

# What is Psychometrics?

Psychology is a diverse and exciting field. As pioneers in a relatively youthful science psychologists worldwide strive to improve every aspect of human life, from planning urban construction and zoning to human-computer interaction. Across all disciplines of psychology there is a common thread that unites all researchers and scientists in this field. This unifying discipline is psychometrics.

Psychometrics, being concerned with the design and analysis of research and the measurement of human characteristics, has enjoyed a history of rapid growth and development since its origins with the work of Binet in France and Spearman in England, and the earlier efforts of Galton and his anthropometric laboratory.

The field of psychometrics has been the genesis of intelligence testing, personality testing, and vocational testing, and has contributed to the emergence of new approaches and methods to psychological measurement based on the demands of society and the emergence of new technology. Psychometricians have also worked collaboratively with those in the field of statistics and quantitative methods to develop improved ways to organize and analyze data.

Of course the most obvious area in which psychometricians are employed is in psychological testing. Testing, whether it is of intelligence, personality, achievement, aptitudes, interests, or proficiency, is a widespread and important practice worldwide. Testing is employed in schools, organizations, business, government, clinical settings and hospitals, as well as in the military. The impact of testing on individuals, organizations, and our culture is substantial and this reinforces the importance of high professional standards for the development, administration, and interpretation of tests. Due to the potential impact of testing on everyone's lives the practice of testing is also controversial and our society depends on the efforts of psychometricians to continue striving for more valid, reliable, and efficient tests.

Psychometricians are not limited to working within the testing industry however. Many psychometricians are employed in industrial and organizational settings performing job analyses, consumer surveys, developing and validating personnel selection procedures, and performing market research. Positions in private and public consulting agencies, clinical research positions, and positions in managerial and administrative roles are also open to graduates of psychometric programs. Psychometricians can even find employment as researchers in fields only tangentially related to psychology, as statisticians, expert witnesses, and of course, in academic settings as well.

The field of psychometrics has made and continues to make important contributions to psychology and to our society. Psychometric principles, applications, and issues continue to permeate every aspect of psychology and have an impact on the lives of many people. The complex issues brought on by our rapidly changing society provide new challenges for psychometricians and new directions for the future of psychometrics.



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