

## **The Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment (CPTA)**

i

### **Statement on the Use of Secure Psychological Tests in the Education of Graduate and Undergraduate Psychology Students**

The Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment (CPTA) encourages the education of undergraduate and graduate psychology students in the appropriate and ethical use of psychological tests and assessment instruments. Such education must be consistent with the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, (AERA/APA/NCME, 1999) and the Ethical Principles of Psychologists, (APA, 1992) as well as guidelines and procedures for test use and security provided by test developers and publishers<sup>ii</sup>. The purpose of this statement is to address issues of test security in the context of teaching and training of students in psychology. It is intended to guide professionals who use secure psychological tests in education only with regard to those areas in which they can exercise control of access to test materials.

#### **Security of Test Materials**

It should be recognized that certain tests used by psychologists and related professionals may suffer irreparable harm to their validity if their items, scoring keys or protocols, and other materials are publicly disclosed. Examples include tests such as graduate school admission or college entrance examinations, or tests of cognitive function. Access to psychological test materials (e.g., test booklets, protocols, administration manuals, scoring keys) should be granted only to qualified psychologists or other professionals who use the material in their teaching, research, or clinical practice. Students who use the materials in the course of their research or training should be directly supervised by a psychologist or other appropriate supervisor. For example, when testing materials are stored in a library, access should be limited to appropriate personnel and to students in training. Test materials sold for the purposes of student training must not be available to the casual purchaser in college and university bookstores. Preferably, such materials should be distributed through an arranged venue such as from the test publisher directly. University or college psychology or other administrative departments and professors must store all psychological test materials under conditions that prevent

access by unauthorized individuals. Psychologists who maintain test materials for teaching or research purposes should be aware of the importance of protecting such documents, and should be familiar with the issues surrounding their security.

## **Testing Demonstrations**

It is entirely appropriate to demonstrate testing materials and procedures in undergraduate courses such as general psychology or personality theory. In this situation, simulated test items should be used to demonstrate any given device or technique. For example, instructors may make their own inkblots or invent "similarities" items to illustrate the content, administration, or scoring of a test. Alternatively, a film or video may be used to illustrate administration, without revealing or compromising the security of the stimulus materials or scoring. When students are administered a psychological test for demonstration purposes in an upper division undergraduate or graduate course, the instructor has the same responsibilities as though the test were administered for its regularly-intended purpose. That is, the instructor becomes the test user and the student the test-taker. The instructor must have the necessary training to administer, score, and interpret the test on an individual or group basis, as appropriate. Although the administration, scoring and interpretation will serve a pedagogical function, they must be carried out in a manner consistent with the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. In addition, students should be informed that a demonstration of a test for training purposes may have the effect of invalidating the test in the event that the students would take the test in the future, with the tests intended purpose

## **Teaching Students to Administer and Score Tests**

Before students administer any kind of psychological test, they should have completed appropriate prerequisite coursework in tests and measurements, statistics, and psychometrics, and they should be thoroughly trained in the proper administration of the specific test being used. It is advisable that the students be supervised in practice and initial administrations, as well as in scoring of responses and deriving interpretations. It is inappropriate for students to administer tests in an environment that does not allow for a controlled, private, and standardized presentation. Communicating the results of a test to a test-taker is a serious matter in any circumstance. Results or interpretations should be reported by students only under the supervision of a qualified faculty member or supervisor. Students should be thoroughly trained in appropriate language and procedures to report all types and levels of scores.

## **Using Tests in Research**

The use of tests in psychological research is bound by the ethics that apply to research with human participants. Issues such as the necessity of informed consent, the nature and extent of debriefing, including feedback of test results, and the disguised use of test materials, must be addressed on a case-by-case basis with due attention to the protection of the participants and the integrity of the test. Unauthorized modification of a published or unpublished test for a research project is a violation of the publishers or authors copyright, and is thus both unethical and illegal. As with tests used in training, when tests are used by students in their research, the faculty supervisor bears the responsibility for assuring appropriate testing practices. Security of test materials, confidentiality of records, standardized administration, and appropriate methods of score reporting must be maintained as in any other testing situation.

<sup>i</sup> CPTA is a standing committee of the American Psychological Association.

<sup>ii</sup> Test publishers regularly publish guidelines on secure test use. To obtain the guidelines for a specific test, contact the relevant test publishers.

---

**[APA Science HOME](#)**

American Psychological Association  
Science Directorate  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
Phone: 202-336-6000 Fax: 202-336-5953  
E-mail: [science@apa.org](mailto:science@apa.org)