

# 7 Things for Strong Pre/Post Tests and Assessments, a Cheat Sheet

## Introduction

There are 7 things that you can do to strengthen Pre/Post tests, surveys, and assessments (all 3 types are referred to in this post as “tests”). These 7 things are useful for junior, mid-career, and senior professionals. Skim these until you find two or three that fit your work or that you can share with a colleague.

## 7 Things for Strong Pre/Post Tests and Assessments

### Use or Share

- **1. Preparation spent on refining word choices is important.**  
Borrow time with colleagues and friends to read the test prompts, looking for any word choices that can be interpreted in multiple ways. It is vital that if you plan to compile response data year after year to compare across time, then you must not change the wording of the prompts across time.

Ultimately, you want to make sure that each test prompt is responded to in the exact same way by individuals and groups across the time that you use the Pre/Post test.

- **2. Preparation on collecting demographic information on participants (e.g. age, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, sex and gender, disability, class, household size, and education level) is important for understanding the results of Pre/Post tests.**

The gains made in your activity (e.g. a training) may fall along demographic lines. You won't know unless you collect this information. That is, the difference in growth among individuals and groups of people in your activity may have to do with previous exposure to the topic or an adjacent topic. Also important, the difference in growth might have to do with the demographics of the staff leading the activity.

Ultimately, get the demographic information so that you can make sense of the results and inform your decision-making for the next iteration of the activity (e.g. at the point of enrollment). ([Check-out our online course on Unconscious Bias in programming and employee climate](#) for further discussion about how demographic trends might uncover Unconscious Bias among your participants and/or staff team and how to Cultivate Equity.

- **3. Collect individuals' identities on Pre/Post tests; don't focus only on the full group's response to the test.**

Some sorts of activities require anonymity for tests. This sometimes means that the staff member who administers the test without collecting names cannot compare the one-to-one growth of individuals.

Remember to offer anonymity while still having comparable Pre/Post data for each individual. For example, each participant can provide their own code name and use that code name when they respond to the Pre/Post tests; this honors their privacy and allows you to know how much each person has grown. In this case, be sure to include demographic prompts on the tests themselves so that you can make the individual comparisons and look for trends in the responses across demographics.

**4. During preparation, decide whether you need a conventional Pre/Post test or a Retrospective test.**

Sometimes individuals don't know what they don't know until the end of the training or event. This is especially the case with topics that have a lot of prominent myths or taboos circulating in our society attached such as sexual harassment, child abuse, and nutritional choices.

In this case, Pre scores from individuals might be higher than the Post scores! Ahh! If your programming finds itself in this situation, opt for implementing a Retrospective test. For example, the test can be designed to ask knowledge, skill, or network questions in two categories the "Before Participating in this Training" and "Now." Administer this test at the end of the activity.

Some "**Before**" wording on the Retrospective test might include:

"Before you started this training, how much did you know about \_\_\_\_\_?"

"Before you started this training, which of the following terms did you have a research-based understanding of?"

"Looking back, how competent were you in thinking critically about solutions for \_\_\_\_\_?"

Some "**Now**" wording on the Retrospective test might include:

"Now that you completed the training, how much do you know about \_\_\_\_\_?"

"Now that you completed the training, which of the following terms do you have a research-based understanding of?"

"Now that you completed the training, how competent are you in thinking critically about solutions for \_\_\_\_\_?"

**5. Time the collection of Pre/Post tests effectively.**

Remember to time the collection of the tests precisely. Find a way to have these completed in-person before the group of people walks away. In-person completion of the Pre/Post tests will ensure a larger response rather than with a follow-up email. You might opt to have folks complete the tests on paper, on their smart phones, or their laptops.

**6. Time the communication about "the why" of taking the Post or Retrospective test.**

Prior to administering the Post test or Retrospective test, inform the folks that the next time you all meet as a group, you will administer the test and share the following: The benefits of the test results for the test takers; the benefits of the test results for the program; the benefits of the test results, long-term, for the community. This type of information appropriately orients the test takers to know the role of the test and their role in contributing beyond the completion of the activity that they are enrolled in.

**7. In a timely fashion, share the aggregate results of the test with the folks who completed it.**

In order to accomplish two final steps, it is important to share the aggregate results of the Pre/Post or Retrospective test. First, your staff team will come full circle, completing the entire best-practice for conducting quality tests. That is, the final step in this "circle" is sharing or communicating the results. This sets a precedence on how participants in your program are treated.

Second, sharing the aggregate results can serve as a point of ongoing recruitment for your program ("snowball" approach – who the participants know might be your next cohort of participants). The participants might decide to refer their peers to your program or respond to your "share about our program on social media" request; either way, this is a win for your program.

