What are psychometric tests?

These are formal, structured exercises designed by psychologists to measure psychological qualities such as reasoning ability and personality factors. They are carefully researched and tested to ensure that they are fair, reliable and valid. They are administered and scored in a standardised way, allowing your results to be compared with people who have taken the tests before. Comparison groups used will often be other university students or recent graduates.

The most common types of psychometric assessment used in job selection are ‘aptitude’ (or ‘ability’) tests and ‘personality assessment’.

Why do employers use this type of assessment?

All employers aim to select someone who has the skills, abilities and personal qualities to do their job well. Some selection methods are better than others at gathering different types of evidence about your suitability. For example, application forms provide information about your qualifications, work experience and written communication skills; interviews allow you to show your oral communication skills; while psychometric tests offer insight into whether you have the specific abilities and personal qualities required.

Aptitude or Ability Tests

These are designed to test your logical reasoning or thinking. There are a variety of tests but the most commonly used are:
- ‘Verbal Reasoning’ – assessing your ability to reason with written information.
- ‘Numerical Reasoning’ – assessing your ability to reason with numbers, charts and graphs.
- ‘Diagrammatic’ or ‘Spatial Reasoning’ – assessing your ability to reason with abstract figures and to think logically.

You may come across other tests depending on the types of job you are applying for, such as ‘programming aptitude’, or ‘mechanical aptitude’.

Aptitude tests are administered under examination conditions and are strictly timed. You are normally asked to select the correct answer from a range of alternatives. Do not worry if you cannot complete all the questions in the time allowed (few people do so). What counts is the number of questions you get right, so work as quickly and accurately as you can.

Your score is compared with a ‘norm group’ such as students/graduates who have taken the test before. This allows selectors to assess your reasoning skills in relation to others and to make judgements about your ability to cope with tasks involved in the job applied for.

Tests are often used alongside other selection methods, either as part of an assessment centre or at the same time as the initial interview. In this case, it is your overall performance which is important and the test scores do not carry more weight than any other element of the process. However, sometimes tests are used prior to a first interview and a fixed minimum score will be required in order to get to the next stage.
Personality Assessments

Personality questionnaires are designed to explore the ways in which you typically react to and deal with different situations. They are not tests as such; there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers and they are not timed. These self-report questionnaires allow a profile to be drawn up from your responses to a large number of questions or statements. The questions focus on factors such as how you relate to other people, your work style, your ability to deal with your own emotions and those of others, your motivation and determination and your general outlook.

Selectors do not look for any specific personality profile for a job, but some characteristics will be more appropriate for particular jobs (e.g. social confidence and independence are important for sales). Personality measurements provide only a guide to your true personality and are used only as supplementary information. You may be given feedback on the profile resulting from your answers or occasionally this may form the basis for a subsequent interview.

The best way to approach these questionnaires is to answer in an honest and straightforward manner. Guessing what the employer is looking for could be counter productive - after all, you do not want to be given a job which does not suit you.

Preparing for Tests

Test practice sessions, run by the Careers Service, can help you become familiar with the demands of aptitude tests and can boost your confidence. During a practice session the testing procedure and compilation of results will be explained. You will have the opportunity to take the tests, similar to those used by employers, under strict test conditions. Later you will receive individual feedback from a qualified tester including constructive, supportive advice. All results are strictly confidential. Practice sessions are available for verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning aptitude tests and details are publicised in ‘Finalists Jobs’ or are available on request. These sessions should be booked in advance and a small charge is made for materials.

Other sources of information:
- Some employers may send you sample questions in advance.
- Practice SHL aptitude test leaflets can be referred to or purchased from the Careers Service.
- The Civil Service, Self-Assessment Package is available on disk in the Information Room.
- A reference file for test material, including some examples, is available in the Careers Service.
- A range of reference books is available in the Careers Service.
- A number of websites are available but these often involve charges - see links from the Careers Service pages [http://www.hw.ac.uk/careers](http://www.hw.ac.uk/careers).
- The ‘Prospects’ website ([www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)) includes a useful ‘test yourself’ section which can be accessed by selecting ‘Graduate Services’.

Finally… some general advice:
- Try to get a good night’s sleep to ensure that you are bright and alert on the day. Plan to arrive in good time.
- Ensure that you know exactly what you have to do before you start each test.
- Work as quickly and as accurately as you can.
- Avoid spending too long on one question. If you get stuck, leave it and move on.
- If unsure of an answer, try to eliminate as many wrong answers as possible and opt for a reasoned guess. Some tests only award marks for correct answers, while others also penalise wrong ones. Ask how the test will be marked.
- Don’t worry if you do not finish the test in time (most people don’t!), but go back and check your answers if you have spare time.
- Remember you can only try your best. Not everyone is great at tests but this does not mean that you are not intelligent or that there is any reason why you will not have a successful career. If you do not get this job there will be others!

Good luck!