



Cambridge Assessment  
Admissions Testing



# TSA

THINKING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Discover people who will thrive  
on your degree courses

Giving you the tools to make informed decisions

## We are a trusted partner to universities around the world

---

Here's a selection of institutions we work with:



“ The students selected based on their TSA scores and interviews have performed very well in the program. We are very happy with the ease of the TSA administration process and the helpfulness of our company contacts. ”

—  
Anna Nyberg | BSc Business & Economics Program  
Director, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden





# Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)

---

TSA is a test of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which helps you identify an applicant's potential for academically demanding study. It is used for entry to a wide range of courses, including Economics, Engineering, Politics and Psychology.

The test was developed in collaboration with world-leading universities and has been enhancing selection processes since 2001. There is extensive ongoing research to ensure the validity and reliability of the test for university admissions.

## Why test thinking skills?

Critical thinking and problem-solving are widely identified as among the most important skills for study and employment – often valued above subject or technical knowledge<sup>1</sup>. School qualifications, however, do not typically focus on these skills.

Students with good thinking skills show strengths in:

- understanding and evaluating arguments
- drawing evidence-based conclusions
- identifying flaws in reasoning
- thinking creatively and systematically to solve problems.

Today's students are preparing for a life in the global knowledge economy, which is driven by information and technology. People entering this type of workplace need flexible thinking skills to be successful as a lifelong learner, constantly adapting to new ways of working and new roles.

## Universities use TSA for:

### Predicting success

---

TSA helps you identify applicants who will thrive on your course. Validity studies show a positive relationship between test scores and on-course performance.

### Discovering students with the right skills

---

The test focuses on academic thinking skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking, which are crucial for university study but are not the focus of school qualifications.

### Widening participation

---

TSA is designed to be accessible to all applicants. It is a test of skills, not prior knowledge. All applicants have access to comprehensive free test preparation materials.

### International reach

---

TSA can be taken either through our global network of test centres or online as a secure remote-proctored test. This makes it accessible to all your applicants, wherever they are in the world.

<sup>1</sup> Whiting, K (2020) *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them*, World Economic Forum, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them)

## Test format

---

TSA is a 90-minute test with 50 multiple-choice questions. It is available in pen-and-paper or computer-based format.

### What it tests:

---

#### Problem-solving

Many of the problems encountered in academic and professional work are novel, and the task is to find or create a solution.

TSA includes three kinds of problem-solving question:

- selecting the relevant information
- finding procedures
- identifying similarity.

The stimulus provided before each question will be either a diagram, a table of information or a graph.

#### Critical thinking

Whatever the subject of study, it is necessary to understand arguments and assess whether arguments establish their claims.

TSA includes seven kinds of critical thinking question:

- summarising the main conclusion
- drawing a conclusion
- identifying an assumption
- assessing the impact of additional evidence
- detecting reasoning errors
- matching arguments
- applying principles.

## Scoring and results

---

There is one mark per multiple-choice question. Raw marks are converted to scores on a calibrated scale from 0 to 100.

If the test is taken in computer-based format the results are available immediately, and in paper-based format it typically takes 1–4 weeks. Results are provided directly to universities in electronic format. Applicants can also see their results using our online system.

TSA results are typically used alongside other information available to admissions tutors to shortlist applicants for interview and make objective selection decisions.

## Test delivery and costs

---

#### Affordable

Test fees are either paid by the applicant, or charged to the institution direct. We ensure test fees are affordable and do not present a barrier to entering university.

#### Available worldwide

Applicants can take TSA at authorised test centres around the world or from home as a secure remote-proctored test. The test can also be administered at your institution.

#### Free preparation materials

We provide everything applicants need to prepare for their test, including past papers and worked answers. There is no need for applicants to pay for a preparation course or additional materials.

#### A choice of test dates

Test dates are agreed with institutions to fit with your existing admissions procedures.

## Sample questions

---

### Critical thinking

This critical thinking question requires test-takers to identify which of the multiple-choice options best expresses the main conclusion of the argument.

Vegetarian food can be healthier than a traditional diet. Research has shown that vegetarians are less likely to suffer from heart disease and obesity than meat eaters. Concern has been expressed that vegetarians do not get enough protein in their diet but it has been demonstrated that, by selecting foods carefully, vegetarians are able to amply meet their needs in this respect.

**Which of the following best expresses the main conclusion of the above argument?**

- A A vegetarian diet can be better for health than a traditional diet.
- B Adequate protein is available from a vegetarian diet.
- C A traditional diet is very high in protein.
- D A balanced diet is more important for health than any particular food.
- E Vegetarians are unlikely to suffer from heart disease and obesity.

