WHAT IS A PSYCHOMETRIC TEST?

Psychometric literally means measurement of the mind (psycho = mind, metric = measurement). Psychometric tests are standardised tests designed by psychologists to measure mental performance. They help to identify your potential and personality. Sometimes employers use psychometric tests as part of their recruitment process to help determine whether a candidate is suitable for a particular role. They are structured pencil-and-paper or computer-based tests that usually consist of multiple-choice questions.

The two main types of psychometric tests used in recruitment selection are:

• Aptitude/ability tests
• Personality questionnaires

APTITUDE TESTS

Aptitude tests identify your potential to grasp new skills. They measure your natural ability to perform tasks where no prior specialist knowledge or skills are needed. The most commonly used aptitude tests in the graduate recruitment process are numerical and verbal reasoning tests. You may also encounter abstract, diagrammatical and spatial reasoning tests, depending on the type of job you are applying for.

• Verbal reasoning — the ability to comprehend and use words — is concerned with spelling, grammar and sentence completion.
• Numerical reasoning is the ability to reason with numbers, and analyse data and graphs.

Strict time limits are set and the tests are taken under exam conditions. The tests are designed so that most candidates do not complete them, so it is important that you work quickly and accurately to get as many correct as possible. There is a right and wrong answer.

PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRES

Personality questionnaires explore your preferred way of behaving. They measure how you relate to other people, and your ability to deal with your own and other people's emotions and the way you handle and solve problems. There is no right or wrong answer and usually no time restriction. Try to be as honest as possible. Don't try to second guess what employers are looking for, as tests usually have built-in mechanisms to detect inconsistencies. Be yourself, and remember that your first response is usually the most accurate.

WHY DO EMPLOYERS USE PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS?

• To help predict future on the job performance — they provide a snapshot of a candidate's potential.
• To ensure that a suitable candidate is hired for the job role.
• Tests are objective and fair — results are not influenced by tester bias.
• To sift out unsuitable candidates at an early stage in the recruitment process, this can be done quickly and cheaply and helps reduce recruitment costs.
• Psychometric tests are usually used as part of the selection process in conjunction with other traditional methods such as interviews.

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

- Before the test day, find out what types of tests will be used and check if any practice test is available. Employers will often send you a sample set of questions. Spend some time working through these.

- Brush up on your basic arithmetic skills — make sure you can work out fractions and percentages without a calculator. You can also find books on psychometric testing at University Careers Services and libraries. There are also a number of websites offering practice tests.

- If you have any disabilities, tell the test administrator in advance to allow them enough time to organise alternative arrangements (e.g. tests are often available in large print).

- If you wear glasses, remember to take these with you.

- Make sure you know how to get to the test venue, and allow plenty of time to get there on the day. Get a good night's sleep. Eat and drink properly. Psychometric tests also test your endurance and can prove quite exhausting.

- Try to relax and remain calm, but remember that a little bit of adrenalin can help boost your performance. Try and adopt a positive approach. View the test as a challenge and an opportunity to demonstrate your skills.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE TEST DAY

The test is a formal event. Everyone who takes the test receives the same instructions, time limits, and questions, to keep the tests fair and objective.

- Listen carefully to all instructions given by the test administrator. If you don't understand something, ask the administrator. They will not be able to help you once the test has started.

- Use the stationery provided. The tests are usually marked using optical scanning machines, which work best with pencil.

- Read the instructions for each test carefully. Record your answers in the correct way.

- Don't spend too long on any one question. If you can't answer a question, skip to the next one. You will be working under tight time constraints, so it's important not to waste time.

- Try to work as quickly and accurately as possible. The more questions you answer, the better your chances of getting a higher score.

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