Inside the Measures

Read how three approaches to personality assessment differ.

SS24.P.14a "Describe different measures of personality, including the Neuroticism-Extroversion-Openness Personality Inventory (NEO-PI), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), and projective tests."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each measure's name, circle how a person responds to it, and number the different kinds of information the measures may reveal. Use your marks to compare the approaches.

What Can a Personality Measure Tell Us?

1. At a community clinic, Maya wants to understand why group projects drain her, even when she enjoys the work. A psychologist could use the NEO Personality Inventory, often called the NEO-PI, to describe relatively stable personality traits. Its questionnaire asks people to rate statements about their usual thoughts and behavior. Scores describe five broad traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. For example, an extraversion score concerns a pattern of social energy, not whether Maya liked one meeting. The NEO-PI describes differences in personality; it does not diagnose a mental disorder.

2. If Maya also reports weeks of intense worry, a clinician may consider the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, or MMPI. This standardized questionnaire asks for true-or-false answers about experiences and feelings. Unlike the NEO-PI, it focuses on patterns relevant to psychological symptoms and clinical assessment. The MMPI also includes validity scales that flag unusual or inconsistent answer patterns, which may affect how results are interpreted. These scales cannot reveal someone's motives with certainty. A clinician interprets the results alongside an interview and other information; a high score on one scale does not, by itself, establish a diagnosis.

3. Another option is a projective test. Instead of choosing a fixed response, Maya might describe what she sees in an ambiguous inkblot or make up a story about a picture. A clinician examines her responses for possible themes, such as conflict or fear. Unlike the NEO-PI and MMPI, these tasks leave more room for the person's own interpretation and for differences among scorers. Scoring methods and research support vary across projective tests, so responses should not be treated as clear proof of a trait or disorder. A clinician considers them, if used, with other evidence.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the information described by the NEO-PI differ from the information the MMPI helps a clinician assess?

2. Compare how a person responds to the NEO-PI or MMPI with how a person responds to a projective test.

3. What do the MMPI's validity scales help a clinician notice, and what makes projective test responses harder to interpret consistently?

4. If Maya reports intense worry, why might a clinician consider the MMPI rather than rely on the NEO-PI alone? What limit still applies to an MMPI score?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A psychologist meets two adults: one wants to understand everyday teamwork habits, and the other wants an assessment of troubling emotional symptoms. Write four sentences recommending a measure for each adult, explaining what each may reveal, and explaining why a projective test should not be used alone.

Inside the Measures

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each measure's name, circle how a person responds to it, and number the different kinds of information the measures may reveal. Use your marks to compare the approaches. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the information described by the NEO-PI differ from the information the MMPI helps a clinician assess?	**The NEO-PI describes broad, relatively stable personality traits. The MMPI assesses patterns relevant to psychological symptoms and clinical concerns.**
2	Compare how a person responds to the NEO-PI or MMPI with how a person responds to a projective test.	**The NEO-PI asks people to rate statements, and the MMPI asks for true-or-false answers. A projective test asks for an open-ended response to an ambiguous image.**
3	What do the MMPI's validity scales help a clinician notice, and what makes projective test responses harder to interpret consistently?	**Validity scales flag unusual or inconsistent answer patterns. Projective responses allow more interpretation by both the person taking the test and the scorer.**
4	If Maya reports intense worry, why might a clinician consider the MMPI rather than rely on the NEO-PI alone? What limit still applies to an MMPI score?	**The MMPI assesses patterns relevant to psychological symptoms, while the NEO-PI describes broad traits. One MMPI scale score cannot establish a diagnosis by itself.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would recommend the NEO-PI for the adult exploring teamwork habits because it describes broad traits such as agreeableness and conscientiousness. I would recommend the MMPI for the adult seeking an assessment of emotional symptoms because it examines patterns relevant to clinical concerns. These measures answer different questions, and neither result should be treated as a complete picture of a person. A projective test should not be used alone because its responses are open to interpretation and its research support varies by test.

Accept accurate distinctions between broad traits, clinically relevant patterns, and open-ended projective responses. For the final task, accept either measure for an adult only if the student gives a passage-supported reason that fits that adult's goal.