

Efficient Assessment And Evaluation Between States And Texas

Posted on October 5, 2019

Assessment and evaluation are central to professional counseling because counselors use information to understand client concerns, plan interventions, monitor progress, support educational or career decisions, and determine whether referral is needed. The original essay correctly recognizes that assessment has become increasingly important as clinical decisions carry serious consequences and as new instruments become available. It also identifies three essential concerns: legal authority, professional competence, and cultural fairness. These concerns should remain connected. A counselor may be legally permitted to use an instrument but lack the training required for that particular test. A technically reliable measure may still be inappropriate for a client whose language, disability, culture, or educational background differs from the population on which it was developed. This discussion focuses on Texas, including practice in Houston, while comparing state regulation with the International Test Commission's competency-based approach. The goal is not to establish that counselors and psychologists are enemies competing for ownership of every test. It is to explain how scope of practice, competence, informed consent, confidentiality, validity, and ethical judgment should guide assessment.

Assessment and Testing in Counseling Practice

Assessment is broader than administering a standardized test. It may include clinical interviews, behavioral observation, rating scales, inventories, educational and occupational information, collateral reports, records, symptom measures, and structured risk assessment. Testing refers more specifically to the standardized administration, scoring, and interpretation of instruments designed to measure defined characteristics. Evaluation combines available information to answer a referral question or guide a decision. A counselor should therefore avoid assuming that a numerical score speaks for itself. The score must be interpreted alongside the client's history, current circumstances, language, functioning, and the purpose for which the instrument was selected.

Why Competence Matters

Assessment decisions can influence diagnosis, treatment, school placement, employment, disability services, custody disputes, and access to care. Incorrect interpretation can stigmatize a client or delay needed support. Competence requires knowledge of test theory, reliability, validity, norms, administration, scoring, interpretation, limitations, and appropriate use. It also includes supervised experience with the specific type of instrument. Reading a manual once is not enough for a complex

measure. Counselors must know when a tool exceeds their education or license and when consultation or referral to a psychologist, physician, neuropsychologist, school specialist, or other professional is appropriate.

Texas Law and the Licensed Professional Counselor

Texas regulates licensed professional counselors through the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council and the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors. The applicable statutes and rules define professional counseling broadly enough to include assessment and evaluation of mental, emotional, and behavioral concerns within the counselor's competence and legal scope. Texas LPCs may select, administer, score, and interpret appropriate instruments used in counseling practice. This authority does not make every psychological, neuropsychological, medical, educational, or forensic test available to every counselor. The professional must comply with training requirements, test-user qualifications, publisher restrictions, and rules governing representations of expertise. (Naugle, 2009; Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council, 2026)

Houston Does Not Have a Separate Counselor-Testing License

The original essay describes Houston as though it maintains a distinct testing law or licensing coalition. Counselors practicing in Houston are primarily governed by Texas state law, federal law where applicable, and the policies of their employers or institutions. Local programs and professional associations may advocate for fair access to tests, but they do not replace the state licensing system. A Houston counselor should therefore consult the current Texas Occupations Code, executive-council rules, professional ethics, relevant court or agency requirements, and the instrument publisher's qualification standards. The city in which services are delivered does not create a separate right to administer a test that falls outside the counselor's competence.

Counseling Assessment and Psychological Practice

Disputes have historically arisen over which professions may use particular instruments. The most productive approach is not to reserve every test label for one profession or to assume that a counseling license permits unrestricted psychological testing. The referral question and required expertise should control the decision. A counselor trained in career assessment may appropriately use interest and aptitude measures. A clinician trained in symptom screening may use validated behavioral-health scales. Comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation, assessment of cognitive impairment, medical diagnosis, or complex forensic testing may require specialized training and

another professional scope. Interprofessional boundaries should protect clients rather than function as professional territory.

Assessment Is Not a Physical Diagnosis

Counselors may assess mental, emotional, and behavioral patterns within their scope, but they should not claim to diagnose physical or neurological disease through counseling instruments. Attention problems, memory difficulty, mood change, fatigue, or unusual behavior can result from medical conditions, medication effects, sleep disorders, substance use, trauma, or other causes. A counselor can identify concern and recommend medical evaluation without representing the counseling assessment as proof of a physical condition. This distinction is especially important when a test produces a score associated with a disorder but cannot establish the cause independently.

State Differences

Professional-counselor laws differ among states in terminology, education, supervision, diagnosis, testing authority, and continuing competence. A counselor licensed in Texas cannot assume that the same activities are authorized after moving or providing telehealth to a client located elsewhere. Practice ordinarily occurs where the client is located, so the professional must review that jurisdiction's requirements. Interstate compacts and temporary-practice provisions may improve mobility, but they do not erase differences in scope. Counselors should document the legal basis for cross-border work and obtain additional authorization where required.

