# **Personality Assessment Techniques**

Any psychological tests is useful in that it achieves two basic goals
1. It accurately (validity) and consistently (reliability) reflects a person's characteristics on some dimension.
2. It predicts a person's future psychological functioning or behavior.

Two broad techniques psychologists use to assess personality are
- Projective Measures (e.g. Rorschach inkblot tests)
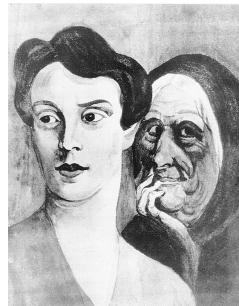
- Objective measures (Personality inventories and Self-Report Inventories)

TABLE 12.6

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Consider each statement and circle SA for strongly agree, A for agree, D for disagree, and SD for strongly disagree.

	SA	A	D	SD
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
2. At times, I think I am no good at all.	SA	A	D	SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	A	D	SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	A	D	SD
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	A	D	SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

Source: Rosenberg, 1965.

Scoring: For items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10, SA = 3, A = 2, D = 1, SD = 0; for items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9, the scoring is reversed, with SA = 0, A = 1, D = 2, SD = 3. The higher the total score, the higher one's self-esteem.

TABLE 12.1

Sensation-Seeking Scale

Circle One		Sample Items
T	F	I enjoy getting into new situations where you can't predict how things will turn out.
T	F	I'll try anything once.
T	F	I sometimes do "crazy" things just for fun.
T	F	I like to explore a strange city or section of town by myself, even if it means getting lost.

Source: Zuckerman et al., 1964.

Personality Assessment

Projective measures: Personality tests that examine unconscious processes by having people interpret ambiguous stimuli (page 580).

Examples:

Rorschach Inkblot Test	Thematic Apperception Test

Projective tests strengths:
 • Provides a wealth of qualitative information that can be followed up if used for psychotherapy

Projective test weaknesses:
 • The testing situation and examiner's behavior affects the response
 • The scoring on the test is subjective and inconsistent among scorers
 • Test-retest inconsistencies are common
 • Poor predictors of future behavior.

Personality Assessment: Objective Measures

<u>Objective Measures:</u> Relatively direct assessments of personality, usually based on information gathered though self-report questionnaires or observer ratings. (page 581).

<u>Examples:</u> Sensation-seeking, MMPI, CPI, 16PF, Just World Belief Scale, Optimism-Pessimism Scale

TABLE 12.1

Sensation-Seeking Scale

Circle One		Sample Items
T	F	I enjoy getting into new situations where you can't predict how things will turn out.
T	F	I'll try anything once.
T	F	I sometimes do "crazy" things just for fun.
T	F	I like to explore a strange city or section of town by myself, even if it means getting lost.

Source: Zuckerman et al., 1964.

TABLE 12.6

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Consider each statement and circle SA for strongly agree, A for agree, D for disagree, and SD for strongly disagree.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
2. At times, I think I am no good at all.	SA	A	D	SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	A	D	SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	A	D	SD
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	A	D	SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

Source: Rosenberg, 1965.

Scoring: For items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10, SA = 3, A = 2, D = 1, SD = 0; for items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9, the scoring is reversed, with SA = 0, A = 1, D = 2, SD = 3. The higher the total score, the higher one's self-esteem.

Personality Assessment: Objective Measures

TABLE 12.5

Rotter's Locus-of-Control Scale

For each pair of items, choose the option that most closely reflects your personal belief. Then turn the book upside down to see if you have more of an internal or external locus of control.

1. a. Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.
   b. People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.

2. a. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.
   b. Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.

3. a. Becoming a success is a matter of hard work; luck has little or nothing to do with it.
   b. Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.

4. a. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
   b. It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.

Source: Rotter, 1966.

Answer: A more internal locus of control would be reflected in choosing options 1b, 2b, 3a, and 4a.

Objective measures strengths:
- Objectively scored and compared to standardized norms collected on large groups of people (they receive the same instructions).
- Validity of self-report inventories is greater than projective tests.

