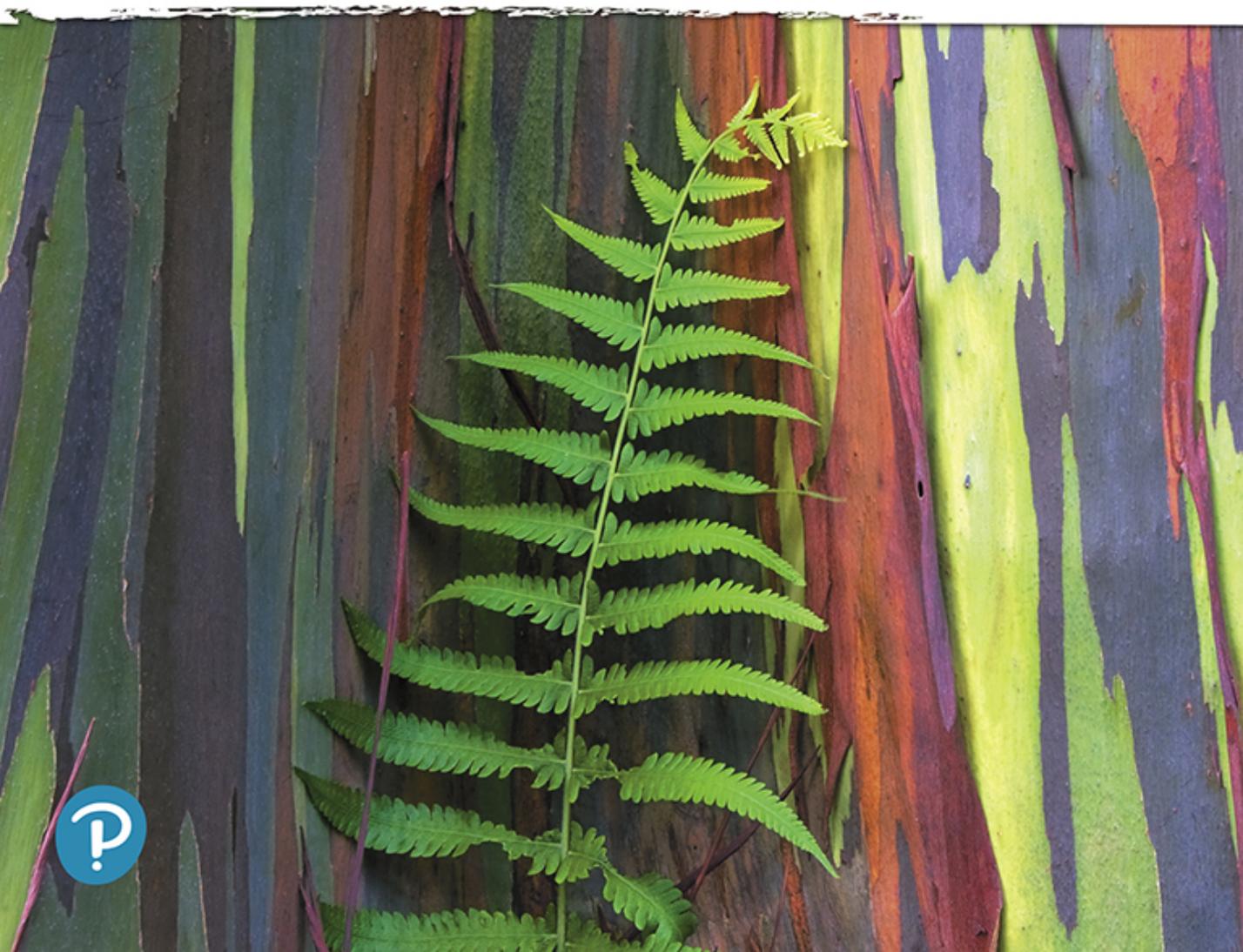


The Merrill Counseling Series

9TH EDITION

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES FOR COUNSELORS AND HELPING PROFESSIONALS

CARL J. SHEPERIS ROBERT J. DRUMMOND KARYN D. JONES



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NINTH EDITION

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FOR COUNSELORS AND
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Manufacturing Buyer: LSC communications, Inc., Deidra Headlee
Cover Designer: Pearson CSC, Carie Keller
Cover Photo: Monica & Michael Sweet/Getty Images
Full-Service Project Management: Pearson CSC, Vanitha Puela
Editorial Project Manager: Pearson CSC, Susan Hannahs
Composition: Pearson CSC
Printer/Binder: LSC Communications, Inc.
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color/Hagerstown
Text Font: Palatino LT Pro

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sheperis, Carl, author. | Drummond, Robert J., author. | Jones, Karyn Dayle, author.

Title: Assessment procedures for counselors and helping professionals / Carl J. Sheperis, Texas A&M University - San Antonio, Robert J. Drummond, Late of University of North Florida, Karyn Dayle Jones, University of Central Florida.

Description: Ninth edition. | Boston : Pearson, [2020]

Identifiers: LCCN 2019003317 | ISBN 9780135186022 | ISBN 0135186021

Subjects: LCSH: Psychological tests. | Educational tests and measurements. | Counseling.

