**Chapter 1: Basic Assessment Concepts**

**Learning Outcomes**

When you have finished this chapter, you should be able to:

* Define assessment and its integral role within counseling; understand the difference between assessment and testing
* Identify the purposes of assessment including screening, diagnosis, progress (outcome) evaluation, and treatment planning and goal identification
* Recognize how assessment aligns with professional counselor standards and best practices
* Identify different types of assessment including standardardized (formal) and nonstandardized tests; norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests; individual and group tests and inventories; objective and subjective tests; speed and power tests; verbal and nonverbal tests; cognitive and affective tests; paper-and-pencil tests; performance assessment; portfolio assessment; and environmental assessment
* Understand the difference between formative versus summative evaluation
* Differentiate between and recognize the strengths and limitations of computer-managed and computer-adapted assessment

**Overview**

1. **Assessment and Counseling**
   * Assessment is integral to every stage in the counseling process.
   * Assessment enhances a counselor’s efficiency in helping a client.
2. **What is Assessment?**
   * Testing is only part of the process.
   * Psychological tests are an objective and standardized measure of a sample of behavior.
   * The purposes of assessment: screening; diagnosis; treatment planning and goal identification; and progress (outcome) evaluation.
3. **How is Assessment used in Counseling?**
   * Assessment is used throughout the counseling process:
     + Assessing client problems.
     + Conceptualizing and defining client problems.
     + Selecting and implementing effective treatments.
     + Evaluating counseling effectiveness.
4. **Assessment Competence and Professional Counselors**
   * Multi-method and multi-respondent assessment methods can help counselors uncover diverse client information.
   * Assessment results provide a concrete record and lead to enhanced credibility.
   * Training standards for professional counselors through CACREP guide assessment education and practice.
   * Professional counseling organizations such as the ACA and its numerous specialty areas promote best practices.
   * Professional counselors should become aware of the laws and regulations pertaining to assessment in their states.
   * Assessment training standards exist to ensure that only qualified individuals can administer, score, and interpret psychological and educational tests.
5. **Assessment Terms and Concepts**
   * Standardized (formal) and nonstandardized (informal) tests.
     + Standardized tests have specific conditions for administration, timing, and scoring that nonstandardized tests do not.
   * Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests.
     + Norm-referenced tests allow comparison of a person’s score to the scores of a comparison group with like characteristics.
     + Criterion-referenced tests compare a person’s score to a predetermined score or level of performance.
   * Individual and group tests and inventories.
   * Objective and subjective tests.
     + The examiner uses judgment to determine the quality of a response on subjective, but not objective, tests.
   * Speed and power tests.
     + Speed tests measure the number of simple items that can be completed in a short time while power tests include items of varying difficulty with no time limits.
   * Verbal and nonverbal tests.
     + While verbal tests rely on language usage, nonverbal tests require students to complete some task without the use of language.
   * Cognitive and affective tests.
     + Cognitive tests, such as intelligence, aptitude, and achievement tests, measure perceptual, processing, memory, or reasoning skills, while affective tests assess noncognitive functions like personality, attitudes, values, and interests.
   * Maximum and typical performance measurement.
   * Behavioral observations can be direct or indirect.
   * Formative versus summative evaluation.
     + Formative evaluation occurs throughout a program in order to make adjustments, while summative evaluation occurs as the end of a program to assess overall outcomes.
   * Paper-and-pencil tests differ from performance (authentic) assessments, which ask examinees to manipulate materials or select visual stimuli.
   * Portfolio assessment allows examinees to display a collection of exemplar works.
   * Environmental assessment seeks to modify the environment to best meet the needs of the individual.
   * Computer-managed, computer-assisted, and computer-adapted assessment must supplement, not supplant, the interpretation of clinicians but it does have numerous advantages:
     + Time and cost efficiency.
     + Better accommodations for clients with disabilities.
     + Diminished bias.
     + Greater client self-disclosure of sensitive information.
     + The ability of counselors to reach geographically isolated clients.
6. **Supplements: Controversies in Assessment**
   * Tests label and categorize.
     + Concern about the use of labels lies in two areas:
       - Tests may be used to mislabel an individual.
       - Labels may be used as an excuse for a remediable or nonexistent condition.
     + While labels are often necessary for obtaining services, counselors must be aware of the potential for misidentification.
   * To test or not to test.
     + Testing can be used to make helpful decisions when used appropriately.
     + Tests can be used inappropriately if they are misunderstood or misused.
     + Resources for students with disabilities or less economic means is often tied to test performance.
     + We must focus on how to best use tests to make accurate decisions.

