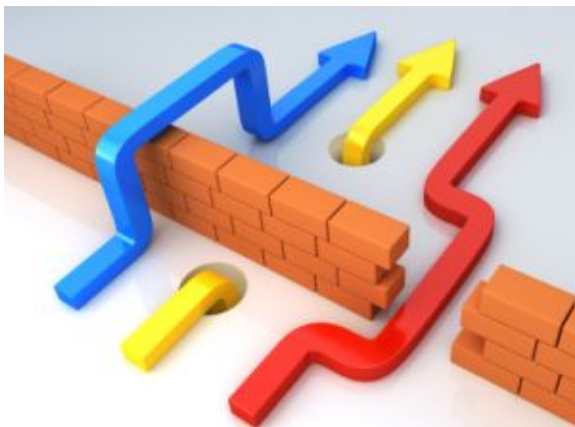


# Solution Space

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## Situational Judgement Test: The Most Underrated Selection Tool?





The situational judgement test (SJT) is a candidate selection tool that involves presenting the applicant with hypothetical (yet realistic) job scenarios and asking them to select the best response out of a set of alternatives. It is considered a powerful selection tool due to its cost-effectiveness, validity, and reliability<sup>1</sup>.

In contrast to cognitive ability tests and personality assessments, SJTs do not assess candidates on a specific trait or ability. Instead, they are used to gauge the general suitability of a candidate for the position. Because the scenarios presented are job-specific and highly variable, SJTs can be used to tap into almost any construct of interest, including problem solving, interpersonal skills, and technical knowledge of the job at hand<sup>2</sup>. In some ways, SJTs resemble a structured interview<sup>1</sup>. SJTs can be administered electronically or in the traditional paper-and-pencil format.

## Designing a Situational Judgement Test

Because of their job-specific nature, SJTs cannot usually be purchased “off-the-shelf<sup>2</sup>.” Fortunately, it is quite inexpensive to design them from

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<sup>1</sup> Gatewood, R. D., Feild, H. S., & Barrick, M. R. (2011). *Human resource selection (7<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Mason, OH: South-Western, Cengage Learning.

<sup>2</sup> Human Assets (2006, August). *Situational Judgement Tests: Are they just measures of cognitive ability?* <https://web.archive.org/web/20091125090047/http://humanassets.co.uk/RS22SituationalJudgementTests>

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scratch. Below are the main steps we recommend you follow when doing so:

### **Step 1: Consult with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)**

If you are designing an STJ for an outside company, the first step is to consult with subject matter experts—the incumbents and/or supervisors at the job—and ask them to describe “critical incidents.” These are defined as situations or events that are particularly impactful (for the better or worse), and an effective response to which is especially pivotal. These scenarios should then be grouped according to similarity of content, and only the most representative ones should be selected.

### **Step 2: “Refine” Critical Incidents**

It is important to make sure that the situations vary in their difficulty and complexity. You should also exclude scenarios that are redundant or that may result in legal challenges (such as describing activities that cannot be performed by disabled applicants). In addition, the scenarios should be of similar length and cover all major aspects of the job. The situational descriptions can then be rephrased to make them simpler and easy to understand<sup>1</sup>.

### **Step 3: Perform Job Analysis**

The next step would be to perform a job analysis and rank the importance/time spent on different tasks at the job position. This ranking should then be compared to the written situations to confirm that they address the most important and/or time-consuming aspects of the job<sup>1</sup>.

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## Step 4: Arrange Items into Survey Format

The items should be arranged into a survey format. The survey should then be administered to the SMEs to have them brainstorm possible responses to the situations listed. Their responses need to be edited to make sure there are no duplicates, and none are too easy to solve using logic or social desirability cues. It is also important to ensure that the response items are clear by removing or editing any that are too long, complex, or inappropriate for the situation described<sup>1</sup>.

## Step 5: Rate Response Items

Next, the SMEs are asked to rate the appropriateness and effectiveness of each response item. To be included in the final survey, the items need to have a high level of agreement in terms of their SME appropriateness ratings and be sufficiently different from one another in terms of their average ratings<sup>1</sup>.

## Step 6: Validate Survey

If you have the means, it would be ideal to perform an empirical validation study. Strong validation results would be indispensable should legal challenges arise, such as those relating to adverse impact<sup>3</sup>. For general guidelines on the validation process, feel free to check out our blog post titled “Job Assessment Validation: Basic Overview.”

Below we list some of the benefits as well as potential drawbacks of using SJTs.

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<sup>3</sup> Adverse impact is said to occur when a selection tool has a disproportionately negative impact on a protected class (such as an ethnic/racial minority group or women)

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## Benefits of SJTs

- 1) High degree of validity—the validity coefficient is estimated at around 0.34, which is comparable to assessment centers, interviews, and biographical data measures
- 2) Cost-effective
- 3) Less adverse impact than cognitive assessments
- 4) Better accepted by test-takers because their relevance to job position is more apparent compared to cognitive assessments and personality tests

## Potential Drawbacks

- 1) Cannot be purchased “off-the-shelf”— must be designed from scratch
- 2) Possibility of faking, especially if some responses are more obviously socially desirable (this can be greatly reduced by asking them to elaborate on their responses)

## Final Thoughts

Given their many advantages and only a few drawbacks, SJTs may very well be one of the most underrated selection tools. If you are ever in need of professional advice or assistance with designing your SJT, feel free to reach out to us! Our team of consultants will be more than happy to assist. We can be reached by email at [performancesolutions@ucf.edu](mailto:performancesolutions@ucf.edu).



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## References

1. Gatewood, R. D., Feild, H. S., & Barrick, M. R. (2011). *Human resource selection (7<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Mason, OH: South-Western, Cengage Learning.
2. Human Assets (2006, August). *Situational Judgement Tests: Are they just measures of cognitive ability?* Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20091125090047/http://humanassets.co.uk/RS22SituationalJudgementTests>