



# INTERNATIONAL TEST COMMISSION

ITC Statement  
On the Use of Tests and Other Assessment Instruments  
for Research Purposes

**10 April 2014, v1.2**

**Final Version**

**Document reference: ITC-S-TU-20140410**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was initiated by Professor Fanny Cheung and was prepared for the ITC by Professors Dragos Iliescu and Dave Bartram.

The authors are grateful for the assistance provided by a number of colleagues, most notably Professors Tom Oakland and Anna Brown, who provided valuable input to the development of the document.

The authors also acknowledge the effort and valuable comments and suggestions of a number of members of the community who have contributed in the review phase of the document: Dusica Boben (on behalf of the Commission on Tests and Testing of the Slovenian Psychological Association), Odeta Geleželytė (on behalf of the Lithuanian Psychological Association), Andreas Høstmaelingen (on behalf of the Board of Tests and Testing of the Norwegian Psychological Association), Pat Lindley, Peter Macqueen (on behalf of the Tests and Testing Reference Group of the Australian Psychological Society), Krunoslav Matesic, Richard Smith (on behalf of the British Psychological Society), Susana Urbina, and Hazel Wheldon.

This document draws on information from various scholarly sources. They include yet are not limited to the "Principles for the use of published psychological tests in research" issued by the British Psychological Society (2005) and the "Statement on the use of secure psychological tests in the education of graduate and undergraduate psychology students" issued by the Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment of the American Psychological Association (1994).

## INTRODUCTION

Tests and other assessment instruments (e.g. ability and aptitude measures, job simulation exercises, work samples, interview guides) generally are developed for use in research as well as in professional practices (e.g. work and organizational, clinical, or educational). The purposes of tests used in research typically differ from their use in institutional and professional practices. For example, in research practices, test data typically are used to evaluate phenomena (e.g. the test's characteristics or the relationships between test scores and one variable on another) with the goal to advance scientific knowledge, understanding, and use. In contrast, in institutional and clinical practices, test data typically are used to evaluate and make decisions that may impact individual test-takers.

Legal and professional standards that guide test use in institutional and clinical practice are found in various sources (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014; APA, 2010). However, similar standards that guide test use in research are less common yet also are needed.

This document is intended to promote the belief that test use in research should abide by legal and ethical principles as well as best practice standards and that tests should be used by competent professionals who focus attention on the rights of test-takers and other parties involved in the testing process. Issues discussed in this document highlight these considerations.

This document specifically refers to such cases when tests are used in research without being commercially procured by the researcher. When a test is commercially procured by a researcher, the legal rights to use that test, under the terms and conditions of the commercial contract are a given. Many times, however, researchers ask for, and receive free usage of commercially available tests, or use tests that are available under other conditions. This document focuses specifically on such cases.

This document characterizes *tests* as procedures or methods that examine or determine the presence of a factor or phenomenon that comprise a set of standardized items (e.g. questions, stimuli, or tasks) that are scored in a standardized manner and are used to examine and possibly evaluate individual differences (e.g. in abilities, skills, competencies, dispositions, attitudes, emotions) (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997; American Psychological Association, 2006; Cronbach, 1990). This definition includes psychological and educational tests in all forms of deployment (e.g. paper-and-pencil booklets, computerized online testing, work samples, serious games). Two forms of tests are described: those that are copyrighted and thus are in the private domain as well as those that are not copyrighted and thus are in the public domain. Many principles discussed below are applicable to both forms.

## THE STATEMENT

Persons engaged in test use for research purposes should consider various issues that are informed by legal, ethical, and best practice standards.

### 1. Permission to use tests in research

A researcher's responsibilities differ for tests that either are or are not copyright protected. The use of the former have restrictions imposed by the copyright holder on who may use the materials. For the latter tests, commonly called open access tests, the copyright holder has granted others free access to them.

Tests generally are developed by one or more scholars, by public and private agencies, or by companies that specialize in test development. On occasion, tests also are developed specifically for a research program. Once developed, a test author automatically holds copyright and thus its legal protection. The copyright protects the test title, items, structure, manuals, scoring keys and algorithms, and sometimes other materials and components. Information on who holds copyright generally is found on the first page of the test manual and test forms or on test websites.

