

TESTING AND ASSESSMENT:



A Guide to Good Practices for Workforce Investment Professionals



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CHAPTER 9 A Review: Principles of Assessment

Assessment tools, when used appropriately, can improve the quality of an agency's services by helping clients, counselors, and job placement specialists gather valuable information that can be used to help clients make appropriate career decisions. Employers can effectively use assessment instruments to measure job-relevant skills and capabilities of employees in training and development programs. To use assessment tools properly, administrators and staff must be aware of the inherent limitations of any assessment procedure, as well as the legal and professional issues involved when using assessment tools.

The Guide is organized around 13 important assessment principles and their applications. This final chapter brings all the principles together. They are listed below in the order of their appearance in the text, with the chapter number in parentheses. Together, the 13 principles provide a comprehensive framework for conducting an effective assessment program.

□ **Use assessment tools in a *purposeful manner* (Chapter 1)**

Assessment instruments, like other tools, are helpful when used properly, but can be useless, harmful, or illegal when used inappropriately. Often, inappropriate use results from not having a clear understanding of what you want to measure and why you want to measure it. You should be clear about what you want to accomplish with your assessment program in order to select the proper tools to achieve those goals.

In selecting your assessment tools, always keep in mind the knowledge, skills, abilities, characteristics, and personal traits you want to measure, and the population to be assessed. Once you are clear about your purpose, you will be better able to select appropriate assessment tools and use those tools in an effective manner. Only use tests that are appropriate for your particular purpose.

□ **Use the *whole-person approach* to assessment (Chapter 1)**

An assessment instrument may provide you with important career- or training-relevant information about an individual. However, no assessment tool is 100% reliable or valid; all are subject to errors, both in measuring job-relevant characteristics and in predicting job performance. Moreover, a single assessment instrument only provides you with a limited view of a person's qualifications. Using a variety of tools to measure skills, abilities, and other job-relevant characteristics provides you with a solid basis upon which to make important career and development decisions and minimizes adverse impact.

Use only assessment instruments that are *unbiased* and *fair* to all groups (Chapter 2)

Using unbiased and fair tests will enable you to provide the most appropriate assessment services to clients. You should review the fairness evidence associated with assessment instruments before selecting tools by examining the test manual and independent test reviews.

Use only *reliable* assessment instruments and procedures (Chapter 3)

If a person takes the same test again, will he or she get a similar score, or a very different score? A reliable instrument will provide accurate and consistent scores. To meaningfully interpret test scores and make useful career or employment-related decisions, use only reliable tools. Test manuals usually will provide a statistic known as the reliability coefficient, giving you an indication of a test's reliability. The higher the reliability coefficient, the more confidence you can have that the score is accurate.

Use only assessment procedures and instruments that have been demonstrated to be *valid for the specific purpose* for which they are being used (Chapter 3)

Validity is the most important issue in selecting assessment tools. It refers to (1) the characteristic the assessment instrument measures, and (2) how well the instrument measures the characteristic. Validity is not a property of the assessment instrument itself; it relates to how the instrument is being used.

A test's validity is established in reference to a specific purpose; it may not be valid for different purposes. For example, a test that may be valid for assessing someone's job knowledge may not be valid for predicting his or her leadership skills. You must be sure that the instrument is valid for the purpose for which it is to be used. Selecting a commercially developed instrument does not relieve you of this responsibility.

The test manual usually provides a statistic, the validity coefficient, which will give an indication of the test's validity for a specific purpose under specific circumstances. It measures the degree of relationship between test performance and job performance (i.e., job-relatedness of the test).

Use assessment tools that are appropriate for the *target population* (Chapter 3)

An assessment tool usually is developed for use with a specific group; it may not be valid for other groups. For example, a test designed to predict the work values of adults may not be valid for use with junior high school students. It is possible that many junior high school students are not vocationally mature enough for the assessment tool to be meaningful, or perhaps the reading level of the test is not suitable for junior high school students. Tests should be appropriate for the individuals you want to test, that is, your target population.

