

17

Taking Preemployment Tests

Key Terms

skill test

psychological test

situational test

civil service test

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude
Battery (ASVAB)

polygraph

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **explain** why employers give preemployment tests.
- **describe** the types of preemployment tests commonly given to prospective employees.
- **prepare** for preemployment tests.

Reading Advantage

After reading each section, answer this question: If you explained the information to a friend who is not taking this class, what would you tell him or her?



Key Concepts

- Many employers will require applicants to take preemployment tests. Most of these tests do not have right or wrong answers.
- Being prepared for preemployment tests includes being well rested, having supplies needed, and arriving at the test site early.

Sharika had just returned from applying for three jobs. “I was surprised I had to take so many tests,” she said.

“Tests!” Dave said in alarm. “You mean you have to take tests to get a job?”

“That’s right,” said Sharika. “You thought teachers were the only people who gave tests? Well, employers do, too. When I was interviewed at one company, the personnel manager said practically all companies give preemployment tests to prospective employees. All government employees, such as mail carriers and civil service workers, must take one or more preemployment tests.”

Why do employers give tests when hiring? Many employers give preemployment tests to screen, or examine, prospective employees. Companies want to choose the best people for the jobs available. They try to gather enough data about job applicants to make wise selections. Another reason employers give preemployment tests is to find out if an applicant is suited to a given job. Employees may give one or more of the following types of tests:

- Skill tests evaluate a person’s physical or mental skills.
 - Psychological tests evaluate a person’s personality, character, and attitudes.
 - Situational tests give the employer a better idea of how a person will perform under actual job conditions.
 - Government agencies give exams to help place people fairly in government jobs.
 - Polygraph tests and written honesty tests help employers judge a person’s truthfulness.
 - Medical exams determine a person’s physical condition for the job.
- Preemployment tests can help you as well as the employer. Taking a preemployment test may reinforce your interest in your chosen career. On the other hand, test results may show that you are seeking a job for which you are not suited. You may find more training is needed to meet an employer’s requirements, or your skills and interests are better matched to another career field. Preemployment tests are only a part of the job selection process, but an important part.

A graphic with a blue and black abstract pattern. The text "Thinking It Through" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font, with "Thinking It" on the top line and "Through" on the bottom line.

Thinking It Through

What preemployment tests do you think are used for jobs that interest you?

Skill Tests

A **skill test** is used to test the physical or mental abilities of a job applicant. An employer uses one or more of these tests to decide if an applicant has the skills to do a job.

Skill tests may be performance, written, or oral. Performance tests check your ability to operate tools and machines. Written and oral tests examine your understanding of the practices or facts needed to perform in the workplace.

In the Real World

The Missing Skill

Bob saw a want ad from a small equipment operator that repairs and rebuilds heavy diesel equipment. Since Bob had experience in auto and diesel mechanics and equipment operation, he applied for the job and was granted an interview.

At the interview, the shop supervisor explained the type of person he wanted for the job. "I need someone who can do four things: drive a truck, operate a forklift, operate a crane, and keep our equipment in good working order."

Bob quickly thought about what the supervisor said before responding. Driving a truck and operating a forklift would be no problem because he had experience doing both. He also had experience repairing and maintaining heavy equipment. However, the crane might be a problem because he never operated one. He glanced at the crane that was parked nearby, and it didn't look difficult to operate. So he said, "I can do all four, but I might need some help running the crane."

"Oh, you have never operated a crane?" the supervisor asked.

Bob made the mistake of saying, "Sure I have. It's been a while though. I'm just a little rusty."

"Well, let's find out how well you can operate it," the supervisor replied.

Bob climbed into the seat while the supervisor explained the controls. Bob was about to say he couldn't do it when the supervisor said, "Back it up about 10 feet and pick up that track to your right. Then set it

down on the concrete pad to your left. Be careful, that track weighs over 1,000 pounds."

