Informal Assessment:
Observation
Rating Scales
Classification Methods
Environmental Assessment
Records and Personal Documents
Performance-Based Assessment
Defining Informal Assessment

Informal assessment techniques are subjective, mostly “homegrown”

Reliability, validity, and cross-cultural issues often lacking

However, informal techniques can do the following:

- Add one more piece of info to total assessment process
- Can be focused to gather specific information
- Can often be used to gather info quickly
- Can be non-intrusive, such as using cumulative records at school, and thus can be nonthreatening
- Usually free or low cost
- Tend to be easy to administer and interpret
Types of Informal Assessment

- Observation
- Rating Scales
- Classification Methods
- Environmental Assessment
- Records and Personal Documents
- Performance-Based Assessment

Let’s Look at Each
 Observation

- Completed by professionals (e.g., teachers), significant others (e.g., spouses), or by self

Two Types and Combination of Two Types:
- **Event sampling**: Viewing and assessing targeted behavior without regard for time (observing acting out child at school ALL day)

- **Time sampling**: Specific amount of time set aside for observation (e.g., viewing acting out child for 10 minutes, 5 times during the day)
Rating Scales

A rating scale is used to assess a quantity of an attribute being presented to the rater (Box 10.2, p. 221)

Rating scales are subjective and the assessment is based on the rater’s “inner judgment” of the rater

Two types of error often associated with ratings scales:

- *The Halo Effect*: Rate based on overall impression (e.g., intern is exceptional, so you rate him high on all aspects, even though he is consistently comes late to the internship)

- *Generosity Error*: Identification with person effects your rating (e.g., you rate fellow student on her ability at exhibiting good counseling skills)
Rating Scales (Cont’d)

Types of Rating Scales:

- **Numerical Scales**: Provide a written statement that can be rated from high to low on a number line (see Box 10.3, p. 221)

- **Likert-Type Scales (Graphic Scales)**: Contain a number of items being rated on the same theme and are anchored by both numbers and a statement that corresponds to the numbers (see Box 10.4, p. 222)
Rating Scales (Cont’d)

Types of Rating Scales (Cont’d):

- **Semantic Differential Scale:** Provide a statement followed by one or more pairs of words that reflect opposing traits (see Box 10.5, p. 222)

- **Rank Order Scales:** Provide a series of statements which the respondent can rank order based on his or her preferences (see Box 10.6, p. 223)

- Exercise 10.2, p. 223
Classification Systems

Purpose: Classification systems provide information about whether or not an individual has, or does not have, certain attributes or characteristics.

Some Classification Systems:

- *Behavior Checklists*: Allows an individual to identify behaviors that best describe typical or atypical behaviors (see Box 10.7, p. 224)
Classification Systems (Cont’d)

Some Classification Methods (Cont’d)

- **Feeling Word Checklists:** Individuals check feeling words on list to identify which they had, are currently experiencing, or hope to feel (Table 10.1, p. 225)

- **Other Classification Methods** (only limited by our imaginations). For example:
  - Asking clients to examine and choose items which represent their “irrational thoughts”
  - An individual conducting a career assessment checks those jobs that look appealing
  - Elderly person identifies barriers to living fully (difficulty getting out of bath, problems seeing, etc.)
Environmental Assessment

Defining:

- Collecting information from client’s home, school, or workplace, usually through observation or self-reports
- More systems-oriented and naturalistic than in-office testing
- Can be eye-opening because in the office clients sometimes present a distorted view based on inaccurate perceptions or because they are embarrassed about revealing information
- Four Types: Direct Observation, Situational Tests, Sociometric Instruments, Environmental Assessment Instruments
Environmental Assessment (Cont’d)

- Types of:
  - *Direct Observation*
    - E.g., Visit client’s home, classroom, or workplace, or other setting
    - Can discover important info about client you would rarely uncover in counseling
    - See Box 10.8, p. 226
Environmental Assessment (Cont’d)

Types of (Cont’d)

- *Situational Tests*: Real-to-life situations to examine how an individual is likely to respond in a contrived, but natural situation (e.g., role-playing a counselor as part of admissions process for a doctoral program)

