

Introduction to Psychological Assessment

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Key concepts, purposes, and basic procedures

1. What Is Psychological Assessment?

Element	Description
Definition	A systematic, evidence-based process that uses multiple methods to gather information about an individual's psychological functioning.
Goal	To understand strengths, weaknesses, diagnoses, and needs in order to guide treatment, education, employment, or legal decisions.
Scope	Cognitive abilities, personality, emotional functioning, neuropsychological status, and specific symptom clusters.

2. Core Purposes

Purpose	Typical Settings	Examples
Diagnostic clarification	Clinics, hospitals	Differentiating major depressive disorder from bipolar disorder.
Treatment planning & monitoring	Outpatient therapy, rehab centers	Selecting appropriate CBT interventions; measuring progress over time.
Educational placement	Schools, special education programs	Determining eligibility for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
Forensic evaluation	Courts, correctional facilities	Assessing competency to stand trial or risk of re-offending.
Occupational selection	Corporate HR, military	Evaluating suitability for high-stress roles or leadership positions.

3. Major Components of an Assessment Battery

1. Clinical Interview

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- Structured or semi-structured (e.g., SCID-5, MINI).
- Provides context, history, and rapport.

2. Behavioral Observation

- Direct notes on appearance, affect, motor activity, and interaction style.
- Often recorded during the interview or testing.

3. Psychometric Testing

- **Intelligence / Cognitive** – WAIS-IV, WISC-V, Stanford-Binet.
- **Neuropsychological** – Trail Making Test, Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure, Stroop.
- **Personality** – MMPI-2-RF, NEO-PI-3, PAI.
- **Symptom inventories** – BDI-II, BAI, SCL-90-R, PHQ-9.

4. Collateral Information

- Reports from teachers, employers, family members, medical records.
- Increases ecological validity.

5. Performance-Based Measures (when appropriate)

- Functional tasks (e.g., simulated daily-living activities).

4. The Assessment Process – Step-by-Step

Step	Action	What to Keep in Mind
1. Referral & Clarify Question(s)	Identify why the assessment is needed.	Align methods with the referral question.
2. Informed Consent	Explain purpose, procedures, risks, confidentiality.	Obtain written consent; discuss limits of confidentiality.
3. Record Review	Gather previous evaluations, medical history, school/work records.	Look for patterns, previous diagnoses, medication effects.
4. Selection of Instruments	Choose tests with strong reliability, validity, and cultural fairness for the client.	Consider age, language, education, and presenting problems.

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Step	Action	What to Keep in Mind
5. Administration	Conduct interviews and testing according to standardized protocols.	Maintain consistent testing environment; monitor fatigue.
6. Scoring & Data Reduction	Use manuals or computerized scoring; compute raw, standard, and derived scores.	Double-check for errors; apply appropriate norms.
7. Interpretation	Integrate scores, observations, and collateral data.	Use a biopsychosocial