The supervisor climbed down from the crane, leaving Bob alone at the controls. Bob successfully started the engine and shifted the crane into reverse. The gears engaged and the crane moved backward. "Hey," he thought, "I'm driving a crane. I'm going to get this job after all."

Bob advanced slowly and carefully moved the crane into position. "That's far enough," the supervisor yelled to him. "Pick up the track."

Bob looked at the levers. "Here it is," he said to himself, "the lever to lower and raise the boom." He moved the lever and the boom slowly lowered. However, it wasn't directly over the track. The boom was just a few feet out of reach.

"You'll need to go forward about three feet," yelled the supervisor.

When Bob shifted into gear, the crane moved forward and kept going. "How do I stop it?" he yelled.

Bob finally stopped the crane, but not before driving the boom into the wall of the office building.

Questions to Discuss

1. Do you think Bob was hired for the job? Why?
2. Instead of lying to the supervisor, what positive things could Bob have told the supervisor about himself and his ability to do the job?
3. Do you think the supervisor would have considered Bob for the job even without experience operating a crane? Why?
4. What would you have done in Bob's situation?

**17-1**

Employers may have workstations set up as testing sites for job applicants.

find percentages, and work with fractions.

Clerical skill tests are examples of combined written and performance tests. These tests are often given to applicants seeking employment as

office assistants. They are given to measure such abilities as performing simple math operations, copying numbers and names correctly, and placing files in alphabetical order, 17-2.

Do not be afraid to take a skill test. If you have the skills to perform the job for which you are being tested, you will not have problems. If you do poorly on a skills test, it is not the end of the world. Instead, it is an opportunity to find out how you can improve your skills. If you express a sincere interest in the job, the employer may offer to teach you the skills you need.

Whatever you do, never tell an employer you possess skills that you do not have. Eventually, the employer will discover the truth. You could then be fired for being dishonest, not being able to perform the duties of the job, or both.

Filing Speed and Accuracy Tasks

This task measures your ability to quickly and correctly file records alphabetically. Below are two lists of files identified by names—last names followed by first and middle initials.

List A consists of files to put away. **List B** represents a drawer of files already in alphabetical order. Determine where the **List A** files correctly belong in the file drawer. You will do this by placing the numbers corresponding to the **List A** files in the appropriate spaces in **List B**.

For example:

LIST A (To be filed)

1. Lockport, H.A.
2. Logan, K.L.

LIST B (Already filed)

| | |
|----------------|-------------|
| () | Logan, J.G. |
| Lober, D.F. | (2) |
| (1) | Long, C.F. |
| Lockwood, R.E. | () |
| () | Lopez, J.M. |
| Lodge, H.A. | () |
| () | Loren, L.P. |
| Loffredo, S.A. | () |
| () | () |

Mountain Bell

17-2

These directions show one example of a clerical test that measures a person's filing speed and accuracy.

Extend Your Knowledge

What Might You See on a Psychological Test?

Most psychological tests involve written multiple choice questions or short essays. A common essay instruction is: “Describe yourself in a paragraph.” Oral psychological tests are given by a psychologist. The questions may be about you or your opinions on certain issues.

Psychological Tests

A **psychological test** examines a person’s personality, character, and interests. These tests do not measure a person’s knowledge or aptitudes. They measure factors such as cooperation, assertiveness, adaptability, loyalty, honesty, and personal likes and dislikes. Some employers give these tests to determine how well an applicant will adjust to the job and get along with coworkers, 17-3.

If you are asked to take a psychological test, do not be concerned. There are no right or wrong answers for these tests so you should not feel stressed. Simply answer the questions as well as you can. The best approach is being positive and truthful.