Classification: LCC BF176 .D78 2020 | DDC 150.28/7--dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019003317>

*The ninth edition is dedicated to my children, who bring light to my world:
Ellis, Jake, Joe Lee, Emily, and Laura Beth*

—CJS

PREFACE

In *Assessment Procedures for Counselors and Helping Professionals*, our goal is to help current and future school counselors, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, career counselors, and other helping professionals become better consumers of the various methods and procedures used in the process of assessment. Assessment occurs in many settings, such as schools, mental health clinics, career counseling centers, substance abuse treatment centers, private practice, psychiatric hospitals, and vocational rehabilitation centers. Assessment is an integral part of the counseling process in which the counselor and client work together to gain a better understanding of the client's problems. We believe that effectiveness and accuracy in assessment are essential to effective counseling. Throughout the text, we stress that assessment is more than simply giving tests. Assessment involves collecting and integrating information about an individual from *multiple methods* and *multiple sources*. Throughout this textbook, our aim is to provide students with an overview of the many approaches to assessment so they can become competent and ethical practitioners in our multicultural society.

This textbook has three goals. The first goal is to supply foundational information about assessment, which includes an overview of the various methods and sources of assessment information. In addition, students must learn some basic principles of measurement in order to understand the applications and issues in assessment. Thus, we also provide foundational information about statistical concepts, test scores, and the psychometric aspects of assessment (e.g., validity and reliability). The second goal of this textbook is to present an overview of the general areas in which assessment is commonly utilized, such as in assessing intellectual ability, achievement, aptitude, career interests and skills, and personality. The third goal is to provide students with information about specific assessment applications and issues, such as clinical assessment, communicating assessment results, assessment with diverse populations, and ethical and legal issues.

To meet these goals, the textbook is divided into three parts that provide a balance of theory and practice information as well as coverage of the assessment instruments and strategies commonly used in school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, and vocational or career counseling settings. These sections include Principles of Assessment, Foundations of Assessment, and Types of Assessment.

PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT

Part One of this textbook, Principles and Foundations of Psychological and Educational Assessment, focuses on the underlying principles of all forms of psychological and educational assessment. We designed this section to provide counselors with the essential concepts of measurement and evaluation that they need to engage in the assessment process. Chapter 1 introduces assessment and provides historical information that has influenced assessment practice. Chapter 2 focuses on the important ethical and legal issues related to assessment. Because assessment strategies are applied to diverse populations, Chapter 3 supplies important information about multicultural assessment, including social and cultural factors related to assessing individuals, groups, and specific populations, as well as the competencies and standards required for assessing individuals from diverse backgrounds. Chapter 4 focuses on the assessment process, emphasizing the importance of

collecting data by using multiple methods from multiple sources. The chapter provides detailed information about formal and informal data-collection methods (e.g., interviews, tests, observations) as well as the sources of assessment information (e.g., the client, parents, significant others, teachers, and health professionals).

FOUNDATIONS OF ASSESSMENT

Part Two of the textbook, builds on the Principles section by exploring the foundations of assessment. Chapter 5 presents basic statistical concepts associated with tests and assessment. Chapter 6 presents information about types of scores and standards for scoring and interpreting assessment instruments. Chapters 7 and 8 supply information about the key psychometric considerations that are essential in assessment: reliability and validity. Chapter 9 integrates the elements of the assessment process by presenting information about selecting, administering, scoring, and reporting assessment results.

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

The chapters in Part Three, Types of Assessment, center on the applications and issues related to specific assessment areas. The main focus is the effective, competent, and ethical application of assessment methods in various settings. Chapter 10 supplies information about assessing intellectual ability, including the major theories of intelligence, the major tests of intelligence (e.g., the Wechsler scales, the Stanford–Binet test, and the Kaufman test), and special issues in intelligence testing. Chapter 11 covers assessment of achievement, including achievement test batteries, individual achievement tests, diagnostic achievement tests, subject-area tests, and other types of achievement tests. Chapter 12 presents information about aptitude assessment. Extensive changes in U.S. social and economic conditions may result in more counselors working with clients on career-related issues; thus, Chapter 13 provides important information about career and employment assessment. Chapter 14 focuses on personality assessment and the many types of personality instruments and techniques. Chapter 15 focuses exclusively on clinical assessment and the use of assessment procedures to diagnose mental disorders, develop treatment plans, monitor counseling progress, and evaluate outcome. Chapter 16 presents information about assessment issues in education, such as the assessment activities of school counselors, the types of assessment instruments used in schools, assessing specific learning disabilities and giftedness, test preparation and performance, environmental assessment in the schools, and assessment competencies for school counselors. Finally, Chapter 17 presents information about communicating assessment results.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

First published in 1988, this textbook has become a classic among assessment textbooks designed specifically for counselors. The ninth edition hosts extensive changes in the content of the text; we have updated all of the chapters and strived to provide the most accurate, up-to-date assessment information. At the same time, we have endeavored to maintain the original appeal of the text by retaining an easy-to-read format and continuing to emphasize assessment information that is most useful and relevant for school counselors, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, and other helping professionals. Throughout the text, we provide information and examples about widely used assessment

instruments in order to help students become familiar with these well-known tests. This edition aligns with the 2014 standards for educational and psychological testing. The text includes the following updates:

