



# What to Look for in an Assessment

## What has the job candidate done? What can they do? What do they want to do?

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The value of properly selected and implemented assessment tools continues to be a hot topic among hiring professionals. Those who are using pre-employment assessments properly have been able to add significant value to their hiring processes.

Unfortunately, choosing the right assessment tools – those that ensure you will accomplish your key Organisational goals and objectives – is not always easy. And using these tools correctly requires adherence to a set of clearly defined best practices.

The more time you take to make sure the assessment tools you are using match the outcomes you're trying to predict, the more value the tool will return. This isn't always as easy as it sounds, because no one tool is appropriate for every situation. There are many different types of assessments, and to make matters even more complicated, there are a staggering number of vendors selling these tools, not all of whom are worthy of your business. So, if all assessment tools and vendors are not equal, and there are many different types of tools from which to choose, how does one decide which tool will best suit their needs?

The first step in helping answer this question is a quick review of the various types of assessments available in today's marketplace.

### What is an assessment?

For the purposes of this article, I define assessments as, "Any instrument used to collect information from applicants for the purposes of making a hiring decision."

Assessments can be divided into three main categories based on the information they are meant to provide. These include:

**What have they done?** This category is designed to provide information about the work-related experiences the applicant has had. This information is very useful for determining what, if any, specific life experiences the applicant has had that will help them perform the job at hand. This type of assessment includes:

- Screening: Questions designed to assess basic "make or break" qualifications.
- Resume review: Review of documents summarising relevant experience.
- Life history/experience: Questions that require applicants to discuss specific experiences they have had relevant to job requirements.
- Background checks: Verification that the applicant meets all legal requirements for performing the job.

**What can they do?** This category includes assessments designed to predict an applicant's ability to perform the job based on their level of knowledge or aptitude for specific job-related requirements.

- **Ability measures:** These measure cognitive abilities such as problem-solving and critical thinking.
- **Situational judgment:** These measure an individual's ability to make the right decision in work-related situations.
- **Simulations:** These provide applicants with replicas of the work environment and require them to interact and solve problems within this environment.
- **Knowledge tests:** These measure knowledge of a specific subject.
- **Personality:** Perhaps the most popular pre-employment assessment tool used today, these provide excellent information about the way an applicant handles specific work-related situations.

**What do they want to do?** This category includes assessments designed to measure an applicant's interest in performing specific aspects of the job that are required for job performance. This category also includes working within a specific type of work environment. This type of assessment includes:

- **Values matching:** These measure the congruence between an individual's preferences and values and the values of the organisation.
- **Career interest:** These provide a way to help applicants better understand what jobs and careers appeal to their interests and capabilities.

Ideally, the above assessments should be woven together to create a process that can predict which applicants best meet the specific requirements of a position and best fit into the organisation in which the job is located.

Choosing the correct type of assessments for your needs requires some careful planning and thought. Despite the fact that all assessment products are not created equal and not all assessments are right for every situation, there are some basic characteristics that are key drivers of success when using an assessment tool. The remainder of this article provides an overview of nine key parameters that should be evaluated when choosing an assessment tool. A careful focus on each of these is an important determinant of success when using assessments.

**Relevant:** First and foremost, assessments must be relevant to the job for which they are being used. These things should be clearly defined before one searches for a vendor, as the ability to provide relevant assessments is the major determinant of success. There are varying degrees of relevance, but the general rule is that the more relevant the assessment is to the job, the more accurate and legally defensible it will be.

**Validated:** There are many different ways to validate an assessment, and a discussion of each is beyond the scope of this article. Pure and simple, a "validated" assessment is one that measures constructs that are relevant to the job, and it does so accurately. When choosing an assessment, the vendor should be able to show that the assessment is relevant to the purpose for which you wish to use it. Without this evidence in hand, you are taking your chances.

**Technically sound:** All assessments that are considered for use should be developed using the correct psychometric methods. While these are often difficult for non-testing geeks to understand, all vendors who are "the real deal" should offer a technical manual with their assessments. This manual can be reviewed by an expert third-party in order to provide peace of mind that the assessment has the pedigree required for success.

**Candidate friendly:** All assessments that are used should create a positive experience for applicants. This means that the purpose of the assessment should be explained, the assessment should not be too long, its contents should be work-related and non-offensive, and whenever possible, the assessment should be engaging and support your employment brand. Every step in the hiring process sends a message to candidates. Testing must be carefully managed in order to ensure it does not have a negative impact on applicants' perceptions.

**Cutting-edge:** You should take advantage of the wide range of features that have served to make assessments more accessible and user-friendly than they've ever been. For the most part, this means using web-based tools to support the implementation, delivery, scoring, reporting, and data analysis that goes along with the use of an assessment tool. Unfortunately, the actual content of most assessments hasn't evolved much over the past decade. We are still squarely focused on using personality and ability tools that require test-takers to fill in radio buttons. I believe this will change as technology and uptake in assessments evolves. I encourage those considering using tests to look into simulation-based assessments, as these represent the future of assessment and can offer excellent results.

**Complimentary:** It is dangerous to look only at an individual test or assessment and expect it to tell the entire story regarding an applicant's suitability to perform a specific job. Assessments are just one part of an overall system designed to collect information so that hiring personnel can make an informed decision. All assessments considered for use should be evaluated in terms of their fit with the entire hiring process.

**Competency-based:** Assessments should be anchored directly to a set of competencies or traits that are relevant to the workplace. The more work-related the outcomes predicted by the assessment tool, the easier it will be to sync them up with your company's competencies or performance models. This is an important step in determining that the assessment is relevant to your organisation and that it produces the outcomes your organisation seeks.

**Supported:** Using assessment properly is not an easy proposition. Be wary of vendors who tell you that it is simple and easy to properly implement assessments. If you do not have in-house expertise to help with the technical aspects of the selection system, the vendor selling you the assessment should provide access to professional services that can ensure the tool is configured and implemented properly. Without the proper support, your assessment effort is much less likely to produce the desired results.

**Usable:** One of the most common issues I see with assessment tools today is the usability of the results they generate. Oftentimes, assessment reports provide a ton of information that is not easy for hiring personnel to interpret. The goal of any implementation is good hiring decisions, and the output of the assessment process needs to be simple and easy to use for decision-making. Review assessment reports to ensure they will support this purpose. The reports should contain clear, relevant, and usable information.

Choosing assessments and the vendors who sell them is not an easy process, but it is critical to the success of your initiative. Take the time and effort to thoroughly evaluate assessments to ensure you are positioning yourself for success. Successful assessment implementation and use is important because it can provide measurable value to your organisation and help ensure the successful achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

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