- *Sociometric Instruments*: Maps the relative position of an individual within a group. Often used to determine the dynamics of individuals within a group, organization, or institution (see Figure 10.1, p. 227)
Environmental Assessment (Cont’d)

Types of (Cont’d)

- **Environmental Assessment Instruments**
  - *Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments Information Management System (CASE-IMS).* Assesses entire school environment and climate through self-report surveys of students, parents, teachers, and principal.
  - *Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function–Preschool.* For use by teachers and parents to assess preschool aged children for cognitive, behavioral, and emotive functioning. (ages 2-6)
  - *Emotional or Behavior Disorder Scale-Revised.* For use in the home or school. To identify behavior or emotional problems through observation (ages 5 to 21)

- Exercise 10.3, p. 228
Records and Personal Documents

- Can help examiner understand the beliefs, values, and behaviors of person being assessed.
- Often obtained directly from client, from individuals close to client (e.g., parents, loved ones), and from institution with which the client has interacted.
- More common records and personal documents:
  - biographical inventories (see pp. 229-231)
  - cumulative records
  - anecdotal information
  - autobiographies
  - journals and diaries
  - genograms. (see Figures 10.2 and 10.3, p. 233)
Performance-Based Assessment

Definition: The evaluation of an individual using a variety of informal assessment procedures that are often based on real-world responsibilities

Alternative to standardized testing that heavily assesses cognitive skills

May lessen racial differences in some cognitive tests

Portfolio Assessment: One kind of performance-based measure

- Pulls together a number of items that demonstrate competencies in a wide range of areas
Performance-Based Assessment (Cont’d)

Example of Portfolio: School Counseling Student

Includes:

- Resumé
- Videos of the student’s work with clients
- Supervisor’s assessment
- Paper highlighting student’s view of human nature
- Ways student shows commitment school counseling
- A test report written by the student
- Student projects on:
  - Comprehensive school counseling program
  - Building multicultural environment in schools
Test Worthiness of Informal Assessment

Validity

- How well the examiner defines that which is being assessed (e.g., if concerned about acting out behavior of a child, need to define the behavior identified as “acting out”)
  - Exactly which “acting out” behaviors are we talking about? Does it include pushing, interrupting, making inappropriate nonverbal gestures, withdrawing in class, and so forth
  - Does acting out only include inappropriate behaviors in the classroom, or does it include inappropriate behaviors in the hallway, on the playground, on field trips, and at home (etc.)?
Test Worthiness of Informal Assessment (Cont’d)

- Reliability
  - Intimate relationship between validity and reliability
  - The better we define the behavior being assessed (the more valid), the more reliable is our data
  - Interrater Reliability: Ideally, two or more raters who understand the behavior being assessed rate separately. Then, a correlation coefficient is obtained (hopefully .80 or higher)
Test Worthiness of Informal Assessment (Cont’d)

- Cross-Cultural Fairness
  - Informal Procedures are easily open to bias
    - Unconscious or conscious bias can lead examiner, observer, or rater to misinterpret verbal or nonverbal behaviors of a minority client
    - Examiner, observer, or rater, may be ignorant of verbal or nonverbal behaviors of a diverse clients
  - However, because they are uniquely geared towards the specific client behaviors, one can pick and choose exactly which behaviors to focus upon
Test Worthiness of Informal Assessment (Cont’ d)

Practicality

- Their practical nature makes them particularly useful
  - low-cost or cost-free
  - can be created or obtained in a short amount of time
  - are relatively easy to administer
  - with the exception of possible cultural bias, are fairly easy to interpret
Role of Helpers in Use of Informal Assessment

- Use is only limited by our imaginations
- Most importantly—will it add to our body of knowledge about the person?
- All helpers can use them
- Can you come up with some idea how you would use them?
Informal assessment techniques sometimes have questionable reliability, validity, and may not always be cross-culturally fair.

Informal assessment techniques can add one additional mechanism for understanding the person.

When making important decisions about a person, they should generally not be used alone but can be an important addition to a broader assessment battery.

Use them wisely and keep in mind the importance that they add to the decisions one is making about a client.