**Summary Narrative**

This chapter addressed purposes and terminology related to professional use of assessment. Assessment integrates testing and other data collection methods to help counselors better understand clients and make better decisions on their behalf. Assessment has four purposes: screening, diagnosis, treatment planning and goal identification, and progress evaluation. Each purpose contributes substantially to the overall counseling process. Assessment and counseling are intertwined in every stage of the counseling process including: (1) assessing client problems, (2) conceptualizing and defining client problems, (3) selecting and implementing effective treatments, and (4) evaluating counseling effectiveness.

# The counseling field has a number of sources intended to guide assessment education and practice. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has established curricular requirements. ACA published the position statement, Standards for Qualifications of Test Users. AACE (2003) publishes the RUST-3 to inform counseling practitioners of their responsibilities while using standardized tests. A number of professional counselor specialty organizations have developed standards to aid counselors in understanding good assessment practices: (a) AACE/IAOCC Standards for Assessment in Substance Abuse Counseling; (b) AACE/ASCA Competencies in Assessment and Evaluation for School Counselors; (c) AACE/AMHCA Standards for Assessment in Mental Health Counseling; (d) AACE/IAOCC Marriage, Couple and Family Counseling Assessment Competencies; and (e) AACE/NCDA Career Counselor Assessment and Evaluation Competencies. Professional counselors should become familiar with the general provisions and specialty standards that apply to their specific work settings and engage in professional development activities that will allow continuing compliance with the standards.

Professional counselors need to be familiar with the terms and phrases essential to the field in order to communicate effectively with other professionals, to advocate for clients and students, and to make decisions in their best interests. Standardized tests have specific conditions for administration, timing, and scoring; nonstandardized tests do not. Norm-referenced tests allow comparison of a person’s score to the scores of a comparison group with like characteristics, while criterion-referenced tests compare a person’s score to a predetermined standard or level of performance—a criterion*.* Some tests and inventories are designed to be administered to only a single examinee at a time (individual tests); others are designed for administration to groups of participants simultaneously (group tests). Objective tests have predetermined correct answers and require no judgment on the part of the examiner (e.g., multiple-choice, true-false items) while subjective tests require the examiner to make a judgment on the quality of the response in scoring an item (e.g., essay, short-answer). Speeded tests usually have a large number of simple items with the purpose of determining how many items one can complete in a specified time limit (e.g., 2 minutes). Power tests have items of varying difficulty, some so difficult as to challenge the most capable examinees, and no time limits; the raw score is the number of correct responses.

Verbal tests require verbal responses while nonverbal tests require examinees to perform some task (e.g., mark answers, construct objects, use visualization skills). Cognitive tests (e.g., intelligence, aptitude, achievement) all measure perceptual, processing, memory or reasoning skills, to varying degrees. Affective tests assess non-cognitive functions, including temperament, clinical disposition, personality, attitudes, values, and interests. Maximum performance measurements strive to reveal an examinee’s performance under optimal conditions (i.e., doing one’s best), while typical performance measurements assess performance under typical conditions (i.e., the way one normally responds or behaves). Behavior observations, which are expanded on in Chapter 10, can be direct (e.g., anecdotal or structured observations) or indirect (e.g., rating scales). Summative evaluation occurs at the conclusion of a program to assess the overall outcomes, while formative evaluation occurs at any point during implementation of the program, allowing mid-course changes and adjustments.

Performance (authentic) assessments require examinees to perform some task, usually by manipulating materials or selecting visual stimuli, while paper-and-pencil tests require examinees to mark answer choices. Most classroom-based, teacher-made tests are paper-and-pencil. Portfolio assessment allows examinees to display a collection of exemplar works and products, which are then evaluated against some set of standards or criteria. Environmental assessment moves the focus of assessment and evaluation from the individual to the environment in which the individual functions in order to match the needs and interests of the client with the demands of the environment, or to identify facets of the environment that can be altered to accommodate the individual.

Finally, computers have revolutionized and complicated the fields of counseling and assessment. Computer-managed assessment, also known as computer-assisted assessment*,* involves the harnessing of computers to administer, score, and interpret tests. Computer-adapted assessment involves an interactive process between the examinee and the computerized assessment device, and usually entails varying administration formats depending on the responses of the examinee to previous questions.