- Thoroughly updated with the most current assessment instruments
- Includes discussions of both the ICD-10 and DSM-5
- Additional case studies
- Reorganized contents so that ethical, legal, and diversity issues are considered as underlying principles in assessment. This edition organizes principles, foundations and assessment types in a more logical flow (see chapter-by-chapter detail below).
- Clearer definitions of key concepts
- Additional activities to illustrate key concepts
- Updated references throughout the text

Key chapter revisions in this edition include the following:

- Chapter 1, Introduction to Assessment, has been revised to provide a clearer discussion on competency in assessment for counselors and to add more visual demonstrations of key concepts (e.g., testing vs. assessment).
- Chapter 2, Ethical and Legal Issues in Assessment, has been shifted to the front of the book in order to emphasize the importance of the topic. In addition, information has been added in relation to the ASCA and ACES ethical codes. Finally, some case study information was included to help explain ethical issues.
- Chapter 3, Assessment Issues with Diverse Populations, has been shifted to the front of the book in order to emphasize the importance of the topic. In addition, definitions have been updated to reflect current perspectives on diversity.
- Chapter 4, Methods and Sources of Assessment Information, has been updated to make the information clearer and more student friendly.
- Chapter 5, Statistical Concepts, has been updated to provide a more thorough explanation of types of correlation and to provide examples of the use of scores. In addition, statistical calculations were simplified and more information is included to demonstrate practical application of assessment concepts.
- Chapter 6, Understanding Assessment Scores, has been updated to provide a more student-friendly introduction to scores. In addition, statistical calculations were simplified and the language was softened to make it more consumable.
- Chapter 7, Reliability/Precision, has been updated with additional examples related to internal consistency. In addition, we simplified the presentation by removing calculations for measures of internal consistency and by providing more definition around alternate and parallel forms.
- Chapter 8, Validity, has been updated clearer discussion around the differences between reliability and validity. In addition, we revised the language of the chapter to make it more student friendly.
- Chapter 9, Selecting, Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting Assessment Results, has been updated to clarify the steps in the assessment process and to include clearer links to diversity issues.

- Chapter 10, Assessment of Intelligence and General Ability, has been updated to provide a clearer connection between intelligence and counseling practice. The theories of intelligence have been updated and the chapter was revised to make it more student friendly.
- Chapter 11, Assessment of Achievement, has been updated to provide statements of relevance for each assessment instrument described in the chapter.
- Chapter 12, Assessment of Aptitude, has been updated to include more depth on psychomotor abilities. In addition, information was added on adult aptitude related to disabilities. Finally, information was updated in relation to GRE scoring.
- Chapter 13, Career and Employment Assessment, has been updated with a career inventory activity. We removed three sections from the chapter in order to provide a clearer focus on the information and to reduce the overlap between the information in a career assessment chapter and a course in career counseling.
- Chapter 14, Personality Assessment, has been updated to provide a more thorough exploration of the complexity involved in defining personality. Errors from the previous edition were corrected in relation to the MCM III Table.
- Chapter 15, Clinical Assessment, has been updated to include a clearer explanation of the bio-psycho-social interview. In addition, information about the ICD-10 was included in the revision.
- Chapter 16, Assessment in Education, has been updated to include a clearer explanation of the application across various areas of counseling.
- Chapter 17, Communicating Assessment Results, has been updated to include more information on flat profiles.

ALSO AVAILABLE WITH MYLAB COUNSELING

This title is also available with MyLab Counseling, an online homework, tutorial, and assessment program designed to work with the text to engage students and improve results. Within its structured environment, students see key concepts demonstrated through video clips, practice what they learn, test their understanding, and receive feedback to guide their learning and ensure they master key learning outcomes.

- **Learning Outcomes and Standards measure student results.** MyLab Counseling organizes all assignments around essential learning outcomes and national standards for counselors.
- **Video- and Case-based Exercises develop decision-making skills.** Video- and Case-based Exercises introduce students to a broader range of clients, and therefore a broader range of presenting problems, than they will encounter in their own pre-professional clinical experiences. Students watch videos of actual client–therapist sessions or high-quality role-play scenarios featuring expert counselors. They are then guided in their analysis of the videos through a series of short-answer questions. These exercises help students develop the techniques and decision-making skills they need to be effective counselors before they are in a critical situation with a real client.
- **Licensure Quizzes help students prepare for certification.** Automatically graded, multiple-choice Licensure Quizzes help students prepare for their certification examinations, master foundational course content, and improve their performance in the course.

