

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING TIPS

Love them or loathe them, psychometric tests are used by many companies and organizations as a means to work out the suitability of potential employees or other participants. If you haven't already undertaken a psychometric test, the chances are high that you will at some point, and knowing how to succeed in psychometric testing is your ticket to moving ahead in your chosen career.

Psychometric tests aren't about luck; prior preparation will improve your scores and make it easier to focus on what is being sought in the testing process. Psychometric tests focus on certain aspects of your knowledge, such as verbal and numerical reasoning, personality traits, and other abilities assessment, such as stamina. To succeed in them, you'll need to do some preparation in advance but there are numerous opportunities for you to practice, so treat this as a positive challenge rather than a potential hurdle in your job hunting.

1. UNDERSTAND

- Understand the purpose of psychometric testing. Knowing why companies and organizations use psychometric testing can ease some of your possible concerns that the tests are out to typecast or dismiss you. On the whole, the tests are aimed at finding out the most able and best suited persons for a job or course of study in the most efficient manner.
- Psychometric testing can be an indicator that there are a lot of applicants for a job and the employer is seeking to identify the most suitable candidates in the most economical way possible.
- It is viewed as an efficient way of gauging a potential employee's thinking, ability to be a part of a team, and personal priorities.
- **See it realistically:** if you're not the best fit, you're better off not working in this work environment. It doesn't reflect on your worth as a person.

2. EXPECTATIONS

- Know what to expect in the testing environment. Psychometric tests can be given in the potential workplace, or on the premises of a business that runs the testing on behalf of the company or organization. Read the attendance instructions carefully and if you don't know where to go, be sure to work it out well in advance rather than turning up late. Also, read any instructions about the test itself with great care and learn what you can about the types of questions, the timing permitted, and the sequences the testing will be provided in.
- Psychometric tests can be written (pen and paper), on a computer, or a combination of both.
- While most testing will take place seated at a desk, it's also possible to be given psychometric tests while undertaking a workplace task, or even when in a gym or on a running machine.
- Average testing time is around 15 minutes but it varies depending on the extent of tests being taken. Even the timing can be treated as part of the assessment of completion or non-completion of particular tests.
- If you have a disability that might impact your ability to take the test, let the employer know in advance. They may be able to rearrange the testing process to accommodate your needs.
- Dress smartly. You are competing with other people; every little part of you that suggests you care and are taking this seriously will count in your favour.
- Bring along anything you're asked to bring, including gym clothes if necessary.

3. ATTITUDE

- Have the right attitude. This can be hard if you're prone to dismissing the worth or resenting taking psychometric tests. You might harbour personal disbelief or even disgust at the use of such tests to sort through people but it's about facing the reality that these tests stand between you and a job, not about fighting your personal war against using psychology as a corporate tool.
- Instead, expect to give the tests your absolute best shot by taking the right mental approach and being determined to work hard.
- Sleep well the night before, look forward to the challenge.

4. PRACTISE

- Practice in advance. For those who have never had psychometric tests or who have been out of formal education for a while, practice can be an important introduction to the things that you'll be expected to answer. As soon as you're told to attend for the tests, start practicing. Practice is the best chance that you have for succeeding, especially when you work with materials that are similar to those you'll be tested on.
- Mike Bryon recommends that you do a minimum of 20 hours of practice if you can, so if you have enough lead-in time, break up the practice to a few hours a day.
- Ask the potential employer for samples of the questions expected. If you receive any, this will give you an opportunity to work out the type of questions you'll need to practice.
- Find websites and books that have practice tests. Do as many as you can before your own testing day.
- Focus on your areas of weakness. If you're great at spelling and word association but lousy at spotting patterns or number skills, don't spend too much time on the easy stuff. Instead, focus most of your energies on practicing the skills in which you're weakest, to improve them and your confidence.
- **Challenge yourself and push past what you cannot do.** Practice will only be effective when you force yourself to do that which you don't believe you can.

5. TICK TOCK

- Practice working against the clock. As most of the aptitude part of psychometric tests is timed, it pays to practice under pressure.
- Practicing this will get you used to answering a lot of questions in a short space of time and to learn to balance speed and accuracy. Use a timer to practice with; a good time period is to allow yourself about 20 seconds per question before moving on to the next one.
- Either follow the time allotted on the practice tests, or use about a 10 to 15 minute period (the time you're likely to get in the actual test).
- Practice time-keeping without checking the clock. Get to know how long 20 seconds feels like when approaching and answering each question.
- **Don't fuss about running out of time.** Just keep practicing to improve your time.

6. WHAT DOESN'T CHALLENGE YOU, WONT CHANGE YOU

- Broaden your test material. As well as using psychometric tests, find all sorts of relevant test material to broaden your knowledge and fast answering ability.
- If you find magazines that have surveys that tell you your personality, do these; again, set up a timer for 15-20 seconds per question. Usually the personality tests are not timed, but there are a couple of hundred questions - it's about sufficiency of evidence in this case.

