

What Tests Are and What They Can Do for You

Who are you?

You have a name and an address. You are, let's say, 16 years old, 5 feet 8 inches tall, and you weigh 143 pounds. You have gray eyes, brown hair, and certain clearly marked features. Some of these characteristics might identify you on a school record form or on an application blank for employment or college admission. But they don't tell the most important things about you.

"Who are you?" doesn't usually mean just name and looks. It also means "What can you do? What kind of person are you?"

These are the main things that a school or an employer or a college or an army classification officer wants to know about you. And they are probably the things you most want to know about yourself.

How can these people find out about you? How can you find out about yourself? How can your abilities, interests, and other characteristics be discovered and measured? Experiences help: what you have done and how you have done it tell a great deal about you. Judgments by skilled observers help: the marks your teachers give you mean a lot. But all students don't have the same opportunity for varied experiences, and even the most skilled teachers may differ in their judgments.

So another helpful method of measurement called "standardized testing" has come into use. A standardized test exposes everyone who takes it to the same kind of experiences; it makes it possible to observe and measure everyone in the same way on the same scale.

Standardized tests are not new. As far back as the Middle Ages, a standardized test was used to determine a man's guilt or innocence of a crime. He was made to walk over a bed of glowing coals. If his feet burned and blistered, he was judged guilty; otherwise, innocent. This was a standardized test because it exposed all who took it to the same experiences, under the same circumstances, and it was scored in the same way for everyone. But the trouble with it was that it was not a "valid" test: it did not actually do at all what it was supposed to do—

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distinguish between the innocent and the guilty.

Since these medieval "trials by ordeal," standardized testing has become much more valid and much less of an ordeal. Especially during the last 40 years there have been great scientific improvements in tests. Of course, they are still not perfect. And some people still regard them as an ordeal. "The only thing worse than a world full of tests," someone has said, "would be a world with no tests at all."

Just how good are modern tests for predicting success? Here is an example: During World War II, the Air Force developed tests to pick the men who were most likely to succeed in pilot training. To check up on these tests, a large number of candidates were tested but the results were not shown to anyone. Months later, after the entire group had taken primary training, a locked safe containing the test results was opened.

Look at the chart below. As you can see, all but 4 per cent of the men with highest scores succeeded in primary training. But 77 per cent of the lowest group "washed out."

After this study, the Air Force decided to use tests for selection of all candidates. It was then possible to figure out just where the passing score should be set in order to get any given number of air cadets for advanced pilot training.

Today more than \$25 million a year is spent in the United States on standardized testing—much of it still for selection, but more and more to help in instruction and guidance.

You have probably taken some standardized tests already, and you will almost certainly take more. Standardized testing may extend from early childhood through middle age. In your earliest school years you probably took "intelligence" tests and "reading readiness" tests. Later, you may have taken "achievement" tests, "aptitude" tests, "diagnostic" tests, perhaps "interest inventories" and "personality scales." And now you may hear of other tests to come — "College Boards," scholarship tests, armed forces classification tests, employment tests, and so on.

What are all these different tests? How are they scored? How are they used? What can you learn from them? How can you get the most out of them? Try to put yourself into each of the following situations and see how tests can help you.

► You're a senior in high school and you want to get into a certain well-known college. Perhaps you also hope

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to get a scholarship. You take entrance examinations and scholarship qualifying tests. The college wants to be sure you're capable of doing the work required of its students. (Incidentally, one of the greatest favors ever done to some students is to be excluded from the college of their choice. If they were accepted and didn't quite have the ability required to keep up with its standards, they might soon "flunk out" or find themselves heading for a nervous breakdown — while they might have been quite successful at another college or on a job which fitted them better.)

▶ You're applying for a job as a secretary in a large advertising company. You take a typist test, a stenography test, and a "general ability" test. (If you fail the test, you'd better improve your skills or try a less demanding job.)

▶ You're a high school junior and you're trying to make up your mind about future courses of study and careers. Your high school counselor gives you a battery of aptitude tests. Your pattern of high and low scores will tell both your counselor and yourself something about your abilities in different fields and the areas which seem most promising for your future concentration.

▶ You're a housewife and the local school system is trying a plan of paying housewives to read themes to relieve the English teachers. The project director gives you and the other applicants a "verbal ability" test and a sample paper to grade. Whether you get the extra "pin money" you need depends on the results you achieve on the test.

▶ You're in the naval reserve and aiming for a promotion. Your scores on tests of electronic developments will go a long way in determining whether you get the promotion or the Navy keeps you a j.g. a while longer.

▶ You're finishing your second year of college and don't know what you want to take for a major. You're not particularly interested in some of the subjects you do best in. The University Counseling Service recommends that you take an interest inventory to help you see what your interests are. The test results will help you understand yourself better and choose more wisely.

