# Assessment Decision Guidelines
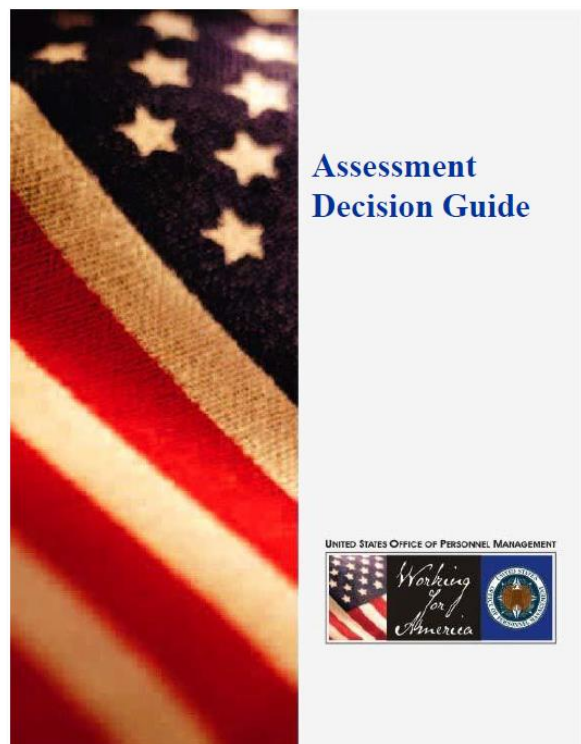


Assessment Decision Guide

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

## Introduction

Employee assessments have become vital in the hiring and promotion process.   Because of their importance, it is crucial to choose the proper assessment for your organization. The purpose of this document is to explain the different types of assessments, as well as essential details to look for in each type. All the information detailed in this document is a condensation of the official Assessment Decision Guide from the United States Office of Personnel Management.

## What is an Assessment?

An assessment is a systematic approach meant to evaluate an individual's job-related competencies, personality traits, interests, or qualification for employment. The results are widely used in the decision-making process for hiring, placement, promotion, retention, training, career development, and other similar situations.  The data derived from these assessments help you avoid the bias associated with interviews as the primary method of hiring.  Because they are the most common types, this document focuses on personality and cognitive assessments.

# Types of Assessments

There are numerous types of assessments to be aware of, so you know which one is right for your organization. The more commonly used ones include:

▶ **Cognitive Ability tests** – assess abilities involved in thinking, such as reasoning, perception, mathematical and verbal abilities, and problem solving

▶ **Personality tests** – designed to collect information about a person's motivations, interests, preferences, and style of interaction with others

▶ **Emotional Intelligence tests** – measures applicant's ability to monitor one's own emotions and others' emotions, and to use that information to guide one's thinking and actions

▶ **Job Knowledge tests** – designed to assess technical or professional expertise in specific knowledge areas

▶ **Situational Judgement tests** – applicant is presented with a description of a work problem or critical situation related to the job and asked to explain how they would handle it

▶ **Physical Ability tests** – measure the strength, muscle flexibility, and stamina necessary for manual labor or physical skill related to the job

## Cognitive & Personality

The most common assessments are cognitive ability tests and personality tests. These tend to be the most useful indicators of job performance because of what they measure. Cognitive ability tests assess thinking abilities and estimate an applicant's potential to solve work-related problems and ability to learn. Personality tests focus on the applicant's motivations, preferences, interests, emotional makeup, and interaction styles. All of these aspects combined give you an accurate, in-depth view of the applicant's ability and desire to perform on the job. Data from these types of tests are essential for more informed hiring decisions.

## Normative vs. Ipsative

Personality tests organize their questions in one of two ways: normative or ipsative. Normative questions oblige the applicant choose an answer that describes whether they agree or disagree with the description whereas Ipsative questions offer a set of adjectives for applicants to select that which most or least describes them. An ideal assessment relies on normative questions because the answers, or scores, are compared to other individuals in a normative population; this allows you to compare your candidate to others, while ipsative questions focus on an individual's perception of themselves which can be fraught with bias.

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You are concerned with whether an assessment measures consistently and whether it measures what is says it does Therefore, most relevant and necessary factors to consider when selecting an assessment are *reliability* and *validity*.

## Reliability

Reliability refers to consistency—will the assessment measure similarly from one assessment administration to the next.  Reliability is displayed as a positive decimal number between 0 and 1.00, where 1.00 means completely free of any error. No assessment procedure is perfectly consistent, but the Office of Personnel Management recommends a reliability range of 0.70 and higher.

## Validity

An assessment should measure what it says it does. An assessment with an acceptable validity rating would be able to accurately predict an applicant's behavior on the job based on their scores. It is best to use a tool with documented *construct validity*, meaning it demonstrates that it truly measures what it claims to. Validity is measured as a decimal number between 0 and 1.00, with 1.00 meaning the two comparative factors in focus, such as test scores and job performance, are perfectly related. In practice, validity coefficients for a single assessment rarely exceed .50. A validity coefficient of .30 or higher is generally considered useful for most circumstances.

*Predictive validity* is also important to pay attention to; it indicates how well assessment scores will predict success on the job. This can be valuable, but only if there is a way to measure job performance in order to correlate to predicted success. It is important to use a tool that accurately measures performance and has a process for correlating to predicted job success.

Although there are several types of validity, too many assessments simply focus on *face validity.*  Basically, if it appears accurate, it is believed to be accurate. This is not recommended for use in a preemployment applications.

# Ensuring an Effective Assessment Process

There are a couple steps to follow in the assessment process in order to ensure all assessment usage is standardized and documented. *Standardizing* means making a process uniform to ensure the same information is collected from each individual and is used in a consistent manner. These steps are as follows:

❯ Treat all individuals consistently by adopting a standardized assessment and decision-making process.

❯ Be sure your selection tool of choice is based on up-to-date science and evidence. Those not familiar with validation methodology should consult an expert.

❯ Ensure all people involved in the selection process are aware of and understand their responsibilities. This includes administrators, interviewers, and assessors.

# The Take Away

When selecting an assessment for your organization, ensure the one you choose has all four of the following factors:

✓ It is Normative

✓ It has high Reliability and Validity

✓ It possesses the ability for Job Matching

✓ It delivers both Cognitive and Personality-related results