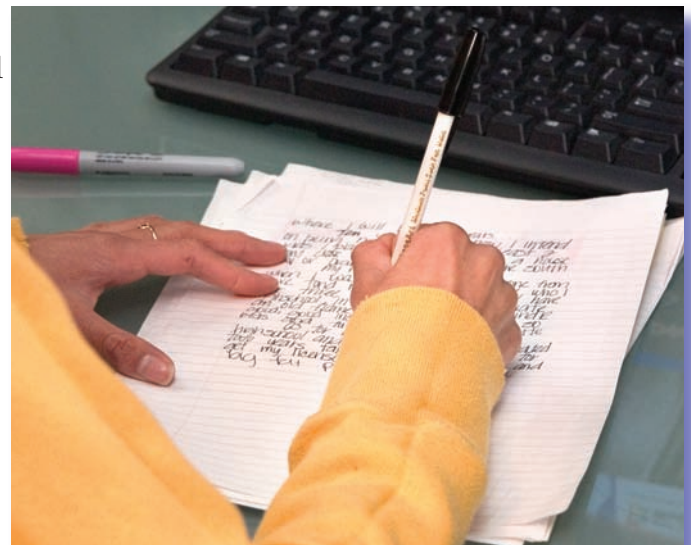
Situational Tests

Many employers find that traditional performance, written, and oral tests do not reveal how well a worker will actually perform on the job. Consequently, they use a **situational test** to examine the ability of job applicants in a work setting similar to the job’s. These tests examine the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required by the job. For example, for a job involving frequent teamwork, applicants may be grouped with four or five other applicants. The group is then given a problem to solve. A trained observer judges how successfully each team member works with others, solves problems, and demonstrates leadership skills.

In another case, potential assembly line workers may be placed on a test assembly line. They may be judged for their dexterity and patience in performing simple routine tasks for long periods. These tests can be very helpful to both the employer and the potential employee. Often it is the applicant who decides not to take the job after getting a chance to experience the work involved.

Thinking It Through

What is wrong with telling an employer you possess certain skills when you don’t?



17-3

Some employers give psychological tests to determine how well an applicant will get along with others on the job.

A decorative icon for the 'Reflect Further' section, featuring a colorful, abstract pattern of purple, blue, and green.

How well do you think you would score on a psychological test? What do you think the test would reveal about you?

Government Tests

The United States Government is the nation's largest employer. It hires many people for civilian jobs as well as military jobs. In addition, a variety of jobs are filled by people working for state and local agencies. Two types of tests you may encounter if you apply for a federal or state government job or pursue a military career are discussed here.

Civil Service Test

A **civil service test** is an examination a person may be required to take in applying for a government job. The Civil Service Commission is the federal agency that administers the civil service tests and hires employees for federal government jobs. The employment service of each state administers tests and hires workers for state jobs. Both federal and state governments test job applicants to select the best qualified person for the job without regard to sex, race, religion, or political influence. The testing system attempts to give all U.S. citizens a fair chance at government jobs.

To learn about these job openings and the testing required, call your nearest state employment service. You can find the number by looking under your state's name. For example, in Illinois look under *Illinois, State of*. Then look for *jobs* or *employment*. The exact title will vary from state to state. You can also find information on your state's Web site.

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery

The **Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery**, or **ASVAB**, is an aptitude test designed to measure strengths, weaknesses, and potential for future success. There are three versions of the test. Two versions are designed for use by military recruiters, 17-4. The third version is the student ASVAB, which is part of the ASVAB Career Exploration Program.

The student ASVAB is for juniors and seniors in high school and postsecondary students. It is given in high schools, colleges, and vocational schools. The test provides three overall scores in verbal, math, and science and technical skills. In addition, eight sub scores in areas such as auto and shop information, arithmetic reasoning, paragraph comprehension, and electronics comprehension are provided.

The ASVAB Career Exploration Program is designed to help you learn more about yourself and explore various occupations. It can help you determine if you are ready for more training in different career areas. A program will provide you with a variety of career planning tools. For example, the Find Your Interests (FYI) inventory will help you identify your work-related interests. The OCCU-Find tool will help you explore occupations in relation to the scores you received on the ASVAB and FYI. You can learn more about ASVAB at www.military.com/ASVAB and www.asvabprogram.com.