The manual should indicate the group or groups the test is designed to assess. Your target population should be similar to the group on which the test was developed or normed. In determining the appropriateness of an instrument for your target group, also consider such factors as reading levels, cultural backgrounds, and language barriers.

Use assessment instruments for which *understandable and comprehensive documentation* is available (Chapter 5)

Are the instructions for administration and interpretation understandable? Is the information sufficiently comprehensive to evaluate the suitability of the instrument for your needs?

Carefully evaluate the documentation provided by the test publisher to be sure that the tools you select do the job you want them to do and furnish you with the information you need. If the documentation is not understandable or complete, you run the risk of selecting inappropriate instruments.

Test manuals should provide information about both the development and psychometric characteristics of tests. They should cover topics such as procedures for administration, scoring and interpretation, the recommended uses of an instrument, the groups for whom the test is appropriate, and test norms. They also should include a description of the validation procedures used and evidence of validity, reliability, and test fairness.

Ensure that administration staff are *properly trained* (Chapter 6)

Assessment instruments must be administered properly to obtain valid results. Consult the test publisher and administration manual for guidelines on the qualifications and training required for test administrators. These requirements will vary depending on the nature and complexity of the test. Only suitable staff should be selected. Administrators should be given ample time to learn their responsibilities and should practice by administering tests to other staff before administering tests to applicants. Some test publishers may run training sessions for test administration and interpretation.

Administration staff also should be trained to handle special situations with sensitivity. An example would be responding to a request for accommodation based on a disability.

Ensure that *testing conditions are suitable* for all test takers (Chapter 6)

There are various extraneous influences that may affect the reliability and validity of an assessment procedure. For example, noise in the testing room, poor lighting, inaccurate timing, and damaged test equipment may adversely affect test takers. Staff should ensure that the testing environment is suitable and that administration procedures are uniform for all test takers.

□ **Provide *reasonable accommodation* in the assessment process for people with disabilities (Chapter 6)**

To ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities have an equal chance to demonstrate their potential, accommodations in the assessment process may be necessary. Under the ADA, reasonable accommodation may involve ensuring physical accessibility to the test site, modifying test equipment or the testing process, or providing qualified assistance to the test taker. For example, administering a Braille version of a test, allowing extra time to complete the test, or supplying a reader may be appropriate. It is important to become familiar with the types of accommodations that can be made without invalidating test results. If reasonable accommodation involving test administration cannot be made, consider alternative assessment strategies.

□ **Maintain assessment instrument *security* (Chapter 6)**

All materials used in the assessment process, whether paper-and-pencil or computer-based, must be kept secure. Lack of security may result in some test takers having access to test questions beforehand, thus invalidating their scores. To prevent this, test administrators should, for example, keep testing materials in locked rooms or cabinets and limit access to those materials to staff involved in the assessment process.

Some instruments used in counseling and in self-assessments are not held to the same strict standards of security. The purpose of testing often will dictate the importance of security for test materials. Security is also the responsibility of test developers. The security of a test may become compromised over time. To protect security, test developers periodically introduce new forms of tests.

□ **Maintain *confidentiality* of assessment results (Chapter 6)**

Assessment results are highly personal. Workforce development professionals must respect the test taker's right to confidentiality. Assessment results should be shared only with those who have a legitimate need to know. This would include staff involved in interpreting assessment results or making work-related decisions. Personal information should not be released to other organizations or individuals without the informed consent of the test taker.

□ **Ensure that scores are *interpreted properly* (Chapter 7)**

Tests are used to make inferences about people's knowledge, skills, abilities, traits, interests, and values. The inferences should be reasonable, well-founded, and not based upon stereotypes. If test scores are not interpreted properly, the conclusions drawn from them are likely to be invalid, thus leading to poor decision making. Ensure that there is solid evidence to justify your test score interpretations and the decisions you make based on those scores. The test manual should provide instructions for properly interpreting test results.