Objective measures weaknesses
- People are able to fake socially desirable responses
- Some people are prone to pick "the first answer"
- Some personality inventories are long and tedious which lends to the problem listed above.
- People are not always accurate in assessing their own behavior, attitudes or attributes. Some people deny their own feelings
- People do change over time.

In order to have a valid assessment technique, it needs to have the following characteristics:

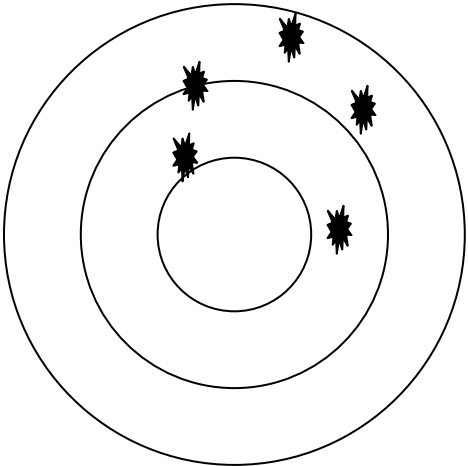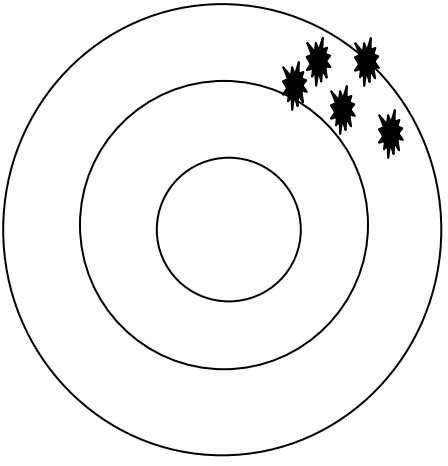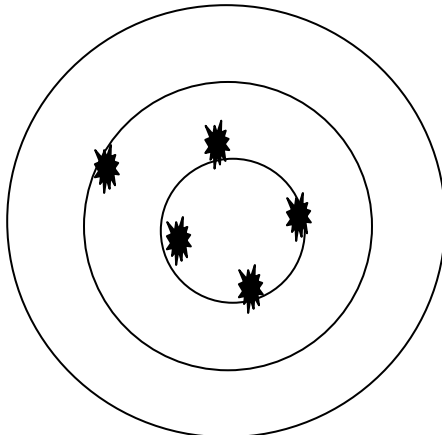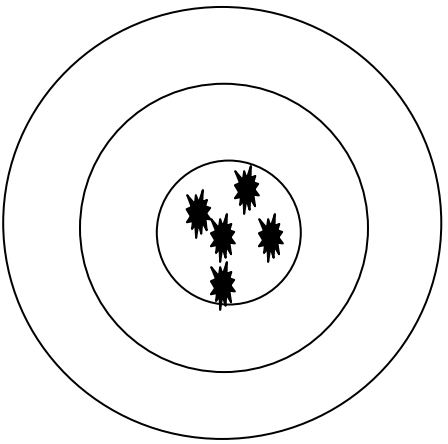|	
Standardized	The administration of a test to a large, representative sample of people under uniform conditions for the purposes of establishing performance norms. The sample of people used for standardization, should be like those the test is designed for.
Reliable	The ability of a test to produce consistent results when repeatedly administered under similar conditions. • If you are given an IQ test, then you should get a similar score if you take it 3 months from now, or even 1 year from now.
Valid	The ability of a test to measure what it is intended to measure. If it is designed to measure intelligence, it measures intelligence and not cultural knowledge. • If a test is designed to measure honesty, it should measure honesty, and not social desirability.

