THE EPSO ASSISTANT EXAM
TEST TYPES

The table below summarizes the test types found in the pre-selection phase of EPSO AST exams. This workbook contains explanations, useful tips and tricks for the test types indicated in the table below. We will deal with other test types in future editions!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEST TYPE</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF QUESTIONS</th>
<th>TIME LIMIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCURACY AND PRECISION</td>
<td>ENGLISH/ FRENCH/ GERMAN</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6 MINUTES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANISING AND PRIORITISING</td>
<td>ENGLISH/ FRENCH/ GERMAN</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30 MINUTES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT (SJT)</td>
<td>ENGLISH/ FRENCH/ GERMAN</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30 MINUTES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACCURACY AND PRECISION

The EPSO accuracy and precision test provides you with a large table of data (see #1 above). You also get a smaller table below that (see #2 above) which replicates one row of data from the large one. When I say 'replicate', this isn’t actually accurate because the ‘replication’ will actually contain errors. Your task is simply to find them and select the answer option which correctly mentions all of the errors. Answer options could be formulated like this:

A. Company
B. Company, Cost €
C. Start Date, Renovations
D. Renovations, Company

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A. Company
B. Company, Cost €
C. Start Date, Renovations
D. Renovations, Company
Now, when an EPSO candidate first encounters this test, a typical reaction is one of bafflement: IS THIS REALLY A TEST? The general feeling is that this is ridiculously easy. This feeling remains until three numbers are revealed:

(9 SECONDS) (40 QUESTIONS) (6 MINUTES)

(amount of time available FOR ONE QUESTION) (number of questions YOU HAVE TO ANSWER) (amount of time available FOR THE FULL TEST)

It is then easy to see that time is the greatest challenge in solving the EPSO accuracy tests: you have to shave off valuable seconds and milliseconds at every step of the way.

HOW DO WE DO THAT?

There are secrets to being lightning fast at accuracy tests. Unfortunately, all of them require a lot of practice. Fortunately, practice is something you can do and so you can improve easily improve in this test.

SECRET 1: CONTROL YOUR EYE MOVEMENT

Exactly because there is so little time available for each question, you simply cannot afford looking at the tables and hectically glance from one cell to the other – you have to be methodical. What do I mean by that?

You should always focus your eyes on the bottom left corner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Cost €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busch Informatik</td>
<td>256.450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In one glance, you can memorize the COMPANY name and check which row in the table above you will need to compare this to. You can now look up at row #1 in the larger table and focus in on two cells:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Cost €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busch Informatik</td>
<td>256.450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, you can check if the COMPANY name was replicated correctly in the lower table and you can also memorise the contents of a new cell: the COST €. Keeping this in mind, you can look down at the lower table again:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Cost €</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busch Informatik</td>
<td>256,450</td>
<td>10/10/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This will allow you to check the correctness of the ‘replicated’ cost data and memorise the next data item: the START DATE. I think you already know our next move – we will look up again, this time to check whether the START DATE was replicated correctly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/10/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s see what’s left: we need to figure out if the various activities (e.g. Repair), designated by icons in the larger table, are correctly replicated in the form of ticks in cells in the lower table. For this, we need to glance at the ‘legend’ at the top of table so we will know what each icon stands for:

Then we can check which of the icons are present in the row we are checking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decorate</th>
<th>Repair</th>
<th>Cleaning</th>
<th>Extension</th>
<th>Garden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this step, we should immediately convert the icons into concepts: Repair, Extension, Garden. Why? So we can check these against the ticks in the lower table:

Now, what did we learn from this method? Did you notice the numbers in the small bubbles next to each step I demonstrated above? Well, the bubbles show the number of eye movements we will have to make in the course of 6 seconds to check everything in the table. As you can see, we tried to keep these to a minimum, but it is still a handful for the time available.

So what would be the correct answer here? Let’s see:

- The COMPANY NAME is incorrect (typo: extra "s" in "Informatik")
- The COST € is correct
- The START DATE is correct
- The RENOVATIONS are incorrect: the tick is under Decorate instead of Repair

THE CORRECT ANSWER IS, THEN, OPTION D: RENOVATIONS, COMPANY.
SECRET 2: CHECK ONLY WHAT YOU NEED TO

In the above example, we didn’t have it easy: there were three icons in the larger table and three ticks in the lower table, so we had to check whether the icons matched the ticks. You will face questions, however, when the number of ticks won’t match the number of icons: in such situations, remember that it is no longer necessary to check where the ticks are: the mismatch in numbers is sufficient.

SECRET 3: KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Even from this example, I am sure you noticed that there are many different types of errors – when you practice, methodically collect these and be aware of them so you will expect them at the real exam.

