

# ABILITY



# EXPLORER<sup>TM</sup>

## USER'S GUIDE

Third Edition

The information in this guide will help you understand the purpose of the *Ability Explorer* and how to use the results in career development. The purpose of the *Ability Explorer* is to help individuals identify their highest abilities and use those results, along with other information, to identify promising career paths.

### **New Features to the Third Edition**

The Third Edition of the *Ability Explorer* includes some major improvements and enhancements. The number of items has been reduced without sacrificing the quality and accuracy of the results. The scoring of the instrument has been simplified as well. A new Abilities to Careers Finder provides a linkage between the abilities measured by the *Abilities Explorer* and nearly 400 bright outlook occupations. Information on the education levels typical for the occupations has also been included, and STEM occupations have been highlighted.

The format and content of the *Ability Explorer* has been updated to make it more useful to a wider range of individuals from middle school through adults in transition. The Third Edition provides an added depth of information to assist individuals in exploring or managing their careers.

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## About the *Ability Explorer*

What do you do well? When you answer that question, you're talking about abilities. Are you good in math, English, or science? Are you a good athlete? Do you listen well? Are you well organized? Are you talented with your hands? Can you visualize things better than most people? These are some of the many kinds of abilities people have. Whether we are born with certain abilities or simply develop them over time through practice and experiences, it is true that every person has them. And for each of us, some abilities are stronger than others.

### The Importance of Knowing One's Abilities

If you ask students or clients to tell you about their abilities, they might be able to answer you to some extent. However, they probably do not recognize all of the abilities they have. That's why it is a good idea to use an objective instrument to help determine abilities in a systematic way. The *Ability Explorer* can help a person plan for the future by knowing his or her strongest abilities and using that information to explore education and training programs leading to a career and job.

Numerous studies have confirmed that self-reported data provides a valuable and accurate depiction of one's best abilities and serves as an effective predictor of both academic and job performance. For more information regarding the importance of self-assessment of abilities, as well as the validity and reliability of the *Ability Explorer*, see the *Ability Explorer Professional Manual*, available for download at [www.jist.com](http://www.jist.com).

### Using Abilities in Career Development

Career development is the process of managing your life, learning, and work. The career development process starts with you getting to know yourself and then matching your interests, aspirations, and skills with occupations. Then we prepare for those occupations through education and training in order to seek work that is fulfilling and rewarding. People repeat this cycle several times throughout their lives as they manage their careers.

**Career Development Model**



All careers and jobs require certain abilities in order to perform well. Employers search for people with the abilities that matter to them. For example, more and more jobs are found in customer service. These jobs require interpersonal, persuasive, and even leadership abilities. There are also a growing number of jobs in information technology. These jobs require computer skills, as well as language, organizational, and technical/mechanical abilities.

People are usually happiest when they have the chance to do the things they do well. Thinking about what one does well leads to choices that one makes in education and training programs, careers and jobs.

## **General Directions for Administering the *Ability Explorer***

You do not need special training to administer the *Ability Explorer*. We recommend, however, that you read these directions and become familiar with the *Ability Explorer* survey booklet before beginning to administer the instrument. The *Ability Explorer* takes approximately 35–45 minutes for administration, scoring, and interpretation.

Before administering the *Ability Explorer*, it is helpful to provide participants with an introduction that discusses the importance of exploring their abilities and how self-awareness of abilities will help them with educational and career planning. You also can briefly discuss with participants the descriptions of the 12 ability areas on page 7 of the *Ability Explorer* survey booklet. See page 8 for administering the *Ability Explorer* under special circumstances.

### **Who Should Take the *Ability Explorer*?**

The *Ability Explorer* is designed to be used with anyone thinking about, researching, or planning a career or job. This can include middle school, high school, and postsecondary school students; persons in career transition; unemployed people looking to enter a new career; individuals who have been released from prison and are looking to enter the workforce; new entrants into the workforce; military members who are leaving or retiring from active duty; retirees who are looking for new work in a different field, and many others who are thinking about a career change.

Most often personal characteristics such as interests, values, and skills are used in the self-discovery phase of career development. Many *interests* and *values* inventories are available, but it is difficult to find solid, research based *abilities* inventories that are tied to occupations and careers. The *Ability Explorer* fills that gap, providing an instrument that easily ties user's strongest abilities to the kinds of careers that they will most likely enjoy and be successful at.

The results are useful for individuals

- Still in school, so they can see the connection between what they are learning in school and potential careers.
- Transitioning to another career, to better know what abilities they can transfer to a new career.
- Currently in the job search, as it can help them identify their top abilities and use that information in crafting resumes and presenting their strengths in job interviews.

## Abilities Measured by the *Ability Explorer*

The *Ability Explorer* lets individuals rate themselves in 12 ability areas covering 16 total abilities representing the full spectrum of potential abilities. People are strong in different abilities. Some people have many abilities; some have a few. The *Ability Explorer* gives persons a chance to find out which abilities are their best.

