

Tool 2: Designing a Sector Knowledge Test

A Sector Knowledge test provides evidence about the candidate's knowledge of sector-specific matters that are critical to the job function. It identifies gaps in a candidate's knowledge that will need to be remedied. Basic engineering principles, computer programming, statistical theory and applications, basics of molecular and cellular biology, legislation, etc., are examples of sector knowledge. Professional certification programs and licensing exams are formal sector knowledge assessments. If you are an employer facing a large number of applicants, you can create your own Sector Knowledge test to assess the candidate's knowledge relevant to your sector, company and the job in question. Be aware that the test will only assess current knowledge; it cannot assess performance, which also depends on behaviours, skills, and abilities.

The assessment of sector knowledge is sometimes incorporated into the interview (Tool 7). You can also combine it with a Practical Test (Tool 6), in which a competent employer representative observes the work and asks questions about the candidate's previous industry-specific work experience. The candidate's responses will demonstrate their sector knowledge and the ability to use trade terminology. But if job-related knowledge and skills are difficult to assess during an interview, then design a specific Sector Knowledge Test.

If you combine the Sector Knowledge test with a Practical Test or the Interview, be sure to provide opportunities for the candidate to share how they applied their knowledge in different areas to the work they have done at previous positions. Ask follow-up questions to clarify and probe more deeply into the candidate's responses.

Guidelines for Designing and Developing a Sector Knowledge Assessment for Internationally-Trained Professionals

We recommend that you:

- 1) Design test items that focus on the technical or professional knowledge required to effectively perform the duties of the job. Provide candidates with a list of critical areas of competence and job duties prior to conducting their assessment.
- 2) Design short-answer type of assessment. It is important to perform a thorough job analysis, identify critical areas of competence and design test items that map to the core competency areas.
- 3) Focus on the following critical knowledge areas:
 - Workplace health and safety
 - Industry terminology, standards and norms, structure, institutions
 - Specific tools, hardware and software packages

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- Compliance with laws and regulations (for example, privacy, security, environmental compliance, etc.)

Remember that a newcomer to Canada is unlikely to know some of these items, but will be eager and able to learn them quickly if given the opportunity.

- 4) Design and develop assessment items that focus on specialized or technical knowledge that can be acquired over an extended period of time. Avoid assessing areas where knowledge may be obtained over a short training period.
- 5) Ensure that test items are current with the requirements of the job. For example, health and safety laws and regulations change frequently, so keep the assessment updated as required.
- 6) Design assessment tools, including hardware and software packages, at a generic level with no reference to a specific vendor or version. This allows maximum flexibility in adapting the skill standards of foreign-skilled workers to employer standards and specifications for the job.

Note: All guidelines for the design and development of an English Writing Test (Tool 3) also apply to the design and development of a Sector Knowledge Test.

The evaluation guidelines for a Sector Knowledge Test require observable criteria at three levels:

SATISFACTORY - “Demonstrates acceptable proficiency”

This level describes a candidate that demonstrates an acceptable level of knowledge which is likely to enable successful performance of the specific job functions.

NEEDS TRAINING - “Does not yet demonstrate fully acceptable proficiency but has potential”

This level describes a candidate that does not yet meet the minimum requirements but appears likely to improve if given on-the-job training, guidance or coaching by a colleague or supervisor. It describes a level that may impede a candidate’s performance with specific job functions in some areas if opportunities for improvement are not provided during the induction period.

UNLIKELY TO ADAPT - “Does not demonstrate acceptable adaptability in at least one significant aspect”

This level describes a candidate that does not meet the minimum requirements. It describes a level that may impede specific job functions.