

SETTING THE STAGE FOR USING FORMAL CAREER ASSESSMENTS

With the mounting pressures on staff time, it is essential that we increase our efficiency. One means of doing this is the appropriate use of technology. The key phrase here is **appropriate use**. In the career development field, one growing problem area is in the use of assessment tools, particularly computerized career assessment instruments.

CIS delivers SKILLS, the Career Cluster Inventory, the Work Importance Locator, the Interest Profiler, Reality Check, and the Entrepreneurial Career Assessment on computer. Optionally, sites can order the IDEAS Interest Inventory and the Dependable Strengths informal assessment in many states. Many other career assessments are available online to career practitioners, and a growing number are available on computer and the Internet. Computer technology is really a means to streamline scoring and reporting. **It does not and cannot replace the personal interaction essential in the practice of effective career counseling.**

If your school or program is using formal career assessment instruments, you are choosing to spend student or client and teacher or counselor time on their administration. To make this time commitment worthwhile, it is important to spend some time preparing your students and clients for the use of career assessment in general and the use of each instrument in particular.

PREPARATION

People who plan to use a career assessment instrument need to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. Here are some basic ideas to share:

- Career assessment instruments help you understand only one aspect of yourself; they help you paint your career self-portrait by adding one color or one component of the portrait. You need to consider all aspects of yourself, adding all of the colors to complete a portrait.
- You will use assessment results, **along with other information and ideas**, to make your career plans.
- Like all portraits, your career portrait will change over time. When it is time to administer a particular instrument, explain the instrument you are using.
- What is its purpose?
- What will the student or client do?
- In general, what will the results mean?

For example, if you were using the Career Assessment Inventory (CAI) you might say: *“The CAI is designed to assess your career interests. It will help you explore career options and plan for your future. A high score for an occupational area suggests that your interests are similar to those of people working in the occupation. A low score suggests a lack of similar interests. Using the results of this instrument may help you discover some new ideas about areas of career interest to you or may help you confirm an interest you already have.”*

The manuals that come with specific career assessment instruments will help you explain the purpose of each instrument to your students. The resources listed at the end of this *Teacher’s Note* are also excellent references for assessment.

INTERPRETATION

After students or clients receive the results of an assessment, they need an opportunity to discuss what these results mean to them. They also need a strategy for applying these results to their career planning. If they don't agree with a result, or can't understand it, they will need assistance in learning from that experience. A method for recording their results and their understanding of these results is a useful tool, making the assessment process meaningful over time. (See *My Career Self-Portrait* learning activity or *Your Career Search* workbook for examples.)

Career assessment should be a beginning point, not an ending point, for learning about oneself. If encouraged to probe questions such as: *Why did my results using this instrument indicate that I was more social than artistic in my personality? How did the interests I indicated lead to a high score in the management occupational group?*, students and clients can consider possibilities that may have seemed unrealistic; and they will gain insights about themselves. The results of interest assessment, in particular, can point to areas in which students have little interest only because they have little experience.

CONNECTION

The final and most essential step in using an assessment instrument is to connect its results to information about the occupations it suggests. Students and clients will need to conduct further research into the occupations they find interesting or appealing. They can do this by using *CIS Occupations* or a variety of other resources. In some cases, depending on the assessment instrument used, students and clients can use *CIS Assessment Link* to connect their results directly to CIS occupations.

RESOURCES

Edwin A. Whitfield, Rich Feller, and Chris Wood. *A Counselor's Guide to Career Assessment Instruments*, Fifth Edition. National Career Development Association, Alexandria, VA, 2009.

Zunker, Vernon G. *Using Assessment Results for Career Development*, Fifth Edition. Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, Pacific Grove, CA. 2006.