The 12 ability areas in the *Ability Explorer* are

- Artistic
- Clerical
- Interpersonal
- Language
- Leadership/Persuasive
- Manual/Technical
- Musical/Dramatic
- Numerical/Mathematical
- Organizational
- Scientific
- Social
- Spatial

## Completing the *Ability Explorer*

Persons who take the *Ability Explorer* are asked to decide how strong their abilities are on 120 different tasks. They rate their abilities from a high of 6 to a low of 1. They enter that number in the box provided.

**6 = very good 5 = good 4 = little above average 3 = little below average 2 = poor 1 = very poor**

1. Recording information accurately				6		
2. Lifting, carrying, moving, or pulling materials or products						4
3. Writing so that readers clearly understand your thoughts				6		
4. Producing posters, scenery, or illustrations using paint, pen, charcoal, or colored markers	4					
5. Deciding who is responsible for doing what activities or tasks					6	
6. Talking easily with people you do not know				2		

## Scoring the *Ability Explorer*

After assigning a rating to each of the items, the individual or an assigned person adds the numbers in each of the columns as shown below.

<b>Page 2 Subtotals</b> (Add up the numbers in each column)	25	20	10	6	6	7
	A	B	C	D	E	F

Later, total scores are determined for each of the abilities as shown below.

<b>Page 3 Subtotals</b> (Add up the numbers in each column)	25	25	20	12	6	8
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Page 2 Subtotals</b> (Copied from page 2)	25	20	10	6	6	7
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Total Scores</b> (Add Page 2 and Page 3 Subtotals)	50	45	30	18	12	15
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>

### Identifying the Strongest Abilities

After totaling the scores on the *Ability Explorer*, individuals will place their results in the chart on page 6 of the booklet, a portion of which is shown below. This helps users compare their results with those of other people. After recording all 12 ability scores, the user would then identify his or her top three abilities. These are the abilities that should be used with the Abilities to Career Finder. If there is a tie, the person should pick the ability that they feel is strongest and use this in the Abilities to Careers Finder.

	A Artistic	B Clerical	C Interpersonal
<b>Your Total</b>	50	45	30
<b>High</b>	44-60	49-60	51-60
<b>Medium</b>	34-43	42-48	43-50
<b>Low</b>	0-33	0-41	0-42

In the example above, the Artistic ability is considered to be high, while the clerical ability results are in the medium range and the interpersonal ability is in the low range. For this person, Artistic would be one of the strongest abilities and should be used in the Abilities to Careers Finder.

### Possible Outcomes

Based on the instrument's use with thousands of individuals, most people obtain 2 or 3 top abilities. A few people may not fit this outcome. They may have many high scores or all low scores.

If a person has **many or all high scores**, consider if this person has over-rated himself or herself. You do not want to challenge this person's self-confidence. One way of approaching this situation is to suggest that the individual consider course grades and experience to identify the strongest abilities.

If a person has **no high scores**, consider the following: Did the individual respond to the items carelessly? Does this person have a negative attitude? Or does this person truly believe he or she is poor in many respects and thus identifies himself or herself as being at risk for future education and career problems? Again, work with the individuals to identify two or three strongest abilities by discussing course grades, hobbies, work experiences, comments by others, etc. Refer to the definitions of the 12 abilities on page 7 of the instrument as a starting point.

### Using *Ability Explorer* Results: The Abilities to Careers Finder

The *Ability Explorer* gives specific information on a person’s highest-rated abilities. Users identify their highest abilities to locate occupations that use those abilities. This information is then used to link up with careers where those abilities are most important in a new feature called the Abilities to Careers Finder. The Abilities to Careers Finder contains information on almost 400 “bright outlook” occupations. The bright outlook occupations are those occupations that are the fastest growing, have the most jobs, or are new and emerging occupations thought to be important to the U.S. economy. The occupations and the related information on the Abilities to Careers Finder have been derived from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Center for O\*NET Development—the definitive resource for occupational information.

A person takes his or her highest two abilities and finds the occupations that match his or her first and second abilities. For example in the chart below, a person who has the highest ability in Numerical/Mathematical and the second highest in Language would place a checkmark in the two occupations as shown below. To expand the list of occupations, a third high ability can also be used.

Numerical/Mathematical			
Secondary Ability	Occupation	Ed	✓
Clerical	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	2,3	
Language	<b>Accountants and Auditors</b>	3	✓
Language	Financial Analysts	3	✓
Leadership/Persuasive	Investment Underwriters	3	
Manual/Technical	Biofuels Processing Technicians	1	
Scientific	<b>Actuaries</b>	4	
Scientific	<b>Biostatisticians</b>	5, 6	
Scientific	<b>Cost Estimators</b>	3	
Scientific	<b>Geodetic Surveyors</b>	4	
Scientific	<b>Logistics Analysts, Engineers, and Managers</b>	3	
Scientific	<b>Mathematicians</b>	5,6	
Scientific	<b>Operations Research Analysts</b>	5	

The occupational information in the Abilities to Careers Finder includes the typical education levels of persons working in that occupation. This will give students, clients, and customers an idea of the training and education that might be needed, and that they might need to obtain before pursuing a job in that career field. The numbers mean the following:

1 = High school	4 = Bachelor’s degree or higher
2 = Associate degree, certification, or some college	5 = Master’s degree or equivalent
3 = Bachelor’s degree	6 = PhD or equivalent

Additionally, those occupations that are considered to be **STEM** occupations—those related to science, technology, engineering or mathematics—have been highlighted in **bold**. STEM occupations are important to U.S. productivity and future economic success. They are also occupations with generally solid wages and salaries. Finally, for a select number of occupations, a *third* ability that has shown to be crucial to success in that job is listed in parentheses.