These principles applies to tests of intelligence, SAT's, personality tests, honesty test, multimeters, speedometers, etc.
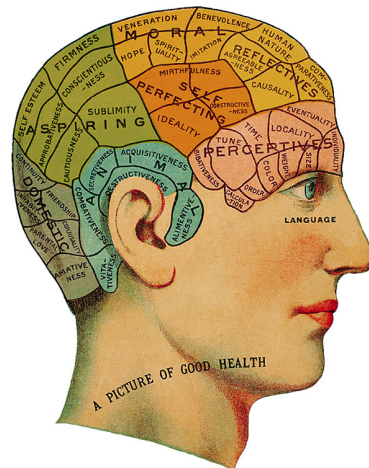
	Low reliability	High reliability
Low validity		
High validity		

Two characteristics of a good assessment technique is that they are reliable and valid. A test that is reliable is fairly consistent in what it measures (the hits are fairly close together). A valid measure assesses what it is suppose to measure (the hits are more toward the center). If it is designed to measure extraversion (the center), it measures extraversion, not neuroticism or psychoticism (the outer rings of the targets).

Pseudoscientific Strategies for Assessing Personality

A pseudoscience is a fake or false science (see chapter 1 for a definition of pseudoscience and science) that makes claims based on little or no evidence. Examples of the pseudoscience of personality are:

• <u>Phrenology:</u> Determining personality characteristics from the shape of the skull. (see Chapter 1, page 7)	
• <u>Horoscopes/astrology:</u> Determining personality characteristics from you birthday. o Personal validation	
• <u>Graphology:</u> Determining personality characteristics from your handwriting.	

Phrenology

Intuitively, people with larger foreheads have larger brains, and therefore, are more intelligent (this also suggested that men were inherently smarter than women). The exterior of the head must reveal something about the shape of the brain.

- Bumps on different regions indicate different personality traits.
- Due to phrenology, it was difficult for scientists to study the anatomy of the brain. Why study the structure of the brain, when the surface of the skull will tell you the same thing?
- What was the evidence?
- If phrenology is valid, what predictions should it make?
- If phrenology is a pseudoscience, why do people accept it?
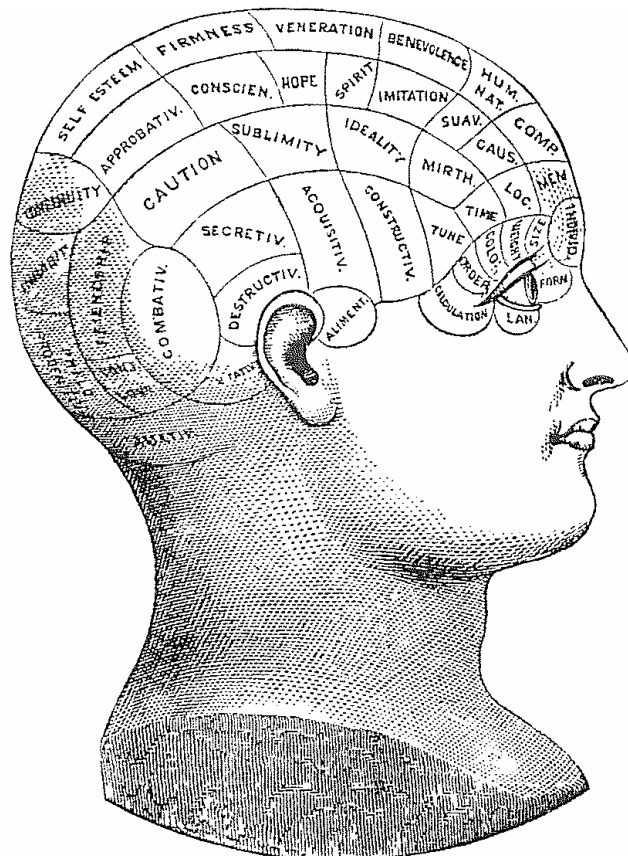
Phrenology
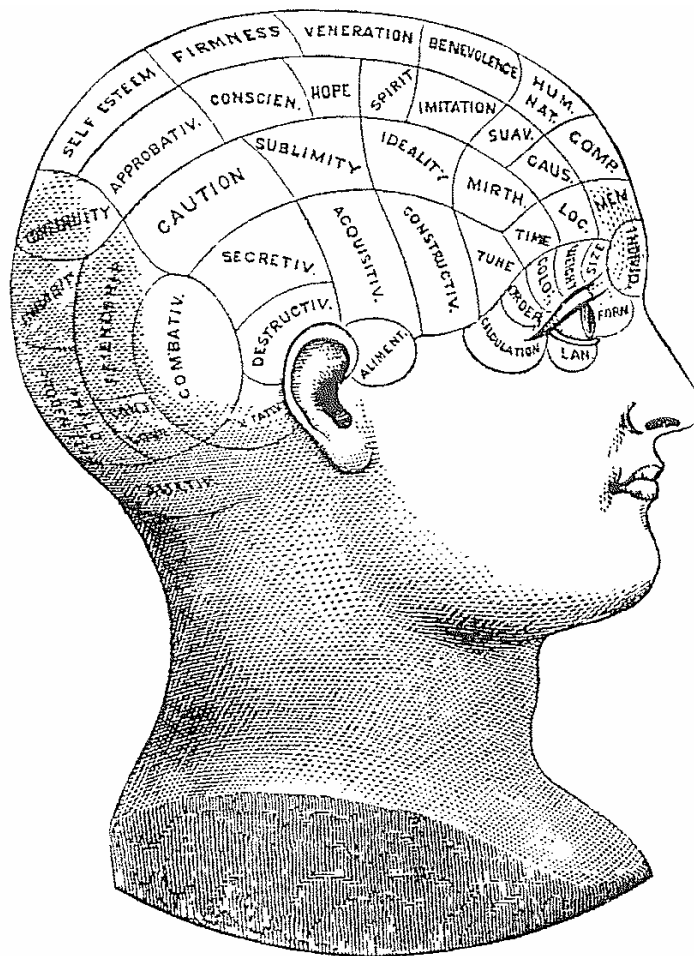
Phrenology is a pseudoscience (a fake or false science that makes claims based on little or no evidence), which claims that personality traits are revealed by the shape of the skull. Like any pseudoscience, you should ask the following questions:
- What is the claim?
- What is the evidence for the claim?
- What psychological thinking processes affect your interpretation of that evidence?

