

# UPDATE

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## Psychological Testing Part 2: Kinds of Psychological Testing

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While all psychological tests have the qualities described in Part 1, they are defined by what they measure and how they measure it. What they measure is mental abilities, personality traits, and problems and symptoms.

- *Mental abilities* include both intelligence and the cognitive processes underlying it. *Intelligence* is the ability to reason and apply knowledge to solve complex problems of various kinds. Underlying *cognitive processes* include information processing, mental speed, executive processes, the various facets of attention, and the ability to store and recall new information (i.e., memory). Measures of intelligence tell us how well an individual can combine these processes to deal with mental problems; measures of cognitive abilities tell how strengths and weaknesses in the processes underlying intelligence combine to make this possible.

- *Personality traits* are stable psychological qualities other than mental abilities that shape how the person deals with the demands of the world. These include such things as introversion-extraversion, impulse control, temperament, self-concept, self-esteem, cognitive style, view of the interpersonal world, and many others. These are the enduring qualities that combine with a person's intellectual abilities to make them who they are.

- *Symptoms and problems* result from the combination of a person's intellectual abilities and cognitive processes, their personality traits, their life experiences, and the demands of the world they must deal with. These include diagnosable problems such as depression, anxiety, or psychosis, but also include such

things as interpersonal conflicts, job difficulties, and other life challenges.

Psychological tests are also defined by the ways in which they measure these things. These typically break down into two categories.

- *Self-Report Measures* are typically questionnaires that ask an individual about things that they can observe in themselves and report to others. An example of this would be a questionnaire that asks about the symptoms of depression (e.g., sadness, loss of appetite, thoughts about death, etc.). While these are things that people could tell us in an interview, these tests allow us to collect them in a standardized manner and interpret them by comparing them to norms.

- *Performance-Based Measures* are tasks that a person is asked to perform, where that performance correlates with a psychological attribute. For example, memory might be measured by presenting a person with a standardized list of words in a standardized fashion, and then seeing how many they can recall later. Comparing their performance to the norms for their age group would allow us to infer how well they can learn and remember new information. Performance-based tests are typically used to measure mental abilities, but they can also be used to measure personality traits, problems, and symptoms.

A comprehensive psychological assessment integrates information from all of these areas of psychological functioning, using both performance-based and self-report measures, with the goal of providing a picture of a person's psychological functioning. Such a picture allows us to understand why they are having the problems that they are experiencing at the present time, and helps us to identify the best ways to address them.

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