

Meaning, Purpose and Characteristics of a Test

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Test: A method to determine a student's ability to complete certain tasks or demonstrate mastery of a skill or knowledge of content. Some types would be multiple choice tests, or a weekly spelling test. While it is commonly used interchangeably with assessment, or even evaluation, it can be distinguished by the fact that a test is one form of an assessment.

What is a Test?

Tests are detailed or small-scale task carried out to identify the candidate's level of performance and to find out how far the person has learnt what was taught or be able to do what he/she is expected to do after teaching. Tests are carried out in order to measure the efforts of the candidate and characterize the performance. Whenever you are tested, it is to find out what you know, what you do not know, or even what you partially know. Test is therefore an instrument for assessment. Testing is part of assessment but assessment is more than testing.

Tests involve measurement of candidates' performance, while evaluation is a systematic way of assessing the success or failure of a programme. Evaluation involves assessment but not all assessments are evaluation. Some are reappraisal of a thing, a person, life, etc.

Purpose of Test / Functions of test

- i. We conduct tests to find out whether the objectives we set for a particular course, lesson or topic have been achieved or not. Tests measure the performance of a candidate in a course, lesson, or topic and thus, tell the teacher or course developer that the objectives of the course or lesson have been achieved or not. If the person taught performed badly, we may have to take a second look at the objectives of the course or lesson.
- ii. We test students in the class to determine the progress made by the students. We want to know whether or not the students are improving in the course, lesson, or topic. If progress is made, we reinforce the progress so that the students can learn more. If no progress is made, we intensify teaching to achieve progress. If progress is slow, we slow down the speed of our teaching.
- iii. We use tests to determine what students have learnt or not learnt in the class. Tests show the aspects of the course or lesson that the students have learnt. They also show areas where learning has not taken place. Thus, the teacher can re-teach for more effective learning.
- iv. Tests are used to place students/candidates into a particular class, school, level, or employment. Such tests are called placement tests. The assumption here is that an individual who performs creditably well at a level can be moved to another level after testing. Thus, we use tests to place a pupil into primary two, after he/she has passed the test set for primary one, and so on.

v. Tests can reveal the problems or difficulty areas of a learner. Thus, we say we use tests to diagnose or find out the problems or difficulty areas of a student or pupil. A test may reveal whether or not a learner, for example, has a problem with pronouncing a sound, solving a problem involving decimal, or constructing a basic shape, e.g. a triangle, etc.

vi. Tests are used to predict outcomes. We use tests to predict whether or not a learner will be able to do a certain job, task, use language to study in a university or perform well in a particular school, college, or university.

Thus, tests

- It provides basis for promotion to the next grade.
- To find out where each student stands in various academic areas.
- It helps in determination about the placement of the students in a particular section.
- To motivate the students before a new assignment has taken up.
- To know effectively the student is performing in theory as well as in clinical areas.
- To expose pupil's difficulties which the teacher can help them to solve.
- Compare the performance of one learner with the other to know how to classify them either as weak learners who need more attention, average learners, and strong or high achievers that can be used to assist the weak learners.
- Reshape teaching items, especially where tests show that certain items are poorly learnt either because they are poorly taught or difficult for the learners to learn. Reshaping teaching items may involve resetting learning objectives, teaching objectives, sequencing of teaching items or grading of the items being taught for effective learning.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TEST

- It can be tried out and selected on the basis of its difficulty level and discriminating power.
- Directly related to the educational objectives.
- It should possess description of measure behavior in realistic and practical terms.
- Contains a sufficient number of test items for each measured behavior; concerned with important and useful matter; comprehensive, brief, precise and clear.
- It should be divided into different knowledge and skills according to behavior to be measured.
- Standardized the items and made instructions clear so that different users can utilize it.
- Rules and norms have to be developed so that various age groups can use at various levels.
- It provides equivalent and comparable forms of the test.
- A test manual has to be prepared, which can act as a guide for administering and scoring.

A test is not something that is done in a careless or haphazard manner. There are some qualities that are observed and analyzed in a good test. Some of these are discussed under the various headings in this section. Indeed, whether the test is diagnostic or achievement test, the characteristic features described here are basically the same.

- i. A good test should be valid: by this we mean it should measure what it is supposed to measure or be suitable for the purpose for which it is intended.

- ii. A good test should be reliable: reliability simply means measuring what it purports to measure consistently. On a reliable test, you can be confident that someone will get more or less the same score on different occasions or when it is used by different people.
 - iii. A good test must be capable of accurate measurement of the academic ability of the learner: a good test should give a true picture of the learner. It should point out clearly areas that are learnt and areas not learnt. All being equal, a good test should isolate the good from the bad. A good student should not fail a good test, while a poor student passes with flying colours.
 - iv. A good test should be comprehensive. A good test should integrate all various learners' needs, range of teaching-learning situations, objective and subjective items
- v. A good test must represent teaching-learning objectives and goals: the test should be conscious of the objectives of learning and objectives of testing. For example, if the objective of learning is to master a particular skill and apply the skill, testing should be directed towards the mastery and application of the skill.
- vi. Test materials must be properly and systematically selected: the test materials must be selected in such a way that they cover the syllabus, teaching course outlines or the subject area. The materials should be of mixed difficulty levels (not too easy or too difficult) which represent the specific targeted learners' needs that were identified at the beginning of the course.
- vii. Variety is also a characteristic of a good test. This includes a variety of test type: multiple choice tests, subjective tests and so on. It also includes variety of tasks and so on. It also includes variety of tasks within each test: writing, reading, speaking, listening, re-writing, transcribing, solving, organizing and presenting extended information, interpreting, blank filling, matching, extracting points, distinguishing, identifying, constructing, producing, designing, etc. In most cases, both the tasks and the materials to be used in the tests should be real to the life situation of what the learner is being trained for. Crosscheck your answer with the following. Do not read my own reasons until you have attempted the activity. Variety in testing is crucial because:
- it allows tests to cover a large area;
 - it makes tests authentic;
 - variety brings out the total knowledge of the learner; and
 - with a variety of tasks, the performance of the learner can be better assessed.