▶ You're a senior in high school and want to enter a school of nursing. Besides aptitude tests, you take a personality inventory. The results will help the school officials know you before you even arrive.

We'll explore tests like these and a lot more in the articles to come. We hope at the end of this series that

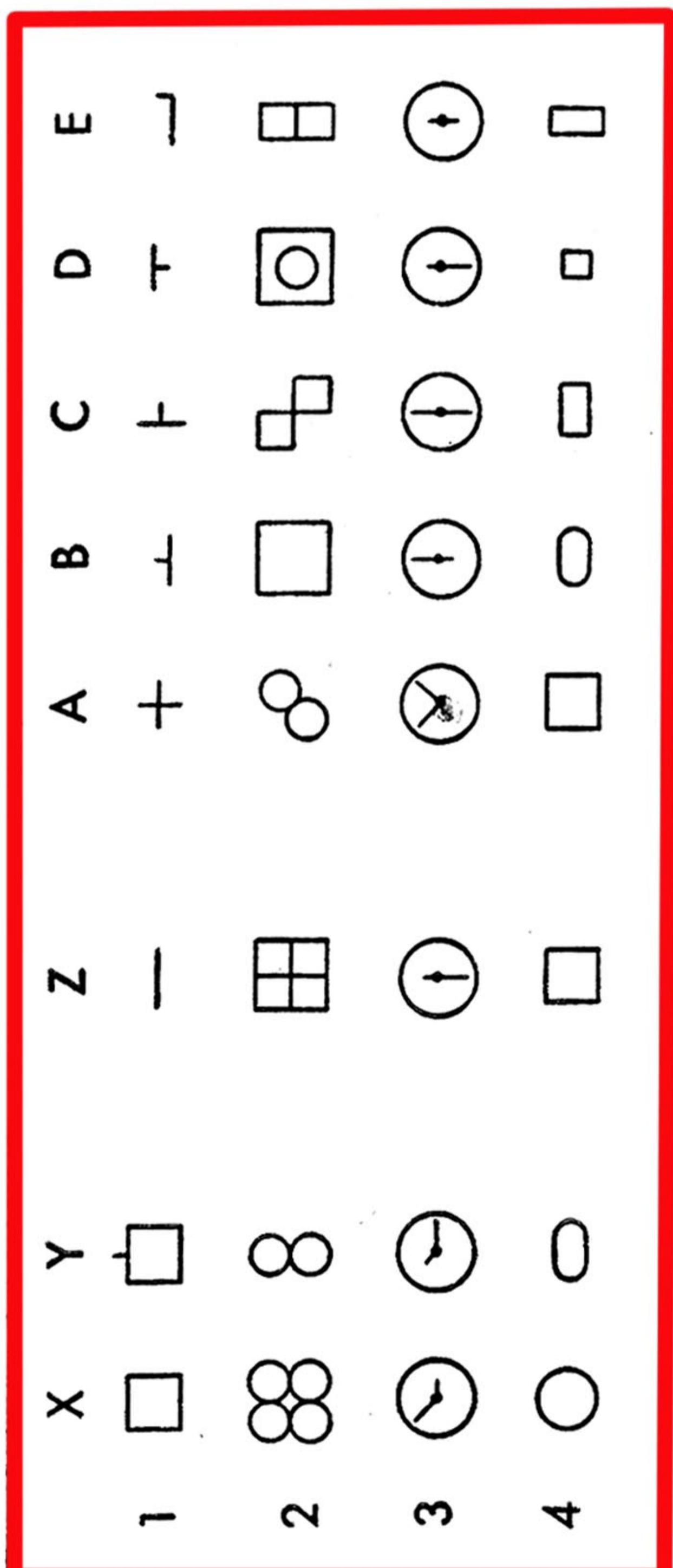
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“aptitude tests,” “general ability tests,” “interest inventories,” “test batteries,” and a lot of other strange words will be part of your everyday vocabulary so that you can better understand and use test results for your own benefit. (And we may even drop in a hint or two on *how* to take tests so you’ll make your best score.) We shall give you a chance to try many sample items and show you how they are scored. Then when you take such tests you will know what to expect. Instead of seeming strange or puzzling, geometric forms like those in Figure A will look familiar. You’ll just say casually, “Oh, those are only items from a general ability test. I bet I’ll see something like that again in my college placement exams.”

And when you see technical diagrams like those in Figures B and C, you won’t “choke up.” You’ll just say, “These give me a chance to use some of the principles I’ve learned in physics.”

Meanwhile, what are *your* questions about standardized testing? If there is anything you would like to have explained or described in these articles, write to Test Editor, *Scholastic Magazines*. We’ll do our best to answer your questions.

FIGURE A: In each line below, Figure Y is similar to Figure X in some way. Find the principle in each case. Then apply it to Figure Z by selecting the one of the five figures lettered A to E which is related to Z in the same way Y is to X*



* The correct answers to Fig. A are 1. B; 2. E; 3. B; 4. C.

