not deducted for wrong answers. Eliminate the obviously wrong answers, and then take your best guess from the others.
- This is a good strategy in the latter stages of a timed test, where you have been slower than you'd like.
- Use the resources available in the Careers Centre. (see below for more details).

Feedback

You should be entitled to feedback on your test results. This may not be forthcoming until you ask. It's helpful to know what you scored and which norm group was used, in case you sit a similar test in the future.

What if your scores are low and you have been rejected?

Reflect on why your scores were low – did you do sufficient practice? Were there types of question you hadn't anticipated? Did the employer use a norm generally perceived to be “high-fliers”? Answering these questions might help you to decide on your strategy i.e. should you do more practice, or focus on applying to different types of employer.

Useful online resources

The British Psychological Society (BPS) useful information for test takers

SHL (Saville & Holdsworth) widely used graduate recruitment tests

Math Centre Numeracy Refresher Booklet ideal preparation for graduate level numerical reasoning tests

OPP (Oxford Psychological Press) widely recognised test producer

eFinancial Careers practise high level numerical tests similar to those used by major investment banks

Career Management Online career planning resource available to all Aston students and recent graduates

Prospects graduate career planning site providing sample questions

Berger Aptitude Tests also known as B-Apt, used to test aptitude for IT roles

Assessment Day sample tests and is of particular relevance to engineering students

WikiJob is an online community for job-hunting graduates with information, links and discussion regarding psychometric testing

Further help from the Careers Centre

Take full advantage of all the support we offer

DVDs, books and leaflets

We have a library of useful careers resources including books and DVDs to provide you help on performing well in psychometric assessments - you can view the full range of careers resources and register for membership online in the Information and Resources section of our website, and you will be able to borrow the books and DVDs we have to aid your research.

Vacancies

Be first to find out about employers seeking to recruit Aston graduates; register online to receive notifications of graduate jobs, placements and summer internships as they arrive: www.aston.ac.uk/careers/vacancies. You can tailor your alerts to receive international opportunities.

Careers Information Leaflets

Our careers specialists have compiled a large resource of information leaflets to aid your career planning and decisions. The full range of leaflets exclusive to Aston students and graduates; can be accessed online: www.aston.ac.uk/careers, **Careers A to Z**, **Careers Information Leaflets**.

Workshops

The Careers Centre offers workshops on various careers related topics that may aid your job-hunting. Check the Events section of our website for forthcoming workshops and booking information:

www.aston.ac.uk/careers, **Careers A to Z**, **Events**.

Careers Advice Appointments

Book a careers advice appointment with our team of experienced advisers to discuss any queries you have related to psychometric testing.

Book online: www.aston.ac.uk/careers, **Careers A to Z**, **Seeing a Careers Adviser**.

Careers Newsletter

Keep up to date with the latest Careers News, forthcoming Events, Competitions, Bursaries and labour market information with our weekly (in term) newsletter. Finalists are mailed the newsletter each Friday, but it can also be accessed via our website: www.aston.ac.uk/careers, **Students and Graduates**, **Latest News**.

When developing new materials, test developers sometimes offer the chance to take a test before it is published and get feedback on results. Look out for details on our website, notice boards or information emails.



Accessibility

We can provide this leaflet in various formats upon request

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