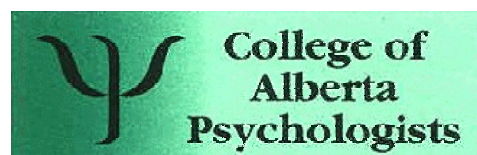


*Professional Guidelines for Psychologists*

# **THE CONTROL AND USE OF TESTS BY PSYCHOLOGISTS**

*Adopted in 1987*

*Revised in 2005*



COLLEGE OF ALBERTA PSYCHOLOGISTS  
**THE CONTROL AND USE OF TESTS BY PSYCHOLOGISTS**

**Introduction:**

Psychological tests have evolved substantially over time, and thus, guidelines controlling the use of tests need to be reviewed. As well, many legislative changes have occurred and are continuing to emerge that also affect psychologists. Therefore, readers are advised to consult and keep abreast of the relevant provincial and national acts, ethical codes, and legal standards regarding the use and control of psychological tests, protocol forms, and test materials in general. The following guidelines were developed based on the 1987 "Control of Psychological Tests" document, and involved consultations from 2002 to 2004 with a range of psychologists in institutional practice, private practice, experienced clinicians, as well as those recently ~~chartered~~ **registered**.

**Purpose of this document and intended users:**

Issues regarding psychological tests have changed over the past few years. The following guidelines are designed to assist practicing clinicians negotiate the issues involving use of such tests, and to have a resource to guide them in effective and ethical practice. However, these are guidelines, and are not a substitute for thorough training in testing, and following proper administration principles.

The range of professionals using such instruments has also changed and widened, and we realize that we no longer have exclusive domain over many of these tools. Therefore, part of the responsibilities of Psychologists now must increasingly emphasize education of clients and colleagues regarding such instruments, and the need for security.

Additionally, the use of such tests by unskilled clinicians is a significant concern. Educating the public and colleagues regarding core competencies necessary to effectively use tests is also more important now than it ever was. Nonetheless, Psychologists recognize that test instruments can be a useful resource, and that the results of an assessment can have substantial impact on clients. Thus, psychologists aspire to uphold the highest standards of accuracy and fairness when administering psychological test instruments.

**Definitions:**

A **psychological test instrument**, as used in these guidelines, is any structured and standardized measurement of cognitive, behavioural, or emotional functioning including (but not restricted to) performance tasks, structured behaviour samples, self-report inventories or checklists, test record forms, or other materials used in the evaluation of an individual. Psychologists may use any test instrument that they are competent to administer and interpret, and which are appropriate for the purpose of the assessment.

The term **guidelines** refers to statements that suggest or recommend specific professional behaviour, endeavours, or conduct for psychologists. Guidelines are aspirational in intent. They are intended to facilitate the continued systematic development of the profession and to help assure a high level of professional practice by psychologists. Guidelines are not intended to be mandatory or exhaustive and may not be applicable to every professional and clinical situation. They are not definitive and they are not intended to take precedence over the judgment of psychologists.

**Guidelines:**

(1) **Purpose:** Psychologists may use tests as part of an assessment process to assist in decision making with respect to diagnosis/classification, description, intervention planning, selection/placement, tracking, and/or prediction/prognosis.

(2) **Informed Consent:** Psychologists will obtain the informed consent of test takers before administering tests.

Informed Consent requires the test taker receive full information concerning the purpose of the testing, the persons who may receive the test scores and the use to which the test scores or resulting report may be implemented. Testing of minors requires informed consent of parents/guardians.

(3) **Protection of Test Takers:** Psychologists are knowledgeable about the legal requirements and protections for test takers that are relevant to the type of test being administered, the setting in which the test is administered and the specific purpose of the test result.

(4) **Competency:** Psychological assessments are conducted by psychologists with appropriate qualifications, or by properly trained assistants under appropriate supervision. The educational qualifications and standards established by the College of Alberta Psychologists must be met, and as well, the qualifications specified in the test's manual must also have been met.

Psychologists will conduct assessments only within their areas of training and experience, or work under the close supervision of professionals with appropriate training and experience.