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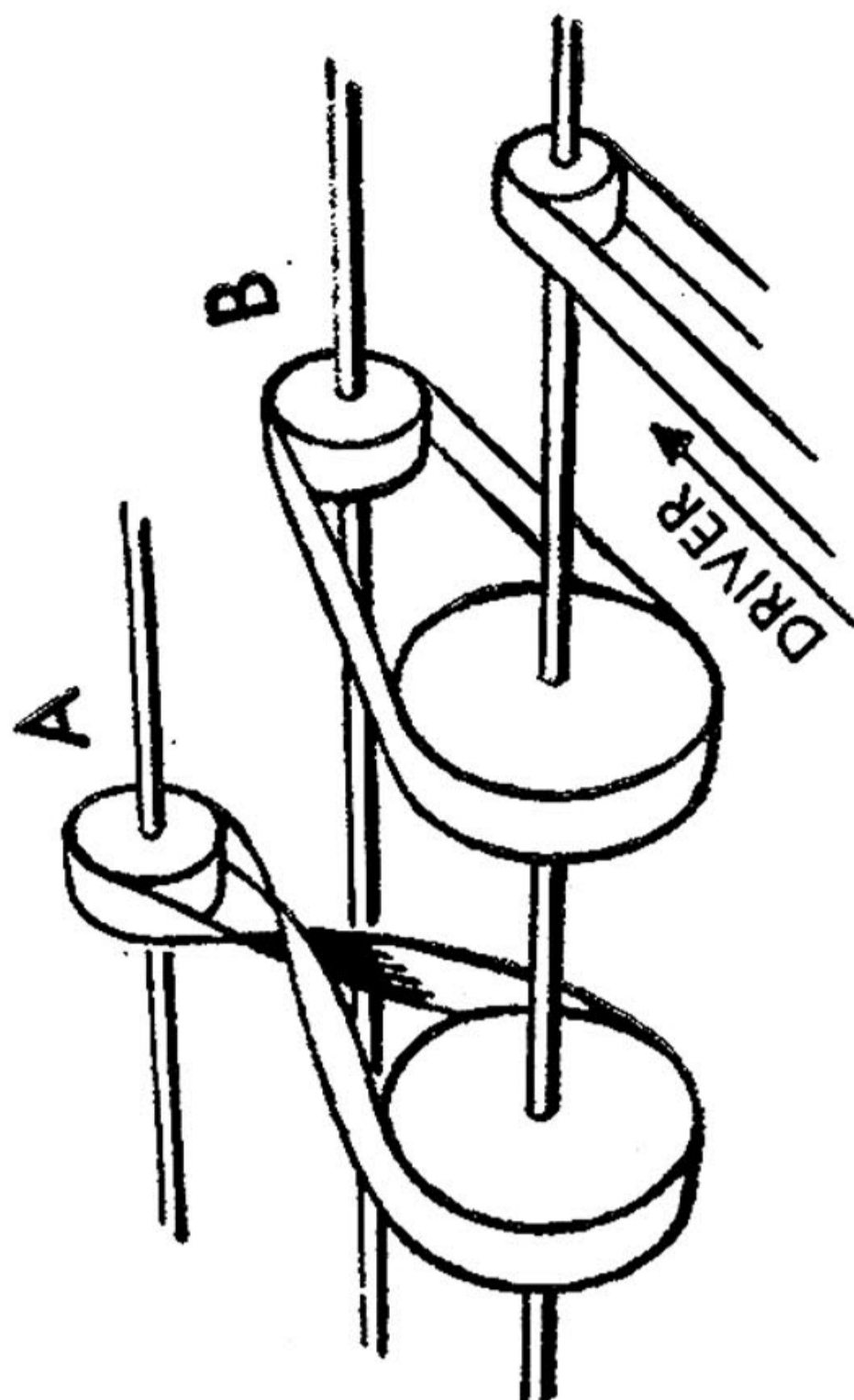


FIGURE B: Which pulley is revolving faster?

Check one answer below. **

- (1) A
 (2) B
 (3) They are revolving at about the same speed.

** The correct answers to Figs. B and C are B, 3; C, 3.

FIGURE C: In which case must the man do more work to move the roller? Check one answer below.**

- (1) A
 (2) B
 (3) He does an equal amount of work in both cases.

** The correct answers to Figs. B and C are B, 3; C, 3.

Prepared with the cooperation of
 the Educational Testing Service,
 Princeton, New Jersey

by

Scarvia B. Anderson, Ph.D.
 Editor, Cooperative Test Division

Martin R. Katz, M.A.
 Assistant Director, Evaluation and
 Advisory Service

Benjamin Shimberg, Ph.D.
 Director, ETS Guidance Inquiry