Introduction To Selection (Aptitude) Tests

Organisations use many methods to assess applicants: application forms; interviews; written tests and exercises; group discussions and practical exercises. They use these to choose the most appropriate candidate for each vacancy. Different methods provide different sorts of information. One method that is increasingly used is aptitude tests.

Aptitude tests are structured systematic ways of evaluating how people perform on tasks or react to different situations. They are characterised by standardised methods of administration and scoring with the results quantified and compared with how others have done at the same tests.

Tests are usually only part of the overall assessment procedure. Employers will use them alongside interviews, application forms, academic results and other selection methods, so test results won't usually be the only information looked at.

Aptitude, Ability and Intelligence Tests

Administered under timed examination conditions. These tests assess your logical reasoning and become increasingly difficult throughout the test. They commonly take the form of multiple choice with right and wrong answers.
You are not expected to finish the tests, although of course you may do so. Your score relates your performance to a 'normed' group. So, your aptitude, ability or intelligence has a relative value to it. This is important to an employer who may want to know how well you can do something in relation to other applicants, the general population or people already doing the job.

Your score can be used in different ways. There may be a pass mark, which, by achieving, you get the job. Or the employer may have planned to interview a certain number of candidates and provided your score puts you in this group you will continue on to the next stage of selection. Alternatively, your score could simply be a further measure considered by an employer alongside a variety of other measures, such as interviews etc.

Programming Aptitude Tests

Sometimes, for computing jobs you will get a programming aptitude test. Some of these use "pseudocode", flowcharting, or assembler language. You can find some examples at www.psychometrics-uk.com/bapt.html "How to pass professional level psychometric tests" by Sam Al-Jajoka (Kogan Page 2001) has a chapter called Psychometric Tests for IT Recruitment which has an example assembly language test. Ask at Careers reception to use our reference copy.

Personality Questionnaires

Personality Questionnaires are used in order to determine your typical reactions and attitudes to a variety of situations. They could be trying to identify how well you get on with others or your normal reaction to stressful situations or just simply your feelings about the kind of people you like to work with.

It is unlikely that these questionnaires will be timed or indeed have right or wrong answers. Do not let this lack of exam conditions fool you. Some employers will know precisely what they are looking for in terms of an ideal Personality Profile and it is up to you to meet their expectations. It is unwise to try to fake the answers. These questionnaires usually have some type of internal checking where the same question is asked with slightly different wording early and late in the test to try to detect dishonest answers. Ultimately, there is little point in pretending to be the kind of employee a firm is looking for if that is not the case. Find something else you will enjoy doing!

SOME PREPARATION TIPS

Practice makes perfect.
Evidence suggests that some practice of similar tests may improve your performance slightly on actual tests. However, don't spend too long practising. It may be wise to brush up on your exam technique and perhaps become more familiar with the types of test you may face.
Treat it as you would any other occasion when you visit an employer. Plan your journey to the test site, arrive on time and appropriately dressed**. Listen to the**

instructions you are given and follow them precisely.

Before the actual test, you will be given practice examples to try - make sure you ask questions if anything is unclear at this stage.

Work quickly during the test, but pay attention to your accuracy. Try not to get bogged down on any one question, but remember that questions may get harder as you proceed. You can only score points for questions you answer, not for those you don't.

Educated guesses are worthwhile. In math's tests you may be able to use the technique of estimating the answer rather than working it out exactly, to save time. If you have a numerical test coming up and haven't done any maths since school then brush up on your numeracy. Stop using a calculator for everyday calculations, practice your multiplication and division, ability to calculate percentages, and to read graphs and tables. Similarly if your English is weak brush up on this.

REMEMBER - Listen to the instructions. They are crucial to your success in any psychometric test!

LINKS

- **SHL** Direct Free examples of ability test questions and personality questionnaires and timed practice tests with feedback on how you compare to other applicants
- **Morrisby** examples of ability tests.
- **ASE** Examples of verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning tests
- **QueenDom** Offers a variety of personality, aptitude and intelligence tests
- **GMAT Test** This is the Graduate Management Admissions Test often used by business schools to select for MBA courses. **Click here** for links to free practice tests.
- **10 minute IQ test** on-line
- **BBC Skillswise** Improve your numeracy and literacy
- **Maths Centre** includes a maths test you can print off

Selection Methods At A Glance

Exercise	What they're looking for	What they're NOT looking for
Group exercise (can take many forms but fundamentally a discussion with a group of other candidates)	People who can work with others to reach a suitable outcome	People who hog the discussion or people who contribute nothing
Presentation (giving a talk about a topic)	The ability to prepare and to communicate to a fair-sized audience	The aplomb of a cabinet minister or a nervous breakdown
Panel interview (involving 2 or more interviewers, probably investigating some issues in some depth)	Someone who can communicate well in a three-(or more) way conversation involving a variety of personalities	Much the same as the one-to-one interview
Lunch or dinner (yes, these can be tests too!)	Someone who can communicate coolly and calmly under for example, the stress of eating peas	Aristocratic table manners or food fights
Personality profile (quiz-like test to find out what sort of person you are)	There are no right answers so there's no point in cheating	Your deepest, darkest secrets
Aptitude tests (normally verbal, numerical and possibly diagrammatic reasoning)	People who are reasonably numerate, literate and spatially aware. Prepare by practising	Einstein
Case studies/in-tray exercises (examples or simulations of day-to-day working situations)	Common sense solutions and bright ideas	MBA-level analysis
Technical interviews (can take many forms, including practical tasks)	People who really do have the technical abilities they list on their CVs	People who have been doing the job for 40 years