The creator of the test, namely its author or authors, owns (holds) copyright unless copyright is transferred by written agreement to another person or entity (e.g. a test publisher). Test authors whose journal publications include either the entire test (a rare occurrence) or test items relinquish copyright of those materials to the journal unless a written agreement stipulates that the author retains ownership. Agencies (e.g. test publishers, certification agencies, consulting companies) generally, yet not always, retain copyright and may rely on themselves or contract with others to market tests. Test development companies retain copyright of the tests they develop.

Professionals responsible for conducting or supervising research that uses tests must obtain permission from the copyright holder before using them. Often this can be done by commercially procuring the test, for those tests that are commercially distributed. After access to a test was acquired through a commercial transaction, the rights for the usage of that test for the intended purposes (research included) are presumed. Permission in absence of payment may also be requested.

Permission should be obtained for both the original tests and any derivative work thereof (such as a translated version of the test). Some copyright holders (e.g. scholars) may grant permission without charge or require a nominal charge to use the test for research. Other copyright holders (e.g. authors or test publishers) generally establish a contractual agreement with the researcher that stipulates the terms (e.g. to use the test for a limited period and for a limited number of administrations) and conditions (e.g. to provide to the copyright holder a copy of all publication in which the data are reported) for the free use of their tests in research. The researcher should ensure that the contractual agreement does not compromise data privacy rules, other laws, as well as agency regulations. The researcher must abide by the contractual agreement.

The copyright holder has the right to refuse permission for free usage of a test for research. This applies to both original versions and to requests to carry out translations. Copyright holders also may refuse permission for research that generates derivative works (such as translations) for a test. The copyright holder should not be in a position to determine the nature of research done with its measures.

The terms and conditions under which the test materials were originally supplied by the publisher remain in force for any future use either by the original recipient or other test users they might have passed the materials on to.

Some tests are in the public domain. Thus, everyone has open access to them. An author's work is in the public domain if the author or other copyright holder has explicitly relinquished their rights to copyright protection. Tests in the public domain can be appropriated by anyone, are considered to be community property, and may be used without the author's permission. In this case, test materials may be reproduced, distributed, publicly displayed, or made into a derivative work. Researchers do not need to obtain permission to use these non-copyrighted tests. Nevertheless, good practice dictates that the researcher should inform the test authors, when possible, of the test use and should acknowledge the authors and publication source when reporting their findings.

Research versions of instruments often are published in journals or on the web sites of the authors. When published in such open-access media, tests may appear to be in the public domain. However, by default, the author is the copyright holder unless and until he or she assigns that copyright to another entity, or gives explicit permission for free and open use. Test authors should include an explicit statement regarding free usage or the conditions of usage for other researchers. Researchers are advised to ask the author when they are unsure about the copyright status of a test.

## **2. Permission for (re)printing**

Copyrighted work should not be reproduced, distributed, publicly displayed, or made into a derivative work without the permission of the copyright owner. Test security must be maintained. Test items should not be printed in publications as this would make them available to unauthorized test users and thus would jeopardize test security. For example, the printing of the original test as well as any translated or adapted versions of it or its items in a publication (e.g. journal article, thesis, or website) is prohibited.

When reporting their findings, researchers may need to provide test items that exemplify the assessed qualities. When using public domain tests, researchers may provide example items and cite the source. When using tests that are copyright protected, permission to reproduce a limited number of scored or unscored items (usually one or two per scale) must be obtained from the copyright holder. Alternatively, researchers may develop items that characterize the qualities of the actual test items yet do not actually reproduce them and thus do not violate copyright.

### 3. Modification of the test or its components

When using copyrighted tests and unless authorized, researchers should not modify any component of a test as it would jeopardize the test's integrity, violate copyright, and be illegal.