Here are a few examples:

- TYPO
- WRONG CURRENCY
- WRONG AMOUNT
- TICKS MISPLACED
- DIGITS SWITCHED UP
- ICON MISSING
- WRONG DATE

ACCURACY AND PRECISION

A typical complaint against most of the EPSO tests is that they are completely divorced from reality and have nothing to do with practical, concrete tasks an EU official has to be good at. Even though psychologists refute this criticism and claim that these tests do indeed measure useful skills and competencies, the organising and prioritising test is kind of an exception: the questions and the data you are provided with often are quite practical and rooted in reality.

LET’S SEE AN EXAMPLE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>TO</th>
<th>DEPART</th>
<th>ARRIVE</th>
<th>COST (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirkwall</td>
<td>Inverness</td>
<td>11:00*</td>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Inverness</td>
<td>08:30</td>
<td>09:40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverness</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>14:20</td>
<td>15:40</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>15:30</td>
<td>17:10</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>St. Helier</td>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>15:10</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Helier</td>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>18:00</td>
<td>18:20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>St. Helier</td>
<td>16:40</td>
<td>17:50</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tuesday and Friday.

Yes, believe it or not, this question is based on a real airport timetable!

LET’S SEE THE QUESTION:

You are in Kirkwall airport at 7am on Tuesday and need to get to St. Helier as early as possible. Which is your best route?

There are two crucial things to remember when it comes to timetable-like organising and prioritising tests.
Crucial Thing #1: CONCENTRATE ON THE RESULT

A natural reaction to the above question would be to first look at the Kirkwall departures and check each potential route to see when you get to St. Helier. Well, there is a much easier way. What is the essence of the question?

You need to get to St. Helier as early as possible.

So why don’t we instead first look at the St. Helier arrivals? It is easy to see that the earliest flight (the one arriving at 15:10) is coming from Edinburgh. So, all we have to figure out is whether we can get to Edinburgh by the scheduled departure time, which is 13:00.

As it turns out, we can easily do that, directly from Kirkwall, boarding the 08:30 flight!

Crucial Thing #2

Although we did not need these in the current question, it is easy to lose sight of other important information presented as well. These include:

- the fact that the Kirkwall – Inverness flight operates only on Tuesdays and Fridays
- the price of the journey
- the question (or another asterisked comment) could have specified the minimum transfer time we need to account for

It is crucial to remember to check these, otherwise it is very easy to lose a perfectly good point.

So, is that all there is to organising and prioritising tests? No, there are several other types (in addition to timetable ones) which you can practice on Online EU Training – see the side box for insights.

SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TESTS

You are working on a fairly mechanic task involving dozens of Excel sheets with very tight deadlines and high workloads. However, you feel that through putting in extra effort you have managed to get on top of the work and believe it is now just possible to deliver the objectives asked for. Then unexpectedly, your Superior makes an urgent request that, whilst not impossible to fulfil, will mean your previous hard efforts on the project will have been negated.

**PICK THE MOST AND LEAST EFFECTIVE ANSWER.**

A Explain the situation to your superior and ask if they could delegate the task to someone else.

B Complete the request from your superior and then return to working on the original project, putting in extra effort as required.

C Explain the situation to your Superior and ask them which should take priority for being fulfilled on time: the project or the urgent request.

D Explain to your Superior how frustrating this would be for you and therefore on this occasion you will need to decline getting involved.

**SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TESTS ARE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM ALL THE OTHER TESTS YOU WILL ENCOUNTER AT THE EPSO AST3 PRE-SELECTION EXAM.**

First of all, **THERE IS NO SINGLE CORRECT ANSWER** – the four courses of action described in the answer represent different degrees of effectiveness in the given situation. Moreover, you don’t simply have to mark the best option – you must think about the worst option as well.

Second, **THE OPTION INTENDED AS BEST BY EPSO IS NOT THE OBJECTIVELY BEST OPTION** – in a different organisation with different values and priorities, another option might have been best.

Third, **IT MEASURES SO-CALLED BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCIES:** basically, your compatibility with the tasks and responsibilities at an EU institution – see the competencies measured in the box on the side.
IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT that EPSO IS CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT YOU WOULD DO in the given situation.

So, IS THERE A WAY to IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES at giving the expected answers in this test?

Let me give you a couple of pointers.

1. First of all, think about what you would do in the given situation – that’s basis of the entire exercise.

2. Next, consider what the test might actually be ‘testing’: is it organising skills, an ability to manage stress, or perhaps analysis and problem solving skills? This is a crucial step and involves reading the answer options as well because the same situation might measure different thing, depending on what the options offered are.

3. Also try to think about the EU as an institution and as an employer when evaluating the answers. The thing that would earn you respect and admiration at Google might not work at all in the public sector.

4. DIRTY TRICK: let me give you a tip that works many times. Try to imagine the worst thing that could happen when following each course of action. The one that results in the least catastrophic outcome is often the intended most effective option.