The International Test Commission's Approach

The International Test Commission provides guidelines emphasizing competent, ethical, and fair test use. Its approach is not a license granting legal authority in Texas. It is a professional framework that helps organizations and practitioners define the knowledge, skills, and personal responsibilities required of test users. Competence includes selecting an appropriate measure, communicating the purpose, administering it under standardized conditions, scoring accurately, interpreting results in context, protecting materials and data, and reporting conclusions without exaggeration. The ITC's focus on observable competence complements Texas regulation because state authorization establishes a legal boundary while professional guidelines explain how responsible practice should occur within that boundary. (International Test Commission, 2001)

Comparing Texas Regulation and ITC Guidance

Texas rules and ITC guidance share several principles. Both require professionals to work within competence, use suitable methods, protect clients, and avoid misleading interpretations. Their

functions differ. Texas law determines who may practice under a protected license and creates disciplinary consequences for violations. The ITC provides internationally oriented standards that may help training programs, employers, publishers, and practitioners evaluate test-user capability. A Texas counselor should follow the stricter applicable requirement when legal, ethical, employer, and publisher standards differ. Compliance with state law alone does not prove that an assessment was clinically sound.

Selecting an Assessment Instrument

Selection begins with the referral question. The counselor should identify what decision must be made and whether a standardized instrument will add useful information. The measure should fit the construct, client population, language, age, reading level, and setting. The professional should review reliability, forms of validity evidence, normative sample, administration time, scoring procedures, accessibility, and known limitations. A popular measure is not automatically appropriate. A test designed for screening should not be used as though it provides a comprehensive diagnosis, and a measure validated for group research may not support a high-stakes individual decision.

Reliability and Measurement Error

Reliability concerns the consistency of scores under defined conditions. No psychological score is perfectly precise. Manuals commonly report internal consistency, test-retest reliability, inter-rater agreement, or other estimates depending on the instrument. Counselors should interpret scores as ranges influenced by measurement error rather than exact quantities defining the person. A small score difference may not represent a meaningful change. When monitoring treatment, the clinician should consider reliable-change methods, clinical significance, and the client's reported functioning rather than celebrating movement produced by ordinary score variability.

Validity

Validity concerns whether evidence supports the interpretation and use of scores for a particular purpose. It is not a permanent property stamped onto a test. Evidence may support the use of a measure for adult depression screening but not for employment selection, adolescent diagnosis, or disability determination. Counselors should examine content, internal structure, relationships with other variables, consequences, and fairness. A test can be reliable yet invalid for the intended decision. Ethical assessment requires the professional to explain the strength of the evidence and avoid conclusions beyond it.

Norms and Comparison Groups

Norm-referenced scores compare a person with a defined group. The meaning depends on who was included, when data were collected, and whether the group resembles the client in relevant ways. Old norms may not reflect current populations. National norms may conceal regional or linguistic differences. A percentile rank does not mean the person answered that percentage of questions correctly; it indicates relative standing within the normative sample. Counselors should describe norms accurately and use caution when representation is limited.

Multicultural Assessment Standards

The original essay highlights multicultural standards concerning content, norming, validity, administration, and disability. These remain essential. Culture can influence communication, symptom expression, test familiarity, attitudes toward authority, and the meaning of particular behaviors. The counselor should not assume that group membership predicts an individual's score or that every difference represents pathology. Historical misuse of testing in racial classification, immigration policy, education, and disability determination makes humility necessary. Fair assessment requires relevant language access, culturally informed interpretation, and acknowledgment when evidence for a subgroup is weak.

Language and Translation

Language proficiency affects comprehension and performance. Informal translation by a family member can change item meaning, compromise privacy, and invalidate standardization. When an approved translated version exists, the counselor should use it according to the manual. Qualified interpreters may support interviews, but their involvement changes the assessment conditions and must be documented. The counselor should distinguish limited English proficiency from low intelligence, resistance, or lack of insight. Reports should explain the language of administration and its effect on confidence in the conclusions.

Disability and Accessibility

Clients with visual, hearing, motor, learning, or other disabilities may require accommodations. The professional must determine whether an accommodation preserves the intended construct. Reading an item aloud may be appropriate for one measure but invalidate a reading test. Extended time, assistive technology, sign-language interpretation, accessible rooms, or alternative response formats may be necessary. Test manuals and disability guidance should be reviewed, and deviations documented. Accessibility is not an unfair advantage; it aims to remove barriers unrelated to what the assessment is intended to measure.