Polygraph Tests

A **polygraph** test, also called a *lie-detector test*, is given with a polygraph machine. The machine measures and records on graph paper the changes in the subject's blood pressure, perspiration, and pulse rate when an examiner asks questions. To conduct a polygraph test, an examiner places an inflated blood-pressure cuff around the subject's arm, a rubber tube around the chest, and small electrodes on one hand. Then the examiner asks the subject questions.

A specific series of questions are asked in a specific sequence. The questions asked usually fall into two broad categories: relevant and control. A *relevant* question is very specific. For example, "Did you steal from your last employer?" A *control* question is less precise, such as, "In the last 10 years, have you ever stolen anything?" Examiners say that a person who is lying will usually react more strongly to the relevant questions.

After a polygraph test, the examiner analyzes the graph and decides whether the subject is lying or telling the truth. The machine by itself cannot do this; it only measures levels of stress. The examiner examines the stress levels and determines if the stress was caused by lying or an emotion such as anger or fear.

The Employee Polygraph Protection Act (EPPA) of 1988 prohibits most private employers from using lie detector tests for preemployment screening or during the course of employment. The EPPA does not apply to federal, state, and local governments.

The law, however, permits the use of polygraph tests by private employers in certain cases. For example, lie detector tests may be given to company employees suspected of theft, embezzlement, or other activities resulting in economic loss or injury to the employer. The test may be used on job applicants in certain firms dealing in security issues, armored cars, or alarms. The polygraph test may also be used by pharmaceutical manufacturers, distributors, and dispensers.

Polygraph tests are subject to strict standards under the law. These standards control the administration of the test and the certification of the examiner. The EPPA strictly limits the disclosure of information obtained during a test. For more information about polygraph tests, contact the Employment Standards Administration's Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor (www.dol.gov/esa).



17-4

If you are considering a military career, you may find the ASVAB tests helpful in your career planning.

Reflect Further

Would you feel uncomfortable taking a polygraph test? Why or why not?

In the Real World

Alan and Hal

Alan and Hal recently graduated from different high schools. They don't know each other, but they are alike in many ways. Both studied vocational electronics in high school and had similar work-based learning programs. Also, both applied for the following job:

Electronics

Ground floor opportunities with growing national computer firm. Must be HS grad exp'd in electronics, microcomputer assembly & repair, digital electronics, data communications. Will be trained to work for a team of experts. Contact: P.O. Box 1354, Chicago, IL 60606

After completing their application forms, Alan and Hal were scheduled for interviews on the same day—Alan in the morning and Hal in the afternoon. When Alan and Hal arrived, each was asked to take a written test. It wasn't an electronics test, but a psychological test. Here are some of the questions asked and their responses.

- Why do you want to work in electronics?
 - Alan: I like electronics and feel it has good future opportunities.
 - Hal: I like to work in electronics, and I want to make a lot of money.
- Would you enter a nine-month training program at a lower salary?
 - Alan: Yes, if it meant I would learn the business.
 - Hal: No. I'm prepared to go to work right now. I don't need much more training.

- Do you prefer to work alone or with a group?
 - Alan: Either. At times I like to work alone, but I also like to work with others.
 - Hal: In a group. I like to be with people.
- Answer yes or no to this: I always control my temper.
 - Alan: No. I try, but sometimes I get mad and raise my voice.
 - Hal: Yes. No matter how unreasonable others are, I control my temper and never get angry.

The company wanted young people with knowledge and experience in electronics who were willing to be trained according to the company's system. Who do you think was hired—Alan, Hal, or both?

Alan was offered a position, but Hal was not. The main reason for Hal not being hired was his answer to the last question about controlling his temper. Very few people, if any, never get angry. Hal's reply sounded unrealistic. His answer also gave the impression that he thinks he's always right and incapable of making mistakes. The interviewer concluded that Hal's attitude would probably lead to problems in getting along with others and accepting constructive criticism.

