

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTRE (PRTC)
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Qualifications for the Ethical Use of Tests

Not everyone who wishes to use the PRTC Test Library materials is qualified to do so. Psychoeducational assessment instruments are classified by publishers and test developers into one of three levels (A, B, or C), differentiating tests according to their complexity of administration, scoring and interpretation as well as training requirements. Consistent with the 1985 Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, and with the professional and ethical standards of test publishers as well as a variety of professional organizations, the Test Library uses this classification system (Level A, B, C) to determine the level of tests to which any individual user may have access. A brief description of this classification scheme, and the training requirements specified by test publishers and professional organizations follows.

Level A

Level A includes tests or aids which can be adequately administered, scored, and interpreted with the aid of the manual and a general orientation to the kind of organization within which the testing is done. Such tests and aids may be given and interpreted by responsible nonpsychologists (e.g., school principals, business executives). Level A tests include trade and vocational proficiency tests, "most interest inventories, group or individual, and multiple choice tests that employ a simple metric as the main avenue of interpretation (e.g., occupational clusters)"¹.

Use of Level A tests requires advanced level course(s) (senior undergraduate or graduate) in testing from an accredited college or university, or equivalent training under the direction of a qualified supervisor or consultant.^{1,2}

Level B

Level B includes tests which require specific training for administration, scoring and interpretation. These tests are more complex than Level A tests and require some understanding of psychometric principles, the traits being measured and the discipline within which the tests are used (e.g. education, clinical, counseling). Level B tests "would generally include most individual or group tests of achievement or interest, screening inventories and personnel tests."¹

Use of Level B tests requires advanced level course(s) (senior undergraduate or graduate) in testing from an accredited college or university, or equivalent training under the direction of a qualified supervisor or consultant. At a minimum the user must have adequate training in psychometric principles (reliability, validity, test construction) and supervised experience in administration, scoring and interpretation of such tests^{1,2}. For some tests, the test publishers require a degree from an accredited college or university^{3,4}, specifically, a Masters degree in Psychology or Education or equivalent training in assessment, and verification of membership in a professional organization requiring training and experience in a relevant area of assessment consistent with the 1985 Standards³.

Level C

Level C is the most restricted category and includes tests and aids which require advanced training and experience in administration, scoring, and interpretation. Level C tests "would generally include any aptitude or language or personality or clinical diagnostic test, group or individual."¹

Use of Level C tests generally requires graduate level training in the specific professional field to which the tests apply (e.g., school, clinical or counseling psychology). Specifically, test publishers and professional standards indicate that use of Level C tests for teaching or decision making purposes⁴ requires a minimum of a Masters and/or Doctoral (Ph.D.) degree in education, psychology or related discipline. Also required is verification of licensure or registration as a psychologist, or certification by a provincial school psychologists association or an agency requiring training and experience in a relevant area of assessment consistent with the 1985 Standards.^{1,2,3,4} The successful completion of a minimum of two university courses in tests and measurement (one course addressing basic principles of psychological measurement and the other, graduate level course covering material on assessment appropriate to the test to be used) is critical. Academic and supervised clinical experience is also needed, including (a) training in theoretical constructs which underlie the specific instrument to be used, (b) training in the administration, scoring, and interpretation of these instruments, (c) training in psychometric principles, and (d) supervision in administration, scoring and interpretation of the instruments.^{1,2} In some cases, however, Level C tests can be administered by someone with a MA or BA degree or equivalent only IF they are closely supervised by a qualified consultant or supervisor.²

Use of Level C test for research purposes can be conducted by a qualified college or university faculty member and/or professional staff of a hospital or business organization. Students in graduate programs can also use Level C tests for research purposes if the request is countersigned by a qualified faculty supervisor or department head.

¹Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines.

Special Education Branch, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, BC, (Section H Pages 7-9, effective date: 95.06)

² College of Psychologists of British Columbia: Guidelines for Educational and Psychological Testing, May, 1994.

³ Psychological Corporation: Harcourt Brace Catalogue, 1996.

⁴ Guidance Centre Resource Catalogue, OISE, University of Toronto, 1996.

General Guidelines

More generally, the appropriate, ethical use of educational and psychological tests requires general knowledge of statistics and measurement, and specific information about the test you are using. Formal academic coursework in tests and measurement (or the equivalent) provides the necessary foundation for the proper use of most instruments, although membership in a professional organization whose code of ethics governs the sound use of educational and psychological instruments is also desirable. Specialized knowledge and training is required for the use of instruments that could be harmful to an individual if misused. With this background, a careful reading of the test manual is then necessary. The testing procedures and measurement concepts specified below provide a check for those whose training in educational and psychological measurement is limited, or for those who are unsure about the level of tests for which they qualify.

Test Selection

You must understand how to select the appropriate instrument and how to determine whether the instrument measures what you need to measure. You must know whether the norms are appropriate for your purposes and for the specific population you wish to test.

Administration

You must understand the appropriate procedures and conditions for administration. Where appropriate (i.e., restricted tests), you must have received formal training in the administration of the instrument.

Testing Context

You must understand how to establish rapport with the examinee and how to create the appropriate testing climate for your purposes. You must be aware that results of testing can sometimes be influenced by the physical and interpersonal context in which testing is conducted.

Scoring

You must understand how to accurately score the instrument, checking to ensure that all scores are accurate before reporting them. You also must understand the difference between raw scores and scores derived from them, such as standard scores, and percentiles.

Validity/Reliability

You must understand the concepts of reliability and validity and be able to locate and interpret information relevant to each. You must understand how reliability limits the interpretation of scores and how validity must be interpreted with reference to a specific application of the instrument.

Measurement Error

You must understand that no measure is free of error. Specifically, you must know how to estimate the degree of measurement error in a score through the use of the standard error of measurement.

Misclassification

You must understand the potential harm resulting from misclassifications of an individual on the basis of test results. You must be able to estimate the probability of a misclassification and be aware of the need to consider information beyond the scores to determine the appropriate classification.

Interpretation

You must understand how to properly interpret the test information provided by the instrument, including how to integrate test results with other information about the examinee. If computer-generated narratives are used as a basis for interpretation, you must understand the limits of such narratives and retain personal responsibility for a thorough and accurate interpretation.

Responsible Testing Practices

You must accept responsibility for the proper use of instruments in your possession, including ensuring that (a) only qualified individuals have access to the instrument, (b) the item content and scoring procedures are secured, (c) the copyright of all materials is honored, and (d) client confidentiality is maintained at all times.

Referral

You must be able to identify the limits of your competence in testing and make referrals for administration or interpretation of instruments that exceed those limits.