Informed Consent

Before assessment, the client should understand the purpose, nature, expected use, limits of confidentiality, fees, who will receive results, and any significant consequences. In forensic, employment, school, or court-ordered settings, participation may not be entirely voluntary, making clarification especially important. Clients should know whether declining an assessment affects services or decisions. Consent is an ongoing process rather than a signature obtained before testing. When a client lacks legal capacity, authorized consent may come from a guardian or representative, while the client should still be involved to the extent possible.

Confidentiality and Privileged Communication

Confidentiality is the professional duty to protect client information. Privilege is a legal rule that may allow the client to prevent certain disclosures in legal proceedings. They are related but not identical, and exceptions vary by jurisdiction and context. Texas counselors must understand requirements concerning threats, suspected abuse or neglect, court orders, insurance, records, and supervision. The original essay correctly notes that state privilege rules can differ. A counselor should not promise absolute secrecy. When receiving a subpoena, the clinician should follow law and seek appropriate consultation rather than releasing an entire file automatically.

Test Security and Digital Assessment

Test items, scoring keys, and proprietary materials require protection because public disclosure can undermine validity. Digital assessment adds risks involving identity verification, remote administration, data storage, platform security, and artificial intelligence. Counselors should use approved systems, understand where information is stored, and avoid placing identifiable client data into public AI tools. Remote testing may alter environmental control and observation. Reports should document nonstandard conditions such as interruptions, device problems, assistance from others, or uncertain identity.

Scoring and Interpretation

Automated scoring reduces arithmetic error but does not replace professional interpretation. Computer-generated narratives may present conclusions more confidently than the evidence permits. The counselor should verify input, review response validity, examine patterns, and integrate collateral information. Interpretation should address the referral question and separate findings from speculation. A responsible report uses plain language, states limitations, and avoids labels unsupported by the data. When results conflict with interview or behavioral evidence, the discrepancy should be explored rather than ignored.

Communicating Results

Feedback can help clients understand strengths, concerns, and next steps. It should not reduce the person to a score. The counselor should explain what the measure assesses, how the client performed, what uncertainty remains, and how results relate to real-life functioning. Sensitive findings require care and an opportunity for questions. Reports sent to other professionals should contain only information relevant to the authorized purpose. Raw test data may require special handling under law, ethics, and publisher rules.

High-Stakes and Forensic Uses

Assessment used in custody, criminal, disability, employment, or legal decisions demands specialized competence. The evaluator's role differs from therapy because the primary client may be a court, agency, or retaining party, and confidentiality is limited. The professional should remain impartial, examine alternative explanations, and disclose the data supporting conclusions. A treating counselor should be cautious about shifting into a forensic role with the same client because loyalty and objectivity can conflict. Referral is often the more ethical choice.

Ethical Responsibility and Impairment

The original essay notes professional responsibility and personal impairment. Counselors must monitor whether fatigue, illness, substance use, emotional distress, bias, or workload affects judgment. Assessment requires concentration and accuracy. Consultation, reduced workload, supervision, or temporary limitation of practice may be necessary. Professional relationships with colleagues are useful when they support honest feedback and appropriate referral. Competence includes recognizing when not to proceed. (American Counseling Association, 2014)

Reflection

Promoting ethical assessment should remain an ongoing professional goal. The most important lesson is that legal permission is only the beginning. A counselor must ask whether the instrument is relevant, valid for the purpose, fair to the client, administered properly, and interpreted within competence. I would approach assessment as a collaborative process rather than an authority's verdict. I would review current Texas rules, consult the manual, explain limitations, and seek supervision when a case exceeds my experience. Multicultural and disability considerations would be built into planning rather than added after an unexpected score.

Conclusion

Efficient assessment and evaluation in Texas require coordination among law, ethics, psychometrics, culture, and clinical judgment. Texas LPCs may use appropriate assessment instruments within their legal scope and demonstrated competence, but Houston does not create a separate testing license. The International Test Commission's guidelines complement state regulation by defining responsible test-user behavior. Counselors must select instruments according to the referral question, evaluate reliability and validity, protect confidentiality and test security, provide accommodations, and explain results without exaggeration. The purpose of assessment is not to defend professional territory or produce labels. It is to generate useful, fair, and defensible information that improves client care and decision-making.

References

American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*.

International Test Commission. (2001). International guidelines for test use. *International Journal of Testing*, 1(2), 93-114.

Naugle, K. A. (2009). Counseling and testing: What counselors need to know about state laws on assessment and testing. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 42(1), 31-45.

Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council. (2026). *Statutes and rules governing licensed professional counselors*.