

What are the Components of a Vocational Assessment?

Introduction

Parents and professionals involved in facilitating the student's transition after age 14 but no later than 16 should consider the developmental maturity of the student as well as the skills that the student will need to adjust to community living and employment. The skills that should be considered include such things as daily living skills (e.g., managing money, preparing food), personal/social skills (e.g., hygiene, social skills), and occupational/vocational skills (e.g., job-seeking skills and appropriate work habits). The degree to which the student already possesses these skills and the extent to which these skills need to be developed can be determined in part by the vocational assessment. Vocational assessment should be more formalized as the student moves through grade levels and the assessment information gathered in later years should be multi-level and include assessment at both the junior and senior high levels (Hann and Levison, 1998).

A variety of approaches is necessary depending upon the student's specific needs, his or her age, and stage of personal and career development. It is essential that information about certain attributes of each individual be gathered. Regardless of the approach used to gather information about your youth, the following components should be included in the vocational assessment. These components represent the essential attributes of the individual that make up his or her vocational profile or identity. It is also important to remember that a student's self-concept is critical to his or her educational and vocational functioning. Vocational assessment should help clarify a student's self-concept and be included within any component of a vocational assessment.

1. **Interests:** What are the student's occupational or vocational preferences? Remember that these may be preferences that the student expresses, or those he/she demonstrates, or those that are identified with an interest survey or inventory. When receiving interpretations of interest inventories, make sure that the tests are truly representative of a wide range of occupations rather than being limited to one category or a few occupations. It is also important that the people who administer and interpret interest inventories represent them as occupational likes and dislikes, rather than as a measure of skills (or aptitudes) to actually do any specific occupation. Results of tests should always be verified by identifying an individual's expressed or demonstrated interests.
2. **Aptitudes (abilities and capabilities):** Aptitude can refer both to the ability to do and to learn certain types of skills, such as mechanical, spatial, numerical, and clerical. Many tests exist to measure a student's aptitude for performing in any one of these skill areas. Often, the best measure is to have the individual try different tasks which require specific aptitudes or occupational duties.
3. **Temperaments (Worker Style Preferences):** Worker style is reflected in how people behave and in the emotional responses and choices they make. Preferring to work with people, things, or data, and the ways your son or daughter organizes and makes decisions are aspects of his or her worker style preference. Information about preferences can be gathered through observation by professionals and parents, as well as through discussion with the student or through temperament inventories.
4. **Learning preferences and styles:** This reflects how a person prefers to receive and process information and experiences. How does your child best retain and use input -- auditory, visual, or through hands-on exposure? Does he or she have any preferences for interaction or times for learning? This type of information can be gathered through inventories of learning style, as well as through observation and discussion.

5. Developmental background (background information): This information does not represent a comprehensive case history; rather, it should include only the information that impacts on your child's performances and prognoses specifically related to vocational development. What special needs does your youth have, given his or her disability?
6. Worker characteristics: These include a student's traits, attitudes, values, employability skills, and work related behaviors such as work habits and social skills. Positive worker characteristics are vital to successful employment and are most frequently cited as reasons for either promotions or dismissals by employers. Information about the student's statistics can be collected via inventories, observations of him or her at real or simulated work (often called situational assessments), professional impressions, and the use of checklists that detail important worker skills (e.g., punctuality, safety awareness, etc.).
7. Vocational/occupational skills: These skills refer to specific technical, industrial, or other types of skills that are required in actual jobs. In order to know if your youth has the technical skills necessary to do a specific job, a training or job analysis must be done and compared to his or her skills. The best indicators of skills are through observations of the individual actually trying parts of the job or occupational area. For many vocational jobs, checklists of the necessary skills already exist.
8. Functional/Life skills: This category refers to those skills that an individual needs in order to address personal and independent living problems that people with disabilities often encounter after leaving school. Some of these skills are: use of transportation, ability to handle financial and housing management, decision-making, and social skills. If your son or daughter is not at a point in the educational process where exiting school and living and working in the community are concerns, this type of assessment may not be needed. However, for those students who are nearing this transition, functional assessment should be a part of the assessment process.