

- *Discreteness* (does the item pertain to a single, unique behavior or a simple count of events as opposed to summary responses?)
- *Verifiability* (can the accuracy of the response to the item be confirmed?)
- *Controllability* (does the item address an event that the applicant controlled?)
- *Equal accessibility* (are the events or experiences expressed in the item equally accessible to all applicants?)
- *Job relevance* (does the item solicit information closely tied to the job?)
- *Invasiveness* (is the item sensitive to the applicant's right to privacy?)²⁸

Most selection tests simply score items in a predetermined manner and add the scores to arrive at a total score. These total scores form the basis of selection decisions made about applicants. With most biodata inventories, the process of making decisions based on responses to items is considerably more complex. Essentially, the development of a biodata inventory is a bit of a fishing expedition where current employees are given many items to complete and the inventory used for future hiring decisions is based on those items—and the specific responses within items or questions—that seem to discriminate between high performers and low performers.

Google developed its biodata inventory by first asking its employees 300 questions and then correlating employee responses to their job performance. Once it isolated items that predicted the job performance of current employees, Google asked applicants a smaller set of questions that ranged from the age when an applicant first got excited about computers to whether the applicant has ever turned a profit at his or her own side business.²⁹

Evaluation of Biodata

Research conducted on the reliability and validity of biodata is quite positive.³⁰ Responses tend to be fairly reliable (test-retest coefficients range from .60 to .90). More important, past research suggests that biodata inventories are valid predictors of job performance. A number of meta-analyses have been conducted, and the average validity has ranged from $\bar{r}_{xy} = .32$ to $\bar{r}_{xy} = .37$.³¹

In addition to job performance, biodata scores appear to predict turnover (individuals with a past history of job changes are more likely to turn over) and student academic performance (biodata scores of incoming college freshmen predicted their subsequent college GPAs).³²

Despite the quite positive validity evidence, biodata does have some important limitations. First, because biodata inventories are developed and scored on the basis of a particular job and sample, it has commonly been argued that the validity of a particular inventory in one organization is unlikely to generalize to another organization. Although this issue has not been conclusively resolved in the literature, prudent practice would suggest that organizations regularly validate their biodata inventory.³³