People completing the *Ability Explorer* are urged to use the information provided to select occupations that fit their abilities, consider the educational requirements for that occupation, and then research occupations in much more depth before making any decision about their future careers.

## Researching Occupations

No person should decide on a career field based solely on the results of the *Ability Explorer* and the Abilities to Careers Finder, or any assessment for that matter. Informed career decision making is the key. As a result, the *Ability Explorer* results should be a first step in career exploration. Once students, clients, or customers use this assessment tool and develop a short list of occupations to explore, they should engage in further research of those occupations.

You should direct your students, clients, and customers to use additional resources such as O\*NET Online ([www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)), and the Occupational Outlook Handbook ([www.bls.gov/oco/](http://www.bls.gov/oco/)), as well as many other resources available in schools, libraries, and workforce centers. When researching occupations, specific areas that should be reviewed include the following:

- **Tasks:** The kinds of activities performed on the job.
- **Skills:** Whether or not a person has or can develop the skills required on the job.
- **Wages and Employment Trends:** Whether or not the wages and employment trends match the hopes and expectations of the individual.
- **Tools and Technology:** The specialized tools and technology used in that occupation
- **Related Jobs:** Other occupations that may be related to the initial one selected.

## Next Steps

After completing all the steps in the Abilities to Careers Finder, try to have individuals specify their next steps in the career exploration process. It may be to conduct an informational interview, locate other resources about the career field, job-shadow a person working in that occupation, develop an educational plan, sign up for training in the skills needed for the career, develop a resume, or many other activities that can move their careers forward. Encourage them to take further action based on what they have learned about their abilities and how those abilities relate to careers and career exploration and transition.

## Additional Tips for Administering the *Ability Explorer*

**Emphasize that the *Ability Explorer* is not a test.** The *Ability Explorer* is unlike traditional aptitude batteries. It is a self-measure of abilities with no right or wrong answers. Therefore, it is impossible for individuals to fail the *Ability Explorer*.

**Take the *Ability Explorer* in two sessions.** In some situations, participants may not have enough time to complete all the *Ability Explorer* steps in a single session. We recommend that if you need more time, administer Steps 1 and 2 in one session. Complete Steps 3–5 on another day, but it is best that they be done soon after participants have completed the scoring.

**Administering to special populations.** The *Ability Explorer* is appropriate for use with all individuals who are involved in career exploration and educational or career planning. Most individuals will not require any assistance in completing the *Ability Explorer*. The *Ability Explorer* is written at about the eighth grade level. As a result, some individuals with special needs, such as those who are limited in understanding the vocabulary, may benefit from an oral administration of the *Ability Explorer*. It is legitimate to help individuals understand any of the words they are not familiar with or to clarify instructions. For certain individuals it may be beneficial to read the directions for each section.

## About the Authors

**Joan C. Harrington** holds a B.A. in English and Business from Northeastern University in Boston and has taught in the elementary grades in Boston. She has lived and worked in Australia, Jamaica, the United Kingdom, Israel, and the Republic of South Africa, where she was involved in test construction, including identifying, assessing, and validating abilities. She has published in the *Journal of Career Assessment* and the *Career Development Quarterly* and has been a presenter at national and international conferences.

**Thomas F. Harrington** holds a Ph.D. in Counseling from Purdue University and has been a long-time teacher of vocational psychology and career counseling courses in the Department of Counseling and Applied Educational Psychology at Northeastern University. In 2004, he received the National Career Development Association's highest honor, The Eminent Career Award. In 2005, he was recognized with the ACA Fellow Award by the American Counseling Association for making a significant contribution to the counseling profession. He is the co-author of the award-winning *Harrington-O'Shea Career Decision-Making System*, co-author of the *College Majors Handbook with Real Career Paths and Payoffs* (JIST Publishing), and editor of the *Handbook of Career Planning for Students with Special Needs*. He has served as President of the Association for Assessment in Counseling, a division of the American Counseling Association.

**Janet E. Wall** holds an Ed.D. in Education. She was the lead architect of the award winning ASVAB Career Exploration Program for the U.S. Department of Defense and she directed the development and revision of ACT's Discover. She has served as President of the Association for Assessment in Counseling. She has published eight books including one on assessment and one on the use of technology as well as many journal and magazine articles. As Founder of CEUonestop.com, an NBCC approved continuing education provider, she offers online, self-paced courses in career development. As member and chair of the joint Committee on Testing Practices, she was instrumental in the development of the Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education and the Rights and Responsibilities of Test Takers. She is the recipient of many awards the most recent including the National Career Development Association's Merit Award, the Maryland Career Development Association's Technology Award, and the American Counseling Association's Carl Perkins Government Relations Award.