

When Should I Update

to the New Revision of a Test?

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As Pearson Solutions Analysts, one of the questions we are asked most frequently is, “When do I need to transition to the latest revision of a test?” As a test publisher, Pearson does not make any recommendations with regard to this question. Instead, we urge test users to look for guidance from their professional associations, most frequently the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA). What information do these organizations provide on the topic?

Tests utilized by practitioners are often deemed *“high stakes assessments”* because they typically help guide diagnosis, identify or confirm eligibility, and other important life-changing decisions. According to the Guidelines for Practitioner Use of Test Revisions, Obsolete Tests, and Test Disposal (2015) which was drafted by Thomas Oakland, PhD, “Professionals engaged in good testing practices evaluate the potential utility of the test used, select technically sound tests in light of intended standards, recognize the importance of fair testing practices, prepare for the test session, administer tests properly, score and analyze test results accurately, interpret test results properly, communicate the results clearly and accurately, and review the appropriateness of the test and its uses.” It is also the responsibility of publishers to provide tests that are reliable and valid, while addressing pertinent issues (e.g., new research trends, new diagnostic criteria, changes in US demographics, examiner preference, etc.). As Pearson Solutions Analysts, it is our job to communicate with customers the reasons and research that underlie the publication of newly revised test instruments.



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The National Association of School Psychologists Principles for Professional Ethics states, "School Psychologists maintain the highest standard for responsible professional practices in education, psychological assessment, and direct and indirect interventions." Standard II.3.2 indicates, "School Psychologists use assessment techniques and practices that the profession considers to be responsible, research based practice." It also indicates, "School Psychologists select assessment instruments and strategies that are reliable and valid for the child and the purpose of the assessment. When utilizing standardized measures, school psychologists adhere to the procedures for administration of the instrument that are provided by the author or publisher of the instrument." Furthermore, the NASP Principles suggest that when utilizing norm-referenced measures, school psychologists "choose instruments with up-to-date information." However, there is no specific time frame for compliance.



Similarly, the NASP Best Practices in School Psychology IV, Volume 2 (2002) states, "The newest revision and most recent norms for a test should be used because recent studies show that the stringency of norms changes over time and more recent norms typically are tougher than older norms. The now well-known Flynn Effect must be considered to avoid the undue effects of out-of-date norms (Flynn, 1998)." After examining the intellectual level of the US population for 46 years, Flynn concluded that the average annual national gain in the US population is .33 IQ points (Weiss, Saflofske, Holdnack, and Prifetera, page 187). This indicates that in a 10-year span, IQ scores obtained by the US population should differ by approximately 3 IQ points.

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014) also provide no guidance on when the transition to a new test should take place, but do state the following: "Test specifications should be amended or revised when new research data, significant changes in the represented domain, or newly recommended conditions of test use may reduce the validity of test score interpretations. Although a test that remains useful need not be withdrawn or revised simply because of the passage of time, test developers and test publishers are responsible for monitoring changing conditions and for amending, revising, or withdrawing the test as indicated." (Standard 4.24, "Standards for Test Revision")

In addition, the above AERA Standard states: "Test developers need to consider a number of factors that may warrant the revision of a test, including outdated test content and language, new evidence of relationships among measured or predicted constructs, or changes to test frameworks to reflect changes in curriculum, instruction, or job requirements. If an older version of a test is used when a newer version has been published or made available, test users are responsible for providing evidence that the older version is as appropriate as the new version for that particular test use."

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Although there may be no clear rule regarding transition time, there does appear to be a professional consensus (sometimes referred to as a “community standard”) that the switch to a newer test revision should be made within one year of publication. In an article titled, “Ethical Standards and Best Practices in Using Newly Revised Tests” by Stefan Dombrowski (September 2003, NASP Communiqué, Vol. 32, #1), it is stated, “The profession has instead established a community standard for the transition to newly revised IQ instruments:

Ranging from six months to one year, this transition period has been tacitly agreed upon by trainers of school psychologists and other leaders in the field (B. A. Bracken, personal communication, June 30, 2003; T. Fagan, personal communication, June 29, 2003; R. W. Kamphaus, personal communication, June 29, 2003; C. R. Reynolds, personal communication, June 30, 2003).” The article also maintains that APA, AERA, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) test standards (1999) indicate that psychologists should use the most recent version of an assessment instrument when conducting an evaluation of a child’s abilities.

Standard 9.08 (“Obsolete Tests and Outdated Test Results”) of the APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2010), states: “(a) Psychologists do not base their assessment or intervention decisions or recommendations on data or test results that are outdated for the current purpose. (b) Psychologists do not base such decisions or recommendations on tests and measures that are obsolete and not useful for the current purpose.”

There is also a lack of consensus in terms of states’ special education regulations. Some states allow for a one-year transition period, while others do not address the issue. David Wheeler, School Psychology Consultant to the Florida Department of Education, reported that the Department of Education does not have a written policy specifying the timeline for transitioning to a revision of an instrument, but State Board rules require that districts ensure that assessments be administered in accordance with instructions provided by the producer of the test instrument (6A-6.0331). If the publisher has a policy, the publisher’s policy should be followed. Most districts have adopted a one-year (formal or informal) transition policy to update tests following a revision.

In summary, one must look closely at the various relevant ethical guidelines and best practices provided by professional organizations, in conjunction with state guidelines, in order to make an informed decision regarding when to upgrade to a new revision of a test. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of us as professionals to make this decision. We have an ethical responsibility to ensure our test results are accurate, and to maximize the likelihood that our test results will contribute to the most appropriate decisions for the individuals we serve.

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