Questions to Discuss

- Do you think the test questions were fair?
- Do you agree with the interviewer's interpretation of Hal's answer? Why?
- Whom would you hire? Why?
- Would you feel uncomfortable taking a similar psychological test? Explain.

Written Honesty Tests

A written honesty or integrity test is another type of test designed to measure a person's honesty in the workplace. These paper-and-pencil tests are intended to help employers identify job applicants who are likely to be dishonest employees. They are often used where people handle cash or merchandise. They may also be used where individuals must work with little supervision. The results of the test may not always be accurate. The test should be used as a part of the total job screening process. It should never be used as the sole reason for hiring someone. Unlike polygraph tests, pencil and paper honesty tests can be given in most states. However, some states have laws restricting their use.

Two types of questions are commonly asked on honesty tests. There are *overt questions*, such as "Have you ever stolen anything from an employer?" A second type of question is more subtle. Some examples include "Do you think a person should be arrested for downloading songs from the Internet without paying?" or "Does everyone steal something once in a while?" These types of questions are often designed in a way that makes it difficult for a person to cheat. More than one question may be included to identify the same type of dishonest behavior. This makes it hard to know the "right answer."

You should not be afraid to take an honesty test. Just answer all questions truthfully.

Medical Examinations

Do not be surprised if you are asked to take a medical or physical examination before you are hired for a job. Some large companies even have their own clinics and doctors. One purpose of a medical exam is to identify health problems that might prevent a person from performing his or her job safely and successfully.

Another purpose is to identify applicants with health problems that may become expensive insurance liabilities for the employer. Some companies have begun to use genetic testing for this purpose, and the trend is expected to continue. Genetic testing examines inherited traits. These can reveal the likelihood of future health problems developing, such as diabetes or heart disease.

Certain jobs, such as flying passenger airplanes or playing professional sports, require top physical condition. Some hospitals, medical clinics, and restaurants require workers to have medical exams for health reasons, 17-5. It is also a common practice for workers in management or stress-related jobs to have a complete medical exam prior to employment and periodically during employment.

Thinking It Through

Why do you think it is legal for certain security and pharmaceutical firms to use polygraph tests?

Reflect Further

Would you rather answer an overt or a subtle honesty question? Why?



Physical Disabilities and the Screening Process

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has caused major changes in the employment of individuals with disabilities. The *Title I—Employment* section of the act prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities who otherwise are qualified for a given job or position.

The act requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for a person with disabilities who can perform the essential functions of the job. Employers must eliminate all attempts, intentional or otherwise, to screen out individuals with disabilities during the interview process. A more complete discussion of ADA is found in Chapter 20, “Diversity and Rights in the Workplace.”

17-5

Preemployment medical exams are required for many types of jobs.

Thinking It Through

Do you think employers should have the right to eliminate job candidates because of a disability?

Drug Testing

Besides medical exams, many employers require drug testing as part of the job application process. Drug use in the workplace has become a major concern to employers. Workplace accidents, high absenteeism, reduced productivity, and high health costs are linked to drug use by workers. Since drug use can affect future job performance, applicants who test positively for drugs are usually not hired.

Drug abusers endanger themselves and coworkers. They have more accidents due to carelessness and poor judgment. Coworkers are endangered when drug users take risks and ignore safety rules. These problems cost employers billions of dollars every year.

To help fight the growing drug problem, many employers have started drug prevention programs for employees. The main purpose of the programs is to provide workers with a safer work environment. These programs usually include some form of drug testing. Employees may be tested periodically without prior notification of the specific time and date of the test. Company policies for employees who test positively may vary, but may include suspension or dismissal.

Drug testing is a controversial issue for both employers and employees. A difficult decision for an employer is whether to include testing in a drug prevention program. The workers most likely to be tested are those in jobs involving workplace or public safety, such as public transportation workers. Employees have concerns, too, such as the right to privacy and test accuracy.

