

# The Basics of Assessments

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will identify assessments that can be used in personality psychology. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Personality Assessments
  - a. Interviews
  - b. Direct Observation

## 1. Personality Assessments

Personality psychology is the study of people's individual patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving over time. How do we determine what those patterns are for each person?

An assessment, or a test, is a way to help to measure the various different traits and aspects of a person's personality. There are different tests for different kinds of theories.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** There could be one test for trait theories, one for psychodynamic, and one for humanistic; however, they could also be applicable to a wide range of theories.

Each one of these different types of assessments has different strengths and limitations. Two important assessments are:

- Interviews
- Direct observations

These are two types of assessments that are more qualitative in nature. That means they are based on descriptions and observations themselves, and they are a little subjective. The questions depend more on the subject and on the psychologist, and are not necessarily the same for each person.

### 1a. Interview

An **interview** is a face-to-face conversation that a person has with a psychologist. They are asked questions by a psychologist and share information about their psychological history, their current status, and their personality in general. Interviews can take two different forms:

- Structured interview, comprising a series of pre-planned questions.
- Unstructured interview, which is an open and informal discussion. It is more directed by the person that wants to talk about themselves than by the psychologist.

The strength of interviews is that they can be tailored to individual subjects. A great deal of information can be gathered from interviews because it allows the psychologist to talk to one subject in depth.

Interviews do have some weaknesses, however. They can be affected or biased by the subject or interviewer's preexisting beliefs.

➞ **EXAMPLE** What the subject looks like might affect how the psychologist is rating the person within the system.

There's also what is called the **halo effect**. The halo effect is the tendency to view a person as generally positive or negative based on things like attractiveness or age.

➞ **EXAMPLE** It's been shown that when a person is physically attractive, others are generally more likely to look at them as being intelligent or more worthwhile than other people.

Within an interview, a person can also lie, which can affect the information as well.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Interview

Evaluator asks a series of questions, face-to-face, about qualities, traits, their response to different scenarios, etc.

##### Halo Effect

Favorable view based on partial information or first impression, can complicate later information.

#### 1b. Direct Observation

The second type of assessment is **direct observation**. Direct observation refers to watching the subject within a naturalistic sort of setting to gather information about them.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A person might go to a school and watch a child playing and interacting with other children. This can provide information about that child's personality and their social interactions.

Direct observations can give more in-depth information about the subjects. They can also provide more accurate information because it's within a natural setting, so they're not being affected by being in a room with a psychologist or in some strange environment.

However, direct observation can be affected by observer bias, meaning preexisting beliefs or ideas that impact the observation process.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you think that teens are more argumentative, then you may tend to focus on more argumentative behavior that you observe, versus non-argumentative behavior.

To prevent this, a lot of direct observations have different tools that help to control bias. They might use a

**rating scale**, which is a list of traits or behavioral aspects that guides the observations and prevents misinterpretations. It tells the researcher what to look for, so they don't necessarily miss it within those situations.

Researchers can also do what's called a **behavioral assessment**. This is when an observer records how many times they observe certain kinds of behaviors. Instead of trying to measure the internal processes that are going on or the different personality traits, they can just note each time they see a behavior that they're looking for. They can create categories for different behaviors.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** For example, a researcher can record how many times a person mentions a particular subject in a conversation.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Direct Observation**

Individual is asked to perform a team project together, interviewers watch the candidates' behavior and take notes but don't interact

##### **Rating Scale**

Evaluation depends on a checklist of qualities wanted; some may be more important than other qualities

##### **Behavioral Assessment**

Evaluating the frequency of specific behaviors



#### SUMMARY

An assessment is given to determine patterns of behavior. One type of assessment is an **interview**. This is a face-to-face conversation between a person and a psychologist. Interviews can be subject to either the subject's or the interviewer's biases.

Another type of assessment is **direct observation**. This can provide accurate information because of the natural setting but is also subject to the observer's preexisting beliefs. Tools like rating scales and behavioral assessments can reduce bias influence.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Behavioral Assessment**

Evaluating the frequency of specific behaviors.

##### **Direct Observation**

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**Halo Effect**

Favorable view based on partial information or first impression, can complicate later information.

**Interview**

Evaluator asks a series of questions, face-to-face, about qualities, traits, their response to different scenarios, etc.

**Rating Scale**

Evaluation depends on a checklist of qualities wanted, some may be more important than other qualities.