

Psychological Testing

How Can I Prepare for Psychological Tests?

Remember that psychological tests are not generally like examinations. There are no right or wrong answers to many “tests” (e.g. personality scales), although speed of completion is a factor in most ability tests so work as fast and as accurately as you can.

Tips:

- Get a good night’s sleep before the day of testing.
- Practise doing crosswords or mathematical problems.
- Read a paper to practice taking in written information.
- If you are likely to be asked to analyse numerical data, review how to do basic calculations such as percentages and ratios.
- Remain calm; make sure all practical arrangements are clear so that you do not arrive feeling flustered or unprepared.
- If you feel nervous, try breathing deeply to help calm yourself down.
- Make sure you bring with you anything you might need during the day, such as reading glasses or an inhaler. You may want to bring a watch in order to keep track of time during any timed exercises.
- If there are any circumstances that may affect your performance on the tests, tell the administrator beforehand.
- If you have any special requirements, contact the administrator in advance to discuss the best ways to meet your needs.

Key Points to Remember During and After the Assessment Process

- Listen carefully to the instructions you are given, and ask if you are unsure about what you have to do. The focus of the assessment is to see how you perform on the tests themselves, rather than how well you understand the instructions.
- Don’t make assumptions about the way you should respond. If you try to guess what the assessors are looking for, you may be wrong. It is usually best to be yourself, and respond honestly. Remember that it’s not in your interests to get a job to which you are not well suited.
- If you find yourself running out of time on a numerical or verbal reasoning test, don’t quickly try to guess the rest of the answers in the hope that you may get a few more answers correct. Some tests have marks taken off for wrong answers and your accuracy is also taken into account when interpreting the results.
- If there is more than one exercise, you will have plenty of opportunities to show what you can do. If you feel you have done poorly on one exercise, don’t give up; your performance on all of them will be taken into account.

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- Being assessed is often challenging and you should expect to feel fairly stretched by the end of your assessment, particularly if there have been multiple exercises.
- Think about what you did well and what could have gone better, and make notes for the next time.
- You are entitled to receive feedback on the exercises you have completed, regardless of whether or not you are successful. This may give you an insight into your strengths and limitations, and may prove useful for future selection procedures.

About Psychological Testing

In general, psychological tests can be broken into three broad categories:

- **Personality Profiles** - These are designed to assess behaviours and attitudes. Commonly used personality profiles in New Zealand include the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) and the California Psychological Inventory (CPI). These have multi choice questionnaires.
- **Ability tests** - These may be tests of general ability or of more specific cognitive abilities (e.g. verbal critical reasoning, numerical reasoning, general problem solving and IQ).
- **Work Sample Tests** - These provide a sample of the work the candidate would be required to complete. e.g.: for a policy analyst role, the candidate would provide a written comment on a piece of policy. For a CEO role, we develop case studies where the candidate needs to develop a strategic business plan to present to the board as part of the panel interview.
- [Take the SHL Practice Tests \(External link\)](#)

The most commonly used tests in selection settings are personality and ability exercises, as these are deemed the most useful when trying to predict someone's future level of performance in a particular role or to gauge their likely level of "fit" with an organisation.

Typical characteristics of Personality Profiles:

- They generally take some time to complete (approx. 30 - 60 minutes)
- They are usually un-timed
- They are usually paper and pencil tests but are sometimes offered in computer based format
- There are no right or wrong answers
- They are usually forced choice format, True/False or 5-7 point scale responses
- They usually contain a "consistency" or a "good impression" scale – therefore, answer honestly
- Questions are often quite vague, (i.e. could be answered differently depending on the situation) and subsequently a person's first or gut response is the best indication of how they would generally respond in the situation.

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Typical characteristics of Cognitive Ability tests:

- Ability tests are usually timed and supervised (approximately 12 - 40 minutes)
- Consist of short questions where there is only one right answer but a lot of wrong ones
- Are typically multiple choice, or short answer format where you are asked to provide a number or a single word response
- Are generally designed to discriminate between highly talented candidates and often few candidates finish them
- The questions usually become progressively more difficult
- Both speed and accuracy are important
- They are usually paper and pencil tests although some are available in electronic format.

Can psychological tests be faked?

For some roles, the profile of the "perfect candidate" may appear to be obvious. You may think you know how to respond as the strong team player, effective leader or high achiever. Test developers are aware that self-report inventories (e.g. personality questionnaires) are particularly prone to candidates making false or misleading responses. You should note that many psychological tests contain "faking scales" or "consistency scales" to detect such misrepresentations.

Answering honestly about yourself, rather than how you would like to be or how you think the prospective employer wants you to respond, will help you get the truest picture of your personality characteristics and maximise your chances of a good fit between you and the position on offer.

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