- **Video Library offers a wealth of observation opportunities.** The Video Library provides more than 400 video clips of actual client–therapist sessions and high-quality role-plays in a database organized by topic and searchable by keyword. The Video Library includes every video clip from the MyLab Counseling courses plus additional videos from Pearson’s extensive library of footage. Instructors can create additional assignments around the videos or use them for in-class activities. Students can expand their observation experiences to include other course areas and increase the amount of time they spend watching expert counselors in action.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following colleagues, whose reviews improved this edition: Jared Rose, Bowling Green State University; Rebecca McLean, Western Illinois University; Roxanna Pebdani, California State University, Los Angeles; and Joy-Del Snook, Lamar University. In addition to acknowledging the contributions of reviewers, I would like to thank Ms. Ellis Starkey and Dr. Donna Sheperis for their assistance in the development of the ninth edition of this textbook. Their contributions were essential in completing this revision.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Dr. Carl J. Sheperis serves as Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Dr. Sheperis has served as President and CEO of the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) and Affiliates. He is a past president of the Association for Assessment and Research in Counseling and Associate Editor for Quantitative Research for the *Journal of Counseling and Development*. He has worked with the American Counseling Association as the Chair of the Research & Knowledge Committee, and has served as the Editor of the *Journal of Counseling Research and Practice*.

In addition to this textbook, Dr. Sheperis is an author of *Research in Counseling: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*; *Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Fundamentals of Applied Practice*; *Diagnosing and Treating Children and Adolescents*; and *The Peace Train*. He is also published in various textbooks, academic journals, and reference volumes.

Robert J. Drummond

Dr. Robert Drummond passed away on March 14, 2005. He was a retired professor and counselor educator at the University of North Florida for 20 years. He was foremost in the field of assessment, and he specialized in educational and psychological testing, career development, models for evaluation, educational research, and personality theory and measurement. Dr. Drummond wrote the first edition of this text in 1988. Now in its ninth edition, the book remains a popular assessment textbook in counseling.

Karyn Dayle Jones

Dr. Karyn Dayle Jones is an associate professor in counselor education at the University of Central Florida. She has over 20 years of experience in the counseling profession and has been a counselor educator for over 15 years. Jones is coauthor of *Introduction to the Profession of Counseling*, has authored or coauthored several book chapters and refereed publications, and has made numerous professional presentations. Her primary areas of research are assessment and diagnosis. She is the past president of the Association for Humanistic Counseling, a division of the American Counseling Association. Jones is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and a National Certified Counselor, and she has worked as a counselor in mental health agencies, schools, and private practice.

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Introduction to Assessment

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define assessment.
- Describe the various purposes of assessment.
- Describe the broad categories of data collection methods and the various sources of assessment information.
- Explain the importance of integrating multiple methods and multiple sources of assessment information.
- List and describe the steps in the assessment process.
- Describe the competencies required by counselors for the effective use of assessment instruments.
- Describe the historical context of assessment.
- Describe the application of computer technology in the field of assessment.

Imagine being asked by a child welfare agency to conduct an assessment that would determine a child's potential for transitioning from foster care status to adoption within a family. As part of the assessment, you might visit the home of the potential parents to determine the appropriateness of the environment and to have a realistic sense of how the family functions. You would also have to evaluate the social and emotional development of the child and the readiness for adoption. For example, it would be necessary to consider the child's ability to bond with a new family, any developmental issues that may be present, and any potential barriers that might impact the success of the adoption process. In order to gather enough information to make this type of determination, you might interview the parents, observe the child playing and interacting, and conduct evaluations using standardized assessment instruments (e.g., the Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development). Consider how important this assessment process would be to the children and the parents. The overall assessment process would be quite involved, and the results would have incredibly high stakes. The final assessment report would include information about any developmental concerns, an evaluation of the family environment, an interpretation of standardized scores, and a final recommendation based on the data. Based on the assessment results, the child welfare agency would make a decision about finalizing the adoption.

It is a privilege for an assessment professional to play a role in the adoption of children and to give them the chance to have a positive family life. Consider how important this assessment process was to these children and their new parents and consider the

huge responsibility that places on the assessment professional. While not always related to such happy outcomes, assessment has long been regarded as a fundamental component of all helping professions and the cornerstone of the counseling process. Simply put, assessment is the process of gathering information about a client and determining the meaning of that information. It is through assessment that counselors can uncover the nature of a client's problems or issues; the magnitude of these problems and how they are impacting the client's life; how the client's family, relationships, or past experiences are affecting the current problem; the client's strengths and readiness for counseling; and whether counseling can be beneficial to the client. Assessment is also critical for establishing the goals and objectives of counseling and for determining the most effective interventions. Assessment occurs in all counseling settings, including schools, mental health clinics, career counseling centers, substance abuse treatment centers, private practice, psychiatric hospitals, and vocational rehabilitation centers. In practice, counselors are *always* assessing. Assessment is an ongoing, fluid, and dynamic process that continues throughout the course of the helping relationship. Although students in the helping professions often initially question the need for assessment training, competency in assessment is integral to successful counseling practice (Whiston, 2015).

The purpose of this textbook is to help current and future school counselors, mental health counselors, career counselors, marriage and family therapists, and other helping professionals recognize the integral role between assessment and counseling; understand the process of assessment; develop an awareness of the applications of assessment; and understand the legal and ethical issues specific to assessment. We believe that competency in assessment is essential to positive outcomes in counseling. In order to be competent in assessment, you will need to seek supervised practice opportunities in addition to learning the content in this textbook. Each chapter in this book will help to build upon your ability to integrate assessment into your practice as a professional counselor.