### Problem-solving

This problem-solving question requires students to use the information given to generate a solution. Only a very basic level of arithmetic is required; the challenge is to identify the relevant information, and to devise and apply a method to solve the problem.

Of the 100 screws in my work box:  
60 are cross-headed and 40 are slot-headed  
70 are 3mm diameter, 20 are 4mm diameter and 10 are 5mm diameter  
80 are 50 mm long, 5 are 36mm long and 15 are 20mm long.

**What is the smallest number of cross-headed, 3 mm diameter, 50mm long screws that there could be in the box?**

- A 0
- B 10
- C 30
- D 31
- E 60

## Research

---

We conduct extensive research to ensure the validity and fairness of our admissions tests. Our research agenda and our approach to admissions testing are guided by the following key principles.

### Positive impact for test-takers

TSA is designed to have a positive impact for test-takers. Any time spent preparing for our tests helps test-takers develop skills directly beneficial for their future academic studies.

### Selection based on evidence of potential

Admissions tests provide a snapshot of a student's ability at the time of their application to university study. Our research shows that admissions test performance also predicts later performance on the university course.

### Application of existing knowledge and skills

Many of our tests focus on knowledge and skills that should already be familiar to applicants. We aim to minimise the amount of new learning or study needed, to ensure that preparation is accessible to all test-takers.

### Collaborative working

The institutions that use our tests have input into our research programme and we hold regular meetings with them. We also fund research in partnership with institutions to explore the impact of our tests in their own admissions contexts.

### Quality assurance and fairness

We monitor the performance of all our test items to ensure they are of the highest quality. Advanced statistical analyses are used to monitor the performance of different test-taker groups (e.g. gender, school background) to guard against any potential bias.

### A broad view of admissions

An admissions test is one part of the admissions process and our research covers wider approaches to selection. We look at the broader context such as widening access initiatives, applicants' perceptions of admissions processes, and the relationship between admissions test scores and other parts of the admissions process.

## Key TSA research points



TSA predicts future performance on a range of undergraduate courses.



TSA helps to shortlist candidates who are more likely to perform well at interview in later selection phases.



Preparation for TSA aims to help candidates develop critical thinking skills that will benefit their studies.

## Case study

---

University College London (UCL) uses TSA as part of its selection processes for a wide range of different courses. We spoke to Tessa Robinson, Administrative Manager, European Social and Political Studies, University College London.



### **Why did you start using an admissions test?**

As most of our applicants apply with A Level grades of A\*AA or higher, or equivalent qualification, having an admissions test as part of our application procedure seemed a fairer way of selecting applicants.

### **Why did you choose to work with Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing?**

TSA contains a Critical Thinking component – which is essential for university study, and not something students may necessarily focus on at school. The test helps us to identify those who will thrive at UCL as it allows students to demonstrate their potential to develop this skill.

### **How does the test help you select the right applicants?**

We pay particular attention to the overall score and the Critical Thinking component score. These scores are used in conjunction with our assessment of the application as a whole.

### **What impact has the test had on selection processes?**

The test helps to standardise our selection processes, thereby making the application procedure fairer for all applicants.

“ We have a large number of applicants coming from different educational systems, doing a variety of different subjects. TSA places everybody on the same footing, by giving a common test to all the people who apply. ”

---

Dr Dave Leal | *Philosophy Admissions Co-ordinator, University of Oxford, UK*

We are Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing, part of the University of Cambridge. Our tests provide a fair measure of skills and aptitude to help you make informed decisions.

We believe everyone should have a fair opportunity to prove they have what it takes, and you should have the right tools and information to find the people who will thrive.



## Contact us

Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing  
The Triangle Building  
Shaftesbury Road  
Cambridge  
CB2 8EA

[admissionstesting@cambridgeassessment.org.uk](mailto:admissionstesting@cambridgeassessment.org.uk)

 [admissionstesting.org](https://admissionstesting.org)

 [admissions-testing](https://www.linkedin.com/company/admissions-testing)

 [/admissionstesting](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLES)

 [@admissionstests](https://twitter.com/admissionstests)



This document was initially designed for print and as such does not reach accessibility standard WCAG 2.1 in a number of ways including missing text alternatives and missing document structure.

If you need this document in a different format **contact us** telling us your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.

All details are correct at the time of going to print in November 2020.

Copyright © UCLES 2020 | CER/2465/V2/NOV20



\* 7500690875 \*