- The timer part of this step is, again, about helping you get used to reading quickly, and to give you some more practice at time pressure.
- Any sort of IQ test, visual puzzles, Trivial Pursuit style questions - the name of the game is to buff up your mental mathematics, reading, and comprehension skills. Do all of this within short time frames.
- Find puzzles where there are simple graphics. The types of questions you'll be asked will include picking the odd one out, or "if this is to this, then that is to ...?" type pattern sequences; these kinds of tests look at your reasoning and spatial abilities. **Find them, time them, do them.**
- Sudoku helps you look at patterns, and again, add a timer to spur you on.
- Use any online word-of-the-day type services, along with crosswords, hangman, word match, and other sorts of word puzzles.
- Keep doing the puzzles with a timer and try to get faster, and of course, accuracy is the name of the game. Challenge colleagues, friends and family.

7. BACK TO BASICS

- Refresh your math skills. Mathematics questions usually take the form of problem, with five or six possible answers.
- If you've slipped away from percentages, fractions, decimals, proportions, ratios, and numerical relationships it's time to return to those kinds of questions and get them accurate.

8. TEST DAY

Take the test. Once it is test time, be prepared. Read or listen to the instructions with great care (after all, if you can't get that right now, will you actually listen on the job?). Avoid feeling pressured and be prepared to enjoy the experience. If there are sample questions, use these as a way to warm up calmly, check your answers, and to get a feeling for the layout and style of the questions.

If you're not clear on the time period allotted, ask again. Be aware of the need for any delays prior to or after tests.

The timing doesn't start until you start the test, so spend a few moments relaxing and getting yourself ready for action.

If you don't feel well, have the test rescheduled and get a doctor's certificate. This isn't "I've got the butterflies" type of unwell but genuine sickness.

9. SELECT THE BEST ANSWER AND MOVE ON.

- Trust yourself. You get a better chance to find questions you can answer if you move on rather than spend two minutes grinding away on a single problem. Doing that would waste the opportunity of another 6 questions at 20 seconds each! Just keep working through and if you have time left, come back to skipped questions.
- Remember that everyone will get something wrong and it is better to push through to answers in which you excel than to remain stuck in the ones that won't click.
- Notice any messages at the bottom of a page asking you to "Turn over". Unfortunately, a lot of people miss that and think they've finished the test.
- Educated guesses are worth trying when you don't know the answer.
- Maximize your speed on the easier questions; this will free up time for the more challenging ones.

10. SEEK FEEDBACK

- Whether or not you're successful in getting through to the next stage of the job hunt, ask for feedback on the psychometric tests. This can give you important insights into how your personality and aptitude have been perceived and which areas it might be worth concentrating on more. While there are no wrong or right answers in personality tests, there can be indicators of areas in which you would benefit from self-improvement, such as training in ethics or assertiveness.
- **Keep trying.** If at first you don't succeed, try again until you do. Failure at psychometric tests stands at around half of the candidates sitting the test. It can be an indicator that you need to practice the tests more, so try to recall which areas of the tests caused you the most difficulties and concentrate on improving those for the next time. Apply again after practicing more. Be confident that your refocused practice will enable you to pass the psychometric tests the next time around.

More details on taking a psychometric test.

- Don't waste time or energy getting upset with what might appear to be dumb or repetitive questions. If you don't know the answer, or can't work it out, **go for your best guess**, and move on to the next question. The more answers you get through, the better your chances are. Like in so many things in life, a good attitude to it helps.
- Ultimately, **relax.**
- **Mathematics** - if this hasn't been your strong point, relax and keep it simple. Try to pick up tips, tricks, and shortcuts. For example, if you add two even numbers, the answer has to be an even number. Two odd numbers add up to an even number. An odd and an even number add up to an odd number. So, even if you can't figure out the answer, it's possible you can find the answer by deduction and eliminating the wrong answers. It's fine to count on your fingers, make notes on paper and come up with something like it: the answer has to be bigger than that and that, and it has to end in an even number because the problem added two numbers that ended in odd numbers...
- If you're chasing a job, **you can't control the interviewer** or how they ask the questions, and you can't read the minds of the interview panel or know how they'll read your resume. One thing you can do is **get proactive** and do some practice and preparation for the test. And don't forget, even if you don't get the job, and you don't bedazzle the testers, there's a very good chance many of the successful people throughout history would also have flopped at this kind of testing process. **You're probably in good company.** Take some heart that the company short-listed you enough to offer you the test in the first place, and persevere.
- **Don't panic** if you don't finish the tests - they're designed to give results even if you don't answer every question.
- **Psychometric testing is an indication; it's not you.** If you're a creative, artistic person, it's very possible that the mathematics and writing tests are not going to show all of your best sides. If, as a result, you miss the job, it's possible you should thank your lucky stars while you're running like the wind in the opposite direction - you probably don't want to work for a company that will cramp your style like that anyway!

Warnings

- If the tests are in English, and it's not your first language, you really need to practice. The language used can be quite complex and full of confusing double negatives.
- Slipping in to complete psychometric tests during a lunch break might not put you in the best frame of mind if you're suddenly starting to run out of time. Be sure to allow yourself all the time needed; ask in advance how long you need to be present for.

- If the tests are using USA or UK questions (and you're not from either country) the wording or the cultural content can be a little strange. Remember, in the case of mathematics, it's about the numbers - don't be put off by pounds (or dollars).
- Don't over-think the tests; very accomplished people can have this tendency and therefore fail the test even though they're ideal for the job. Practice answering under pressure if you find yourself reflecting too much.