Throughout the textbook, we use the term *assessment* rather than *testing*. It is important to understand that testing is just one component of the assessment process and that the scope of assessment activities is far beyond the exclusive use of standardized tests. Although we will present information about important and widely used educational and psychological assessment instruments throughout the text, we stress that assessment is more than simply giving tests. Assessment involves collecting and integrating information about an individual from *multiple methods* (e.g., *interviews, observations, tests*) and *multiple sources* (e.g., *the client, family members, teachers, physicians, etc.*). Corroborating data from multiple assessment methods and sources helps create a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the client and their presenting concerns.

WHAT IS ASSESSMENT?

Before we can talk about the assessment process, it is important to understand our definition of assessment. The term *assessment* refers to any systematic procedure for collecting information that is used to make inferences or decisions about the characteristics of a person (American Educational Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA], & National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 2014). Assessment encompasses a broad array of data collection methods from multiple sources to yield relevant, accurate, and reliable information about an individual. In counseling and other helping professions, assessment is considered a *process* because it is the *continual practice* of

gathering information. Some hold to a traditional, yet erroneous, belief that assessment is limited to the first meeting with an individual; in reality, assessment is an ongoing process that may begin even before the first face-to-face contact with the individual and continues throughout the course of the helping relationship.

Many disciplines employ the activity of assessment, including psychology, counseling, education, social work, health, military, and business and industry. Educators and other school personnel use assessment to identify learning or behavior/emotional problems in students and to determine appropriate interventions and educational plans. Psychologists and other mental health professionals utilize assessment to help in diagnosing mental disorders, treatment planning, and monitoring and evaluating treatment progress. Career counselors engage in assessment to evaluate individuals' vocational interests and aptitudes. Because numerous types of professionals engage in assessment, we will refer to those individuals as *counselors*, *test users*, *assessors*, *examiners*, or simply *professionals* throughout the textbook. Similarly, we will refer to individuals who participate in the assessment process as *clients*, *test takers*, *assesseees*, or *examinees*.

Assessment is often equated with *testing*, and the two terms are often confused or erroneously used interchangeably. Even today, many published textbooks hardly distinguish between assessment and testing. As Cohen and Swerdlik (2018) noted, the term *testing* has been used for a broad array of associated elements ranging from administration of tests to the interpretation of scores. However, assessment goes beyond merely giving tests. It is a comprehensive process that involves the integration of information from multiple data collection methods (e.g., interviews, tests, and observations). Therefore, tests are considered just “one method of collecting information within the larger framework” of assessment (AERA et al., 2014, p. 119). The fact that assessment can proceed effectively without testing helps to distinguish between these two activities (Weiner, 2013). Figure 1.1 provides a comparison of assessment and testing.

The methods for collecting assessment information can be grouped into three broad categories: interviews, tests, and observations. Each category comprises a wide array of formal and informal instruments and strategies, such as unstructured interviews, rating scales, standardized tests, projective drawings, checklists, questionnaires, and so on.

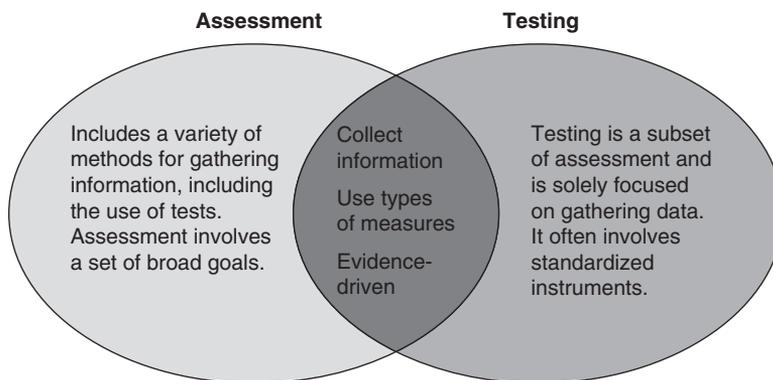


FIGURE 1.1 Assessment vs Testing

Source: Based on Weiner, I. B. (2013). The assessment process. In J. R. Graham & J. A. Naglieri (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Volume 10 assessment psychology* (2nd ed) (pp. 3–25). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Assessment also involves obtaining information from various sources, which may include the client, family members, spouses/partners, teachers, physicians, mental health professionals, and other professionals. The assessment process varies from assessment to assessment, depending upon the purpose for assessment, the setting in which the assessment takes place, the needs of the client, and the availability and utility of the methods and sources of information (Weiner, 2013). We emphasize the importance of using multiple methods in most assessments because the results of a single assessment instrument should never be the sole determinant of important decisions about clients.

The Purposes of Assessment

Now that we have defined assessment, it is important to explore the rationale for conducting assessment in counseling and other helping professions. Why do counselors assess? The short answer to this question is to gather information about a client. However, the information that counselors need to collect about a client depends a great deal on the *purpose* or *reason for assessment*. The research literature contains at least four general purposes of assessment. These include screening, identification and diagnosis, intervention planning, and progress and outcome evaluation (Erford, 2006; Sattler & Hoge, 2006; Selborn, Marion, & Bagby, 2013).

