



# Evaluating Job Applicants: The Role of Training and Experience in Hiring

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Training and experience (T&E) assessments are part of the hiring process for almost every Federal job. These assessments must be valid (job-related and acceptably predictive of job performance) to comply with first merit system principle, which envisions hiring based solely on relative ability. Also, effective screening and evaluation of job applicants remains important even—indeed, especially—in a time of reduced Federal hiring, because hiring decisions have long-term effects on agency performance, productivity, and morale. This report describes several methods of T&E assessment, identifies strengths and weaknesses of these methods, and suggests remedies.

## ***How—and how well—do T&E assessments work?***

Training and experience assessments use information about the *past* to make inferences about an applicant’s *present* proficiency and *future* job performance. As shown in the table, several T&E assessments are sufficiently valid to have practical value in hiring. However, the more valid training and experience assessments require an investment of effort and time from the employer—and, to a lesser degree, the job applicant—to work as intended. Although technology can make T&E assessments more efficient and consistent, there is still no “free lunch.”

Practical Value of Selected Types of T&E Assessment	
Practical Value	Assessment
Very Useful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured Interview</li> <li>• Accomplishment Record</li> </ul>
Likely Useful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupational Questionnaire</li> <li>• Reference Checks</li> </ul>
Possibly Useful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Years of Experience</li> <li>• Resume (by itself)</li> </ul>

## ***Are there issues in using T&E assessments for Federal hiring?***

Our research highlights continuing challenges in such assessment. For example—

- *Past* training and experience do not necessarily confer *present* competence;
- Applicants may fail to fully or adequately describe their job-related T&E;
- Applicants—even those who are honest and highly-qualified—are not good generally at evaluating their own training and experience; and
- Applicants have an incentive to exaggerate their T&E and ability—and some do.

## ***What can be done to make T&E assessments more useful?***

- Grounding the assessment in a current and thorough job analysis;
- Improving information collection (for example, by revising occupational questionnaires);
- Improving information evaluation (for example, by enhancing rating scales and scoring);
- Providing guidance to applicants to develop their self-rating abilities; and
- Verifying applicant information and proficiency.

## ***What does MSPB recommend?***

- Avoid use of low-validity T&E assessments for hiring decisions.
- When T&E assessments are used, use techniques to improve their accuracy.
- Consider alternatives when practical.

*For the full report, including a discussion of when—and how—to use T&E assessments, please visit [www.mspb.gov/studies](http://www.mspb.gov/studies).*