Different standards exist when using public domain open access tests. When using them, researchers may modify the tests by adding or deleting items as well as altering the wording or ordering of items, test directions, or scoring keys and algorithms in order to make the test more applicable to the purposes of the study, the populations who will complete the test, or contextual conditions. These modified versions of tests are considered derivative works and are permitted for public domain tests. For example, an adaptation of a public domain test for use in another culture than the one for which it originally was developed may require a language translation, deletion, rewording, or addition of items, and change in instructions and in item scaling.

Researchers may make similar modifications to copyrighted tests only with the express written permission of the copyright holder.

Any modification from the original form of the test should be documented, as outlined in point (5) below. Refer to the ITC Guidelines on Test Adaptation (ITC, 2010) when adapting tests.

### 4. Ethical test use

The ethics of test use for research generally are consistent with those for test use in professional contexts. Thus, those engaged in research are expected to act in a professional and ethical manner, display competence in the use of tests, take responsibility for test use, ensure test materials are maintained securely, and ensure test results are treated confidentially.

Test users should observe their ethical obligations. These include the need to obtain informed consent or assent, defend the security of the test materials, and ensure the privacy of personal data. A document provided to research participants should inform them of important research provisions, including whether participants will receive a personalized or group summary of the data. An obligation to offer research participants feedback on their results may be impractical or unattainable and thus may not be warranted. However, where practical, the researcher should endeavour to offer feedback as a condition of the research study. Researchers also should abide by the legal and ethical principles in the region or country in which the research is conducted and display sensitivity to important cultural conditions.

The person granted permission to use a test in research must be qualified to use it or must be supervised by a qualified professional (e.g. a colleague, professor, or advisor). The responsibility of the qualified professional extends to the wider testing process, including collecting, coding, analyzing, reporting, and applying data in various forms.

## 5. Documentation

Scientific research requires proper documentation. The documentation allows the scientific community to evaluate the quality and outcome of the research and to facilitate its replication. Thus, the use of research methods, including test use, should be documented in the methods section of all research reports. The documentation should reference the test name, edition, and publication date of the original or adapted test. Additionally, if appropriate, the researcher should document that permission to use the test was provided by the copyright holder, including stipulations that may have been stated in the copyright holder's authorization document.

Researchers who translate or adapt a test should state the manner in which these modifications were made and provide validity and equivalence evidence of the translated or adapted form (ITC, 2010).

Researchers who develop a new measure should provide, at minimum, information about the newly developed measure: the basis of the test's theory and purpose, the manner in which the initial items were selected and later analyzed and selected, the number of items by domain and at least one example in each domain, scaling methods used, along with information about validity evidence and measurement precision (e.g. reliability or other indicators of measurement precision, depending on the measurement model of the test). All publications that utilize data from newly developed tests should indicate whether the researcher offers to send copies of the measure to other researchers.

## 6. Conflicts of interest

The researcher should acknowledge the source of funds, if any, used for the development of the test or for other research. Research funded by external agencies may have a vested interest in its outcome (e.g. a government agency that is promulgating policy or a test company that holds test copyright funded the research). Researchers should be aware of such situations and maintain their dedication to objectivity and impartiality. Researchers also should state relationships that may suggest a conflict of interest (e.g. researcher receiving compensation from tests used in the research or being employed by a test publisher).

## 7. Spread of research editions into professional practice

In professional practices (e.g. organizational, clinical, educational and other contexts) where tests are used to assess a characteristic or to offer a classification, tests *need* to be reliable and valid at the individual level in order to ensure the correct estimation of the targeted characteristic, or the correct classification of an individual. In research contexts, tests do not always need to satisfy individual assessment reliability and validity criteria.

Various reasons exist for relaxing technical criteria for tests used in research. First, tests may be developed and used to test innovative hypotheses and study constructs that have not been studied sufficiently to ensure the attainment of robust measurement models. Second,

tests used in research contexts may not be standardized, and population statistics and psychometric properties may not be known in advance of the research. Third, the test data may be used at an aggregate or group level and not used to draw conclusions about individual test takers.

Research versions of tests sometimes are extended for use in professional practice without an acknowledgement of their limitations. The test author has a responsibility for not contributing to the extension of research tools into professional use before sufficient information about their psychometric properties has been published.

## REFERENCES

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