SCREENING *Screening* is a quick part of the assessment process, usually involving a single procedure or instrument, used to determine whether an individual has a high risk of having a specific problem and needs more in-depth assessment at that time. The screening process is not comprehensive, and the instruments used for screening are often held to lower standards of psychometrical soundness (Erford, 2012). Screening does not necessarily detect a specific problem or disorder an individual might have or how serious it might be; rather, it provides counselors with preliminary information that identifies those individuals with a high probability of having a particular problem. If, through the screening process, an individual is identified as having a high risk for a disorder, then further assessment is warranted. For example, many colleges have “depression screening days” in which students are given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire or instrument that detects a risk for depression. If the results of the instrument indicate a high risk for depression, the student is referred to the counseling center for further evaluation and, if needed, counseling. At the counseling center, a clinician might use multiple assessment instruments to determine the potential for a diagnosis of clinical depression and to help guide the treatment process.

A common example of screening occurs when a counselor has an initial concern about the potential for substance abuse with a client. The counselor might use the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory—4th Edition (SASSI-4) to identify the potential for a substance use disorder. If a client scores at clinically significant levels, then the counselor would conduct a more thorough assessment to determine the types of substances, level of use, potential for withdrawal, potential need for detoxification, and best options for treatment planning.

IDENTIFICATION AND DIAGNOSIS In counseling, assessment is often conducted as a means of *identifying* or *diagnosing* problems, symptoms, or disorders. *Diagnosis* can be defined as a “detailed analysis of an individual’s strengths and weaknesses, with the general goal of arriving at a classification decision” (Erford, 2006, p. 2). The assessment process for diagnosis typically encompasses the use of a series of instruments and strategies to identify a client’s problem areas that need to be targeted for intervention. Many counselors are

required to diagnose individuals using a classification system called the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). *Mental disorders* are behavioral or psychological patterns that impair an individual's cognitive, emotional, or behavioral functioning. In mental health counseling settings, depression and anxiety are examples of problems commonly diagnosed using the DSM-5. In school settings, identifying students who may be experiencing delays or learning problems is an important objective of assessment.

INTERVENTION PLANNING *Intervention planning* (i.e., treatment planning) involves deciding on a course of action that facilitates client change and helps improve the client's outcome. In most cases, individuals are referred for counseling because they are struggling and need specific psychological, educational, or behavioral interventions to improve their situations (Lichtenberger, Mather, Kaufman, & Kaufman, 2004). In these cases, the purpose of assessment is to gather information to determine the most effective interventions that address and resolve the client's specific areas of concern. There are innumerable interventions that a counselor can choose from, and the interventions decided upon are based on the client's problems and the reason for referral. Additionally, the setting in which the assessment takes place—such as a school, hospital, community mental health agency, private practice, or vocational center—will influence the types of interventions recommended (Lichtenberger et al., 2004).

PROGRESS AND OUTCOME EVALUATION Once interventions have been implemented, counselors may use various assessment instruments and strategies to monitor a client's progress and evaluate outcome. By periodically monitoring a client's progress, counselors can determine if the interventions are positively impacting the client. If an intervention is having no positive effects, counselors may re-evaluate the client and make new intervention plans. When an intervention program is completed, counselors may conduct an outcome evaluation to determine if the particular intervention was effective and if the clients achieved their goals at the end of counseling. The first step in *progress and outcome evaluation* is establishing a *baseline measure* of the client's condition. This usually takes place during the initial meeting for assessment and can involve the use of formal or informal assessment instruments or strategies. For example, an informal method would be to ask clients to rate their feelings of depression on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating a complete absence of depressive symptoms and 10 indicating feeling intensely depressed. An example of a formal assessment instrument designed specifically for progress and outcome evaluation is the Outcome Questionnaire (OQ-45), which measures adult clients' psychological symptoms (e.g., depression and anxiety), interpersonal functioning, and social role functioning. The assessment methods used to collect baseline data are periodically readministered to monitor the client's progress over the course of intervention. To assess the outcome of the intervention, the same instruments are also administered after the client has completed the intervention. Results from the outcome assessment are analyzed to determine if there has been a change from the baseline score.

Multiple Methods and Multiple Sources

You are likely beginning to see that assessment is a complex but essential process. Counselors using best practices assess by using multiple methods and multiple sources. Imagine having a complex jigsaw puzzle that you need to put together but not having an idea of

what the puzzle is supposed to look like when it is completed. You might attempt to use different approaches to determine some direction for solving the puzzle, you might get others to give you input about the process and outcome, and you might apply some problem-solving methods to the task. Conducting a thorough assessment is a similar process. As counselors and helping professionals, we often are unaware of what the end picture will look like for a client, but we have to begin to piece together the parts that will aim toward a solution to the presenting problems.

