



MAJOR FIELD TESTS

Colleges and universities use the Major Field Tests to measure student academic achievement and growth and to assess the educational outcomes of their major programs. In addition, academic departments use the Major Field Tests to evaluate their curricula and to measure the progress of their students. The tests also provide students with an assessment of their own level of achievement within a field of study compared to that of students in their program and to national comparative data.

Background

Development of the Major Field Tests began in 1989, modeled on the development of the Graduate Record Examinations® (GRE®) Subject Tests. However, unlike the GRE Subject Tests, the Major Field Tests do not serve as a predictor of graduate school success, but are designed to measure the basic knowledge and understanding achieved by senior undergraduates in their major field of study. Each test is revised approximately every five years. Experienced teaching faculty members representing all the relevant areas of a discipline participate in determining test specifications, questions, and types of scores reported. ETS assessment experts subject each question to rigorous tests of sensitivity and reliability. In addition, every effort is made to include questions that assess the most common and most important topics and skills within each major field of study.

Test Content

The Major Field Tests are designed to assess mastery of concepts, principles, and knowledge expected of students at the conclusion of an academic major in specific subject areas. In addition to factual knowledge, the tests evaluate students' abilities to analyze and solve problems, understand relationships, and interpret material. The tests may contain questions that require interpretation of graphs, diagrams, and charts based on material related to the field. Academic departments may add up to 50 additional locally written questions to test areas of a discipline that may be unique to the department or institution.

Test Length

All Major Field Tests are multiple-choice exams lasting two hours (three hours for MBA), and administered in a proctored environment. However, the addition of optional locally developed questions may result in a longer testing period.

Test Administration

Departments or schools choose when and where to give the tests; however, the tests are normally administered during the senior year when students have completed the majority of courses in the major. Many institutions administer the tests as part of the requirements of a capstone course.

National Comparative Data

A Comparative Data Guide, published each year, contains tables of scale scores and percentiles for individual student scores, departmental mean scores, and any subscores or group assessment indicators that the tests may support. The tables of data are drawn from senior-level test takers at a large number of diverse institutions. More than 500 colleges and universities employ one or more of the Major Field Tests for student achievement and curriculum evaluation each year.

Scores

Major Field Test score reports are sent directly to the office within an institution that purchases them, such as a department chairperson, dean, or director of testing. Results of the tests are reported for the entire group of test takers, as well as for individual students. Overall student scores are reported on a scale of 120–200; subscores (which many of the tests include) are reported on a scale of 20–100. Another score reported for most of the tests is based on group-level achievement in subfields of the discipline. These “assessment indicators” report the average percent of a subset of test questions answered correctly by all students tested. On Major Field Tests, only correct answers are scored, so students are not penalized for omissions or guesses.

PSYCHOLOGY (4BMF)

(Current form introduced in January 2005)

The Major Field Test in Psychology consists of about 140 multiple-choice questions, some of which are grouped in sets and based on such materials as a description of an experiment or graphs of psychological functions.

The questions in the Psychology Test are drawn from courses of study most commonly offered in undergraduate programs within the broadly defined field of psychology. Questions often require students to identify theories, psychologists, methods, and other information from the field. In addition, some questions require students to analyze relationships, apply principles, draw conclusions from experimental data, and evaluate experiments.

The content distribution is as follows:

1) Experimental or Natural Science Oriented Areas (about 40% of the questions)

A. Learning, Cognition, and Perception (about 24% of the questions)

1. Learning (6-8%)

- Classical conditioning
- Operant conditioning
- Knowledge acquisition
- Social learning
- Biological constraints
- Theories and issues

2. Language (1-3%)

- Structure
- Speech perception and processing
- Communication
- Disorders
- Theories and issues

3. Memory (5-7%)

- Levels of processing
- Types of memory phenomena
- Encoding strategies and failures
- Retrieval strategies and failures
- Semantic organization

2) Social or Social Science Oriented Areas (about 41% of the questions)

- Theories and issues

4. Cognition (4-6%)

- Representation
- Information processing
- Problem solving
- Reasoning
- Metacognition
- Theories and issues

5. Perception (3-5%)

- Psychophysics, Signal detection
- Attention
- Perceptual symptoms and organization
- Theories and issues

B. Comparative and Evolutionary (about 3% of the questions)

- Instinct, genetics, learning, adaptation
- Aggression and Dominance
- Attachment, Sociality, Altruism
- Sexual behavior
- Parenting behavior
- Evolutionary psychology
- Theories and issues

C. Sensation and Physiology (about 13 % of the questions)

- Neurons and neural communication
- Sensory structures and functions
- Motor structures and functions
- Central and peripheral nervous system
- States of consciousness
- Psychopharmacology
- Hormonal factors
- Neurophysiological models (e.g., memory, motivation, arousal, emotion)
- Theories and issues

A. Clinical and Abnormal (about 10% of the questions)

- Types of disorders

- Biological factors
- Psychological factors
- Sociocultural factors
- Diagnostic systems
- Treatment of disorders
- Prevention
- Theories and issues

B. Developmental (about 12% of the questions)

- Nature-Nurture
- Behavioral genetics
- Motor, Sensory, Perceptual
- Attention, Cognition, Memory
- Language
- Learning, Intelligence
- Social, Personality, Emotion
- Socialization influences
- Cultural influences
- Periods of development (e.g., infancy, adolescence, adulthood)
- Theories and issues

C. Personality (about 7% of the questions)

- Behavioral approaches
- Phenomenological approaches
- Psychodynamic approaches
- Social cognitive approaches
- Trait approaches
- Assessment
- Theories and issues

D. Social (about 11% of the questions)

- Social perception, cognition, attribution, beliefs
- Attitudes and behavior
- Self
- Social influence and persuasion
- Interpersonal attraction
- Group processes
- Cultural influences
- Theories and issues

3) Other Areas (about 21% of the questions)

A. Historical (about 3% of the questions)

B. Applied (about 3% of the questions)

- Industrial-Organizational and Human factors
- Educational

- Applied, Public policy
- Health psychology

C. Measurement and Methodology (about 15% of the questions)

- Measurement, scales, tests
- Research designs
- Statistics
- Interpretations of findings
- Ethics

Scores on the Psychology Test are reported as follows:

Total Score

Reported for each student and summarized for the group.

Subscores

Reported for each student and summarized for the group.

- Learning and Cognition (including Language, Memory, and Thinking) (27)
- Perception, Sensory, Physiology, Comparative, and Evolutionary (26)
- Clinical, Abnormal, and Personality (26)
- Developmental and Social (29)

Assessment Indicators

Reported for the group* only.

- Memory and Thinking (15)
- Sensory and Physiology (18)
- Developmental (15)
- Clinical and Abnormal (14)
- Social (14)
- Measurement and Methodology (19)

Numbers in parentheses are approximate number of questions in each category.

*A minimum of five students is required for assessment indicators to be reported.



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