Graphology

A century ago, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle popularized the use of handwriting analysis (graphology) by writing stories in which Sherlock Holmes used it to solve crimes, and is the forefather to projective tests such as the Rorschach Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

Graphology claims that personality traits are revealed by handwriting, such as the size, shape and slant of letters*. Based on such claims, some companies use graphologists to select job candidates. This false system has been used to determine who gets hired, who is selected for a jury, or who is given bank credit. What critical questions should you ask about graphology?

- How accurate are graphologists are at predicting personality traits? What is the evidence?
- How do graphologists compare to chance, or untrained observers?
- Does their analysis distinguish individuals?

When graphology has been assessed, what are the findings?

- Graphologists score close to zero on test of accuracy in personality rating.
- When performing a test-retest reliability (asking the graphologist to reassess their answer without seeing their previous answer), the retest answers rarely matched the original ones.

- Graphologists do <u>slightly</u> better than untrained college students in ratings of personality and job performance.

*graphology is not the same as using handwriting analysis to detect forgeries

Based on the accuracy of each category on page 467, how many correct identifications (both types) and incorrect identifications (both types) are made?

Assessing a graphologist: Is the person a good or bad secretary?

Are you ready?	Is the person actually a good or bad secretary*	Were you correct?	Your Response	Outcome
	<u>Good</u>		Yes	Correct (hit)
			No	Wrong (miss)
	<u>Bad</u>		Yes	Wrong (false +)
			No	Correct

* you can replace the choice with entrepreneur/librarian, actor monk

Assessing a graphologist: Is the person a good or bad secretary?

	Person is actually a good secretary	Person is actually a bad secretary
Graphologist says they are a good secretary	Correct (hit)	Wrong (false positive)
Graphologist says they are a bad secretary	Wrong (miss)	Correct (hit)

Success Rats by Type of Assessor

Group Assessed	Graphologists	Untrained Assessors	Psychologists (typed transcripts)
Good/bad secretaries	67%	70%	56%
Entrepreneurs/librarians	63%	53%	52%
Actors/monk	67%	58%	53%
Overall Success rate	65%	59%	54%

Graphological interpretations*

1. Level of emotional responsiveness

the
Withdrawal

the
Objectiveness

the
Intensity

The backward slant at left indicates withdrawal, the vertical slant in the middle indicates objectiveness, and the forward slant on the right indicates intensity.