Selecting and utilizing *multiple methods* of data collection, which may be referred to as a multimodal approach to assessment, are essential to having a system of checks and balances for information gathered. The methods utilized to collect assessment information can be broadly categorized as interviews, tests, and observations. Within each category is a wide array of *formal* (e.g., standardized tests, structured interviews, and formal observation) and *informal* (e.g., unstructured interviews, projective techniques, checklists, questionnaires, and anecdotal reports) instruments and strategies. The sources of assessment information may include the client, parents, spouses/partners, teachers, physicians, and mental health professionals, to name just a few. Figure 1.2 illustrates the various methods and sources that may be utilized in the assessment process. In most assessments, using multiple methods and multiple sources is important for obtaining information that is thorough enough to produce an in-depth understanding of the individual. Counselors should never rely

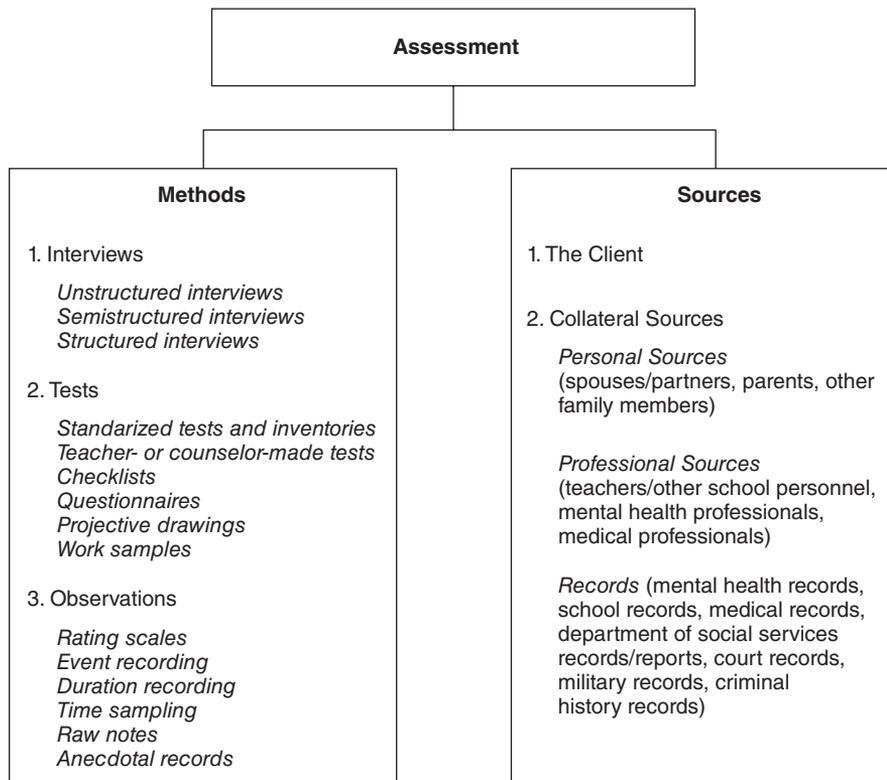


FIGURE 1.2 Multiple methods and multiple sources of the assessment process.

solely on the results of a single assessment instrument or strategy to make important decisions about clients. In this section, we will present an overview of the methods (i.e., interviews, tests, and observations) and sources of assessment information. Chapter 4 more fully describes each of these assessment methods and sources.

It may seem like an obvious point, but meeting face-to-face (or via camera) with a client is critical to having a complete picture from the assessment process. The *interview* is a face-to-face meeting of the assessment professional and the client. Interviewing may range from completely unstructured interactions, to semistructured interactions, to highly formal structured interviews. Its primary purpose is to gather background information relevant to the reason for assessment. The interview can be considered the single most important method of gathering information about the client's presenting problem and background information. Without interview data, information from tests and observations is without context and meaningless. In many settings, the interview is the primary (and sometimes only) assessment method used to collect data.

Tests are instruments designed to measure specific attributes of an individual, such as knowledge or skill level, intellectual functioning, aptitude, interests or preferences, values, personality traits, psychological symptoms, level of functioning, and so on. Counselors may use data collected from formal and informal tests, checklists, questionnaires, or inventories for several purposes, such as screening for emotional, behavioral, or learning problems; classifying or diagnosing certain attributes, problems, or disorders; selecting or placing individuals into training, educational/vocational programs, or employment opportunities; assisting in planning educational or psychological interventions; or evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions or educational programs. Test results are particularly useful in assessment because they may reveal vital diagnostic information that would otherwise not have been uncovered through other assessment methods.

Observation is an assessment method that involves watching and recording the behavior of an individual in a particular environment. It is a way of seeing what a person actually does, rather than relying on others' perceptions of behavior. Observation is useful for collecting information about an individual's emotional responses, social interactions, motor skills, and job performance, as well as for identifying specific patterns of behavior. Observation can be formal, involving the use of standardized rating scales and highly structured procedures, or informal, in which the counselor simply makes raw notes regarding a client's verbal and nonverbal behavior during the assessment.

In addition to multiple methods, counselors use *multiple sources* of information. The client is usually the primary source of information during the assessment process. Other sources of information (called *collateral sources*) include *personal sources*, such as parents, spouses/partners, and others close to the individual being evaluated, and *professional sources*, such as teachers, physicians, mental health professionals, and other professionals. Information from collateral sources is valuable because it is typically more objective and reliable than information obtained directly from examinees. Another source of assessment information comes from client *records*, such as school grades/attendance, previous psychological or educational assessment reports, mental health treatment plans or summaries, court documents, records from social services agencies, and so on.