Psychologists are fully responsible for the contents of any reports they sign, including reports written by others under their supervision.

(5) **Test Selection:** Psychologists should select tests that are appropriate for the intended purpose and intended test takers. Standardized tests have acceptable statistical properties and are supported by research for the intended use.

(6) **Alternate Use:** Psychologists should avoid using tests for purposes other than those recommended by the test developer unless there is good evidence to support the alternative intended use or interpretation.

(7) **Administration:** Psychologists should administer and score tests correctly and fairly following established procedures for administering and scoring tests in a standardized manner.

Modifications to standardized test content or procedures should be made only on the basis of carefully considered professional judgment. The rationale and potential impact of the modifications on the validity of the scores should be noted in the results.

(8) **Interpretation of Scores:** Psychologists should avoid using a single test score as the sole determinant of decisions about test takers and interpret test scores in conjunction with other information about individuals.

Psychologists will use tests developed for screening purposes only for identifying test takers who may need further evaluation. Results of screening tests alone should not be used to make any decision about a person, unless adequate reliability and validity for those other uses can be demonstrated.

Psychologists must not solely rely on computer-interpreted test results unless they have information on: the principles on which the computer interpretations were derived, the validity of the interpretations for the intended applications, and the samples on which they were based. The psychologist also has the responsibility to evaluate the computer based interpretation of test performance in light of other evidence. Simple submission of generic computer generated results as the assessment report is not acceptable.

Derived scores such as standard scores, percentiles or age-equivalents should only be disclosed in the context of an interpretive report containing appropriate cautions about the limitations of the reliability and validity of the scores.

(9) **Confidentiality:** Assessment results are confidential and shared only with those with a legitimate, professional interest.

Test results identified by name of individual test takers should not be released to any person or institution without the informed consent of the test taker unless otherwise required by law.

Test results used for research purposes should not individually identify the clients who participated in the research.

(10) **Reporting of Results:** Psychologists should communicate test results in a timely fashion and in a manner that is easily understood and avoids misunderstanding.

Computer and software-based interpretation reports must only be integrated within the body of an individually written report. An exception that may occur to this is a computer generated report that is specifically designed for disclosure to clients.

- (11) **Use of Results:** Psychologists have an obligation to make all reasonable efforts to ensure that results of testing are used appropriately by those to whom they report.
- (12) **Test Security:** Psychologists will do everything that is within their power to protect the security of standardized tests, including respecting copyrights and eliminating opportunities for test takers to obtain information, protocols, or scores by inappropriate means.

Outdated testing materials will be disposed of in a secure manner.

Client files should be securely stored. Supervisors of provisional psychologists are also responsible to ensure the storage and secure maintenance of the files of their supervisee.

Additionally, Psychologists must carefully weigh the demands and requests of competing interests (such as lawyers, employers, and test publishers), and consult with colleagues or the College of Alberta Psychologists as needed when requests for access to test materials are made. As a general rule, psychologists should fully disclose, with client consent, interpreted psychological test findings and test data to clients or their agents but should refrain from releasing or disclosing test materials, other than to another psychologist, unless required to do so by law.

- (13) **Currency:** Psychologists will use the most current edition of the test and norms, unless there is compelling rationale to use a previous edition.

For more detailed guidelines regarding Test Instrumentation, Test Use and Administrative Procedures, the reader is advised to refer to:

The Canadian Psychological Association and MHS Corporation have developed a document regarding the disclosure of test materials, and this can be obtained at <http://www.mhs.com/>

Furthermore, information regarding "trade secret" controls on psychological test materials and protocol forms is available at <http://harcourtassessment.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/Footer/Legal+Policies.htm>

A good general reference on assessment is: American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC, American Psychological Association.

The International Test Commission also established extensive guidelines in 2000 for test use, and a copy of the document can be obtained at [www.intestcom.org/test\\_use\\_full.htm](http://www.intestcom.org/test_use_full.htm)

This document is scheduled to expire by 2012. After this date, users are encouraged to contact the College's Practice Review [Advisory](#) Committee to confirm that this document remains in effect.