

CANDIDATE ADVICE

Preparing for Psychometric Assessments

What to expect, the mistakes to avoid and how to prepare for personality questionnaires and ability tests.

As a candidate, the chances are you have come across – or will come across – psychometric tests as part of the job-hunting process, online or in person. This guide explains what they are, the mistakes people make, and how to give yourself the best chance.

What are psychometric tests?

Psychometric literally means "measurement of the mind". Psychometric tests are standardised exercises that compare your responses with those of a large group of people with similar backgrounds to your own. The two types most commonly used in recruitment are **personality questionnaires** and **ability tests**.

Personality questionnaires

Strictly speaking these are not tests – there are no right or wrong answers. They come in two main formats:

- Statements about working life that you rate on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, for example: *I enjoy leading meetings.*
- Blocks of statements where you pick the ONE most like you and the ONE least like you, for example: *I look forward to the future with optimism · I am a creative problem-solver · I am competitive in everything I do.*

Ability tests

Ability tests are normally timed and do have right and wrong answers. They measure your ability in specific areas:

- **Supervisory, graduate, managerial and professional roles:** usually verbal reasoning and numerical reasoning.
- **Skilled, craft and technician roles:** often mechanical reasoning, spatial awareness and fault finding – the kinds of test you may meet when applying for maintenance, technician and engineering positions.



How are they administered?

Traditionally tests were taken on paper, with a qualified administrator explaining the process and invigilating. That still happens, but most assessments are now completed online – often at home, as an early screening stage. If you complete a test at home you may be asked to re-sit it later under supervision; this is a standard safeguard against cheating, not a sign that anything went wrong.

Common pitfalls

Personality questionnaires

- Treating the questionnaire as a test and trying to pick the "right" answers, or second-guessing what the employer is looking for. Inconsistent or unrealistic answers are picked up by the way the questionnaire is designed.
- Spending too long analysing the statements, or trying to cross-reference later answers with earlier ones.

Ability tests

- Not reading the questions carefully enough – particularly important in critical reasoning tests.
- Rushing the questions.
- Spending too long on a single question.
- Being rusty on basic numerical concepts – important if you are taking a numerical reasoning test.
- Losing track of the time in a timed test.
- Not having the right equipment to hand: a watch, reading glasses, or a calculator you are familiar with.

Tests taken at home

- Doing them late at night when you are tired.
- Being interrupted part-way through.
- Being tempted to get friends to help – it will show at the supervised re-sit.

How to prepare

Before a reasoning test

- Brush up on your number skills – graphs, charts, tables, ratios, proportions and fractions – if you are taking a numerical test.
- Complete practice tests of the kind you are likely to face (see the websites below).

As the session starts

- Read the instructions carefully and ask if anything is unclear.
- Strike a balance between answering as many questions as you can and keeping your accuracy up – some tests score accuracy as well as the number of correct answers.
- Avoid simply guessing, in case wrong answers are penalised.

Before a personality questionnaire

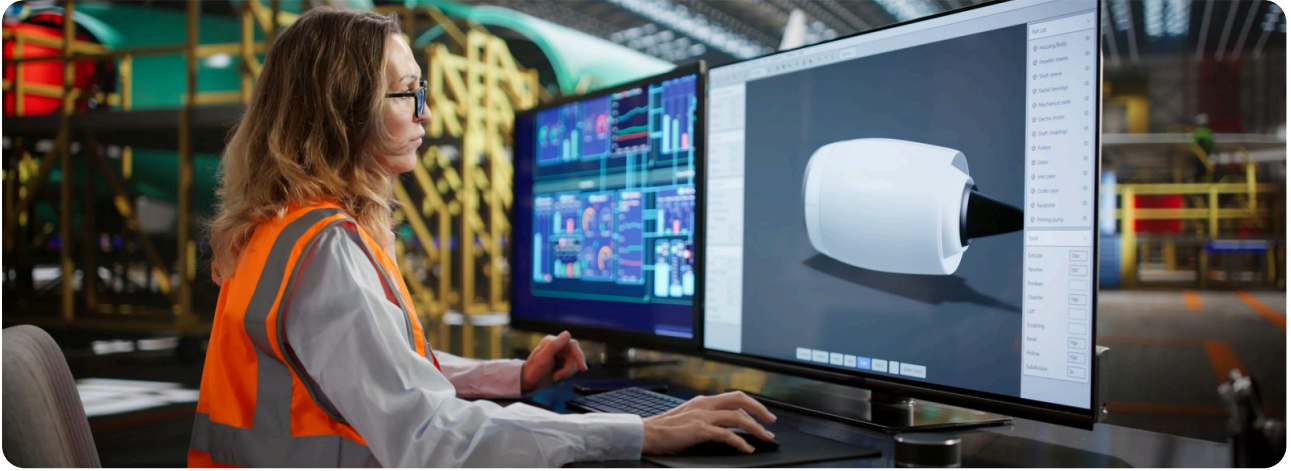
- Don't try to second-guess the "right" answers – there aren't any.
- Take each statement on its own merits. Think about what you are like now and how you normally behave at work.

Completing assessments at home

- Expect to be asked to re-take tests later in a supervised setting.
- Don't leave it to the last minute, in case of computer or browser problems.
- Set yourself up somewhere quiet and free from interruptions.

Afterwards

- Ask for feedback where it is available.
- If you found the ability tests harder than expected, revisit the preparation tips above before the next one.
- If you had technical problems or were disturbed during an online test, tell us straight away – we can ask the employer whether the session can be reset or rearranged.



Where to practise

These sites offer free practice tests and guidance. Newer sites appear all the time – search for "psychometric practice tests" – but be wary of those that charge.

- **SHL practice tests** – free practice versions of the verbal, numerical and inductive tests used by many large employers.
- **Saville Assessment** – preparation guides from another widely used test publisher.
- **Psychometric Success** – free downloadable practice tests and advice.
- **University of Kent Careers** – a university careers service with graduate-level practice tests and advice.

Been asked to take an assessment?

If an employer has asked you to complete a psychometric assessment as part of an application through Sigma, call your consultant on 02920 450 100. We can usually tell you what format to expect and how much weight it carries in the decision.