There is no set standard as to the number of methods or sources that should be used in assessment. The methods and sources chosen for the assessment process typically depend upon the nature of the referral questions, the reason for assessment, and available assessment resources. The client interview is considered the cornerstone of assessment

and is employed in almost all cases. However, utilizing additional methods and sources of information leads to a more complete and accurate picture of the individual being evaluated. For example, let's say a mental health counselor working in an outpatient counseling center conducts unstructured interviews with clients to determine the reason they are seeking counseling and to collect relevant background information. The counselor also asks clients to complete a self-report checklist of psychological symptoms. From the checklist, the counselor discovers that a particular client has many symptoms of depression, which the client did not disclose during the interview. In this example, the use of the checklist provided essential information that was not uncovered by the interview alone. The client profile also might be more clearly detailed with the administration of some standardized tests; however, the counselor might not have access to these in their work setting.

The Assessment Process

Now that we have defined assessment and discussed methods and sources, it is important to re-emphasize that the assessment process is more than simply giving a test. Assessment is a complex problem-solving process that necessitates collecting and integrating information about an individual in order to make decisions or inferences about that person. The first and most important step in the assessment process is to identify the client's problem(s) to be addressed and the reason for assessment (Urbina, 2014). A clear sense of why an assessment is being conducted helps counselors select the methods and sources of information that will provide an adequate basis for arriving at useful conclusions and recommendations (Weiner, 2013). In most instances, the process of assessment ends with a verbal or written report, communicating the assessment results and making recommendations. Between these two points are other additional actions directed at collecting relevant client information (see Figure 1.3). While the process of assessment might appear

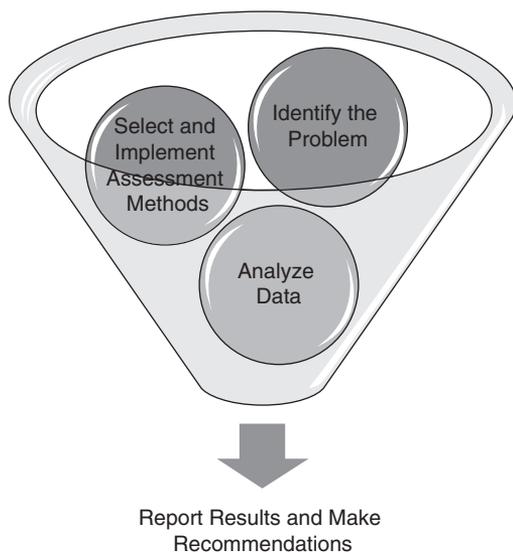


FIGURE 1.3 The Assessment Process

overwhelming now, it can be broken down into four manageable steps (Hardwood, Beutler, & Groth-Marnat, 2011):

1. **Identify the Problem** The first step in the assessment process is identifying the presenting problem, that is, the reason why the individual is being assessed. Because assessment is so clearly linked to counseling, the reason for assessment and the reason for counseling are often the same. Reasons for assessment and/or counseling can stem from a variety of problems or concerns, such as academic/vocational performance, cognitive abilities, behavior problems, or emotional and social functioning (Lichtenberger et al., 2004). In order to proceed to the next step in the assessment process, the counselor must have a clear idea about what the problem is and the reasons for which the client is being seen.

Clients may be self-referred for assessment, or they may be referred by another source, such as a family member, teacher, judge, physician, or human resources manager. Referral sources can help clarify the nature and severity of the client's problem through the specific questions they want answered about the client. Thus, referral questions are often directly linked to the problem being addressed in assessment. The following are examples of referral questions that help define the client's problem:

- Does this student have a learning disability? If so, do they qualify for special education or related services?
 - Is this child ready to begin kindergarten?
 - Does this child's problematic behavior indicate a diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?
 - Is this individual suicidal?
 - Does this adult have Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?
 - Does this parent have a mental disorder that might interfere with parenting?
 - What are this individual's vocational interests?
 - How well can this employee be expected to perform if promoted to a management position?
2. **Select and Implement Assessment Methods** After counselors determine the nature of the problem that needs to be appraised in the assessment process, the next step involves selecting and implementing methods for collecting data (e.g., interviews, tests, observation), as well as determining the sources of assessment information. Counselors choose from among the numerous formal and informal assessment instruments and strategies based on the reason for referral, the context in which the assessment takes place, and the adequacy of the instruments and procedures they will use. Interviews are used in almost every assessment to obtain background information about an individual, including family history, work and education background, social history, and other relevant cultural and environmental factors. Counselors may administer tests to evaluate a person's cognitive functioning, knowledge, skills, abilities, or personality traits. Observation may be used to record or monitor a client's behavior in a particular setting. Lastly, collateral information may be obtained from family members, spouses/partners, and others close to the individual being evaluated. Although there are no set guidelines for which or how many assessment instruments or strategies to use, in general, the more methods used to collect data, the more accurate and objective the information obtained.
 3. **Evaluate the Assessment Information** A key task for counselors is evaluating assessment information, which involves scoring, interpreting, and integrating information