How to Take Preemployment Tests

Unlike most tests, there are few preemployment tests for which you can study. However, there are several steps you can take to prepare yourself for any test. Follow these suggestions to help you feel calm and composed at test time:

- Try to find out in advance what type of tests you must take. If it is a skill test, such as welding, you can practice. However, do not practice so much that you tire yourself just before test time.
- Get plenty of rest the night before the test so you will feel refreshed and alert.
- If you are taking a written test, bring an extra pencil just in case you need it.
- Arrive at the test site early. Select a seat where you can see and hear the examiner well.
- While instructions are being given, be sure to ask questions about anything you do not understand. Follow directions exactly. Know how and where your answers are to be made. You may know the answer, but it will be marked wrong if you write it in the wrong place on the answer sheet.
- When taking a written test, try not to stay too long on one question. Answer the easiest questions first. Then go back and try to answer the harder questions.
- Have confidence in your ability.

Thinking It Through

What are the advantages and disadvantages of drug testing? Should employers use this type of test to screen job applicants?

Reflect Further

What additional steps might you take to prepare yourself for scoring well on a preemployment test?

Summary

Many employers give preemployment tests as part of the job selection process. This helps them choose the best people for the jobs available. In addition, they can determine if a person will be suited to a certain job.

Several types of preemployment tests can be given to prospective employees. Skill tests may be given to test either their physical abilities or their knowledge of how to perform certain skills. Psychological tests are often used to find out more about an applicant's personality, character, and interests. Situational tests give the employer a better idea of how a person will perform under actual job conditions.

Civil service tests are often required to help place people fairly in state and federal government jobs. The military uses the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test to help place people in the military. Polygraph tests and written honesty tests help employers judge an applicant's honesty.

Medical exams are required by some employers to determine an applicant's physical condition for the job. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities who can perform the essential functions of a job. Increasing concerns about drug abuse on the job have led some employers to start drug testing programs for job applicants.

Facts in Review

1. List two ways a preemployment test may be helpful to the person taking the test.
2. What is a performance test? Give an example.
3. Why do some employers give psychological tests to job applicants?
4. Who administers civil service tests?
5. Why do state and federal governments test job applicants?
6. Why may someone with no plans for a military career want to take the ASVAB?
7. What stress changes in the body do polygraph tests measure?
8. Who determines if a person taking a polygraph test is lying or telling the truth?
9. Where are honesty tests most often used?
10. What are the two main reasons for giving medical examinations to prospective employees before hiring them?
11. True or false. The main purpose of employee drug prevention programs is to provide workers with a safer work environment.

Developing Your Academic Skills

1. **Science.** Research the possible future use of genetic testing to determine employees' health plans. In class, debate whether this seems to be an appropriate procedure—are there advantages or disadvantages to the employer or the employee?
2. **Social Studies.** Study examples of civil service tests. Discuss how the tests help place workers in jobs in the state and federal government. Give examples of different government jobs and discuss the qualifications necessary for each job.

Applying Your Knowledge and Skills

1. **Employability and Career Development.** Investigate the types of preemployment tests you may be asked to take when applying for jobs in your career area.
2. **Communications.** Obtain sample questions from preemployment tests and answer them in class.
3. **Problem Solving and Critical Thinking.** Assume the role of an employer. Make a list of the skills a job applicant needs to qualify for a specific job in your company. Then describe a performance, written, or oral test you could give applicants to evaluate their skill levels.

Information Technology Applications

1. Video yourself answering questions commonly asked in an oral psychological test. View the videos and critique your test.
2. Practice taking a standard keyboarding test. Rate yourself for speed and accuracy. Evaluate your results and determine areas that need more work.

Developing Workplace Skills

Working with two or three classmates, design a written honesty test for an entry-level position with one of the following employers: a child care center, a fast-food restaurant, or an auto repair shop. Talk with someone employed in the chosen career field to get a better understanding of the job. Present your written honesty test to the class. Explain why honest employees are important to the employer you selected. Also explain how your test will help identify people that may not be honest.