2. Social responsiveness

many
Repression

many
Lack of inhibition

Note the tight loops of the m and n on the left, which indicate repression, and the spread loops of the m and n on the right, which indicate a lack of inhibition.

3. Approach to achievement

the
Lack of self-confidence

the
Strong willpower

Note the low t-bar on the left, which indicates a lack of self-confidence, and the high t-bar on the right, which indicates strong willpower.

*(Figure 10.A) from Psychology, brief edition, 2000 by John Santrock

Personal validation

The process of validating or assessing the accuracy an ambiguous or general statement (usually about that individual's personality) with his or her own personal experience with the belief that the statement is making reference to that personal experience. When multiple people read that same statement, they think of different personal experiences to <u>validate</u> the claim with their own personal experiences

To help understand the process of personal validation, read the following personality sketch.

You have a strong need for other people to like you and for them to admire you. At times you are extroverted, affable, and sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, and reserved. You have a great deal of unused energy which you have not turned to your advantage. While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations. You pride yourself on being an independent thinker and do not accept other opinions without satisfactory proof. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself. Some of your aspirations tend to be unrealistic.

After receiving an individual copy of this personality description, 39 students rated on a scale of 0 (poor) to 5 (perfect) the degree to which the personality sketch described their personality. The following results were obtained.

Rating		Number of students	Percentage
5	Perfect match	16	41%
4		18	46%
3		4	10%
2		1	3%
1		0	
0	Poor match	0	

Most students said this personality sketch was essentially a good description of their personality. How is this possible if everyone is reading the same description, yet everyone is different?

People are reading a general statement and recalling how that personally relates to them. They think of an example in their life that confirms that statement. The truthfulness or accuracy of the statements resides in the subjective interpretation of the statements, not in ability of the writer to make accurate predictions. Although this demonstration was done in 1948, similar results have been found recently. What people fail recognize is the following:

   (1) In such multi-faceted descriptions, there is bound to be some overlap with ones own characteristics.
   (2) The statements that fit the best are so general that they are bound to ring true—one size fits all.
   (3) The statements are desirable to possess.

How much acceptance would astrology receive if a sign read like this?

Virgo: You are the logical type and hate disorder. Your nitpicking unbearable to your friends. You are cold, unemotional, and usually asleep while making love. Virgos make good doorstops.

<u>Situation:</u> I started watching a movie on television and one of the commercials was for a psychic hotline. As an introduction, they asked many questions, all using the pronoun "you". An example: "Are you troubled with the direction you are going?" All questions related to the way in which one views their life. I started thinking that all of these questions could be related to me. I was able to think of instances in my own life that would answer almost everyone of those questions.

<u>Explanation of personal validation:</u> This is an example of subjective validation because ambiguous statements (questions in this case) were made in reference to how a person views his or her own life, and because of that, I was able to make those statements personal, and actually come up with experiences that corresponded with what they were saying.

<u>Potential Impacts:</u> In this case, it could persuade someone to spend their money on a "psychic reading". In a more general sense, it could make someone believe in something that they wouldn't otherwise believe in.

Example without explanation or impact

I received a letter from Smithsonian magazine that said that I had been chosen as one of a select few to be offered a specially priced subscription. The woman who "signed" the letter wrote that she knew what type of person I was, and that was the reason I had been chosen, because I was "intelligent" and "hard-working--always on the go.

I was at bar the other evening. A guy came up to me and said that I was a person who works hard and cares very much about what you do. I scoffed at him and said that, while I believe this to be true, there is no way you could have known that. He was just telling me things I would like to believe to be true of myself. I could have thought of experiences where these were true and believed that this "gentleman" had insight into my personality.