



# Umbrella Summary

## Work Sample Tests

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

### What are work sample tests?

Work sample tests are methods used to assess an individual's ability to successfully perform a job. These tests require individuals to perform tasks that are physically and/or psychologically similar to those they would experience on the job (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986). Though much of the early use of work samples was to assess psychomotor skills for manual tasks like carpentry, electrical work, or welding (Robertson & Downs, 1989), more relevant examples include role plays, in-basket exercises, filing, and writing or typing exercises (Roth, Bobko, McFarland, & Buster, 2008). There are two primary categories of work sample tests. General work sample tests are administered to people who already possess the skills required for the job (e.g., from previous work experiences or training opportunities) (Robertson & Downs, 1989). Trainability tests, on the other hand, are suitable for applicants who do not have previous experience on the job because they involve a period of instruction during which the applicant is first expected to learn how to perform the task before completing the work sample test (Robertson & Downs, 1989). An important element of work sample tests is that they are highly structured, with standardized administration and scoring processes (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986).

### What do work sample tests measure?

Work sample tests are merely a general method of gathering important information about candidates. Much like hiring interviews, they can be designed to tap any of a myriad of knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSAs). Commonly measured KSAs include cognitive skills, job knowledge, social skills, and writing skills (Roth et al., 2008). Because work samples often include performance of one or more specific job tasks, multiple KSAs are usually measured at one time (Roth et al., 2008). Performance on work sample tests is usually measured by observers providing subjective ratings of either the candidate's behavior during the task or the end result (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986). Depending on the nature of the work sample, performance may be assessed more objectively (e.g., typing accuracy). In the case of trainability tests, raters also provide judgments of the candidate's anticipated performance in training (Robertson & Downs, 1989).

## Why are work sample tests valuable?

Work samples are valuable because they are relatively strong predictors of subsequent job performance, for people who already possess the necessary KSAs to perform the job (Roth et al., 2005). Additionally, trainability tests have been shown to be strong predictors of success in training (Robertson & Downs, 1989). Work samples are likely to be most predictive of job performance or success in training when the simulation tasks closely align with the tasks that will be encountered on the job or in training (Robertson & Downs, 1989). Another benefit of work sample tests is that applicants tend to have the most favorable reactions to them, relative to other hiring methods, presumably because of their strong relevance to the job (Anderson, Salgado, & Hulsheger, 2010).

## QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Work sample tests can be useful hiring tools that lead to higher job or training performance among new hires.
- ▶ Work sample tests are not intended to improve turnover, and there are no meta-analyses assessing that connection. Because they are associated with better performance, it is possible that work sample tests may reduce involuntary turnover caused by poor performance, but research is needed to test that question.
- ▶ A work sample test should be developed on the basis of a job analysis and should include standardized administration and scoring processes.
- ▶ Except for the case of a trainability test, work sample tests should not target knowledge, skills, or situations that will be covered in training or learned on the job.
- ▶ For jobs that entail a significant amount of training, work sample tests are best suited for assessing basic prerequisites—fundamental knowledge or skills that will not be trained. For child welfare professionals, this may mean competencies like oral or written communication or typing skills.
- ▶ Work sample tests are particularly appropriate for jobs that do not involve extensive training or have high minimum requirements. In child welfare, this may mean jobs like case aides or supervisors or minimum requirements like a master's degree or many years of previous experience.
- ▶ As with all strategies used to make hiring decisions, work samples are considered tests and are therefore subject to certain professional and legal guidelines. Due to the technical requirements involved in developing and validating a work sample test, it is recommended that agencies consult with an expert for assistance.

## References

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## Author(s)

Maggie Thompson, MS, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Megan Paul, PhD, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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