



Civil Service
Human Resources

Civil Service Initial Sift Test

A guide for candidates



Civil Service psychometric tests

The Civil Service uses psychometric tests alongside other assessment methods (such as application forms, competency evidence, and interviews) to decide whether a person has the required capabilities to meet the needs of a job at a particular grade.

Using tests can offer benefits by:

- giving candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their strengths
- providing the recruiter with an objective method of assessing candidates on relevant criteria
- helping identify areas where candidates could benefit from further development

The tests are fair and free from bias or discrimination because:

- they are robust as measurement tools – they work effectively each time they are used
- there is no advantage in having more educational qualifications or work experience
- provided that the test is administered appropriately, including the correct use of cut-off benchmarks, the tests have been found to be fair towards all protected groups and to predict candidates' performance in later stages of selection

Your personal information is held securely in Civil Service Jobs. The test supplier does not see your personal information and will only know your name if you choose to share it with them. Your information will only be used for the purposes of enabling your application for a job and for evaluating the effectiveness of the tests.

About the Civil Service Initial Sift Test (CSIST)

The Civil Service Initial Sift Test is an online situational judgement test. It measures your ability to demonstrate the behaviours underpinning the [Civil Service Competency Framework](#) (CSCF). There are 3 separate tests matching 3 levels of the CSCF:

- Level 1 (AA/AO) – 25 minutes
- Level 2 (EO) – 30 minutes
- Level 3 (HEO/SEO) – 30 minutes

These tests are used to assess whether you meet the minimum requirements for the grade/level you have applied for. They are not testing the skills needed for a specific job at that level.

The structure of the test

The test will give you 9 different workplace scenarios and you will be asked 3 to 5 questions per scenario. For some questions there is only 1 correct answer from the options given, however for other questions you will have to use a rating scale to indicate how appropriate or inappropriate an action is.

The test is timed, and takes 25 or 30 minutes depending on the grade/level of the test.

Practice questions are included at the beginning of the test.

No specialist knowledge or experience is required, and all the information you need to answer the questions is provided within the scenario.

Taking a test

The test is taken online and we will send you an invitation and will provide full instructions on how to complete the test.

You should complete the test on your own, as we may retest you under supervised conditions to validate your test results.

We recommend that you use a desktop computer and a modern browser to complete the test, as some questions may not display well on devices with smaller screens such as mobiles or smaller tablets.

You'll need to remain connected to the internet for the duration of the test.

You should ensure that you've enough time to complete the test before you start, as once the test begins responses cannot be saved and the test cannot be restarted.

Some workplaces block access to this type of test on their computers. If this is the case, you may need to try an alternative computer or location.

If you need a reasonable adjustment to be made (such as additional time), or experience accessibility issues with the test you should contact the recruitment team or the point of contact in the job advert.

Preparation

You should try to take the test as early as possible after you are invited to, so that you will have time to resolve any technical or access issues before the deadline. All queries or requests for help should be submitted at least two working days before the test deadline to ensure a response.

- Find a quiet place to take the test, with no distractions
- Try to take the test when you are feeling calm, although it's natural to feel a little nervous
- As the test is timed, have a clock or watch available so that you can check your progress – the test will end after 25 or 30 minutes (depending on the level of the test)
- Ensure you can complete the test in one sitting – you can't restart it
- Make sure you have read all the test instructions carefully
- You may wish to have some rough paper, pen, and a calculator available
- Answer every question that is presented to you

Before taking these tests, we suggest you spend some time getting used to taking psychometric tests. You can find free practice situational judgement tests on the internet. All tests vary, so don't expect the practice tests to look identical to the Civil Service Initial Sift Test.

You'll be given example questions before the test starts.

Test results

Your score is calculated from the responses you give.

Your score is compared to the scores of a representative group of civil servants to create a percentile score. If your percentile score is 44, it means you scored better on this test than 44% of the group.

After the test deadline, the recruiter will look at the test scores for all applicants to decide what the pass mark will be. They will consider the impact on protected groups, and the number of available invitations to the next stage.

Meeting the minimum required standard for the test is no guarantee that you will be invited to the next stage of the selection process.

If you pass a test at the minimum required standard, your score will be banked for six months. This means that if you apply for future vacancies at the same grade, you won't need to retake the test.

If you don't pass, you will be able to take the test again for any future vacancies you apply for.

Feedback from the test

Your score and automatically-generated feedback on your performance will be available from your application centre in Civil Service Jobs, although this won't include details of your answers to specific questions, which we can't provide

What to do if you encounter a problem during the test

For support, contact your recruitment team. Their email address is in your application centre if you're invited to take a test.

Alternatively, you can contact the recruitment team through our [form](#).

Questions about the advertised job should be directed to the contact on the job advert.