

Training Opportunity Profile for Visually Impaired Persons (TOP-VIP):
 A Resource in Vocational Evaluations of Persons with Visual Impairments

Michael Peterson, Ph.D.

Abstract

TOP-VIP (Training Opportunity Profile for Visually Impaired Persons) is described. TOP-VIP is composed of a variety of self-assessment, career exploration, and work sample exercises designed to be used to assess visually impaired (and other persons) individuals for entrance into training in counseling/social work, sales, management, allied health, and computer programming.

Introduction

In recent years a number of problems have been identified related to a variety of important issues in vocational assessment of disabled persons. These include: (1) the utility and meaning of normative data for work samples (Bottesbusch, 1985); (2) limited materials available for experimental vocational assessment related to entrance into training for skilled technical, and professional positions (Peterson, 1985); and (3) vocational evaluation of severely physically disabled individuals including blind persons (Peterson, 1984-85). For the last four years, a research and development project has been conducted at the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (RRTC-BLV) at Mississippi State University to develop experiential vocational assessment materials adapted for use with blind and visually impaired persons that would further use a criterion-referenced, competency-based approach to vocational assessment adapted from assessment centers in business and industry. This article briefly describes that project and the materials developed.

TOP-VIP: An Overview

TOP-VIP includes vocational assessment and exploration materials adapted for use with visually impaired persons that related to five clusters of jobs; (1) counseling/social work; (2) management; (3) sales; (4) allied health; and (5) computer programming. Materials include: a Technical Manual; an Assessor Manual for each of the five job clusters; and a Participant Manual for each of the job clusters that is available in three formats to facilitate the most appropriate administration on to the blind or visually impaired individual: (1)

1.0 Orientation and Career Information Module	2.0 Orientation Interview
3.0 Psychological Test, etc.	4.0 TOP-VIP Assessment Techniques
5.0 Counseling and Feedback Interview	6.0 Additional Related Experiences

7.0
Case
Staffing

8.0
Career
Development Plan
Formulation

braille; (2) print; and (3) audio cassette tape.

TOP-VIP is designed to be used by vocational evaluators and other rehabilitation professionals who work with blind and visually impaired persons who may be interested in pursuing training and employment in the five case clusters. Specifically, the materials are intended to (1) provide occupational information and occupational exploration experiences that will assist the visually impaired individual to gauge his or her interest in career clusters; (2) provide information concerning alternative techniques to sight that visually impaired persons may use in performing activities in work positions and allow the individual opportunities to experience use of these alternative techniques in the context of job related work tasks; (3) assess the skills of the visually impaired persons on behavioral dimensions that are important for entrance and success in both training programs; and (4) facilitate personal decision-making by the visually impaired individual concerning his or her interest in and potential for employment in counseling and/or social work. A systematic process for the use of TOP-VIP materials has been developed that can be incorporated into the total vocational evaluation process. This is described graphically below.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROCEDURES FOR TOP-VIP

A systematic process for the development of materials was used. This procedure is described below.

1. A Review of literature provided guidelines for the development of these materials. Both assessment center and vocational evaluation literature was reviewed regarding assessment center and work sample development. This review resulted in a monograph (Peterson, et al, 1984) that identified major needs in vocational evaluation of blind persons.
2. The job cluster was specified. This included an identification of the general field and an identification of specific DOT job titles that could be considered representative of the job cluster. Occupations were chosen that represented good opportunities for blind persons.
3. Analysis of the job cluster. An analysis of the job cluster was conducted that included: tasks of the jobs; skills and characteristics need by individuals entering training and performing job tasks; and methods of job accommodation used by visually impaired persons. Information was obtained by: (1) reviewing published studies and literature including the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and job analyses conducted by the Vocational-Technical Education Consortium of States (V-TECS) and other sources;

(2) conducting job analysis interviews with sighted and visually impaired workers and trainers; (3) review of research related to skills and characteristics including professional competency studies.

4. Development of dimension statements, definitions, and behavioral examples. Information in #3 was synthesized to identify major clusters of behaviors important for entrance into and completion of training and for ultimate success on the job. Rating scales and guidelines were developed, too.
5. Assessment exercises was then developed that would assess primary dimensions described in #4 above. Guidelines for final selection and development of exercises included the following: high face validity related to the occupational area; measurement of at least three to five dimensions in each exercise; and assessment of each dimension at least twice. A dimension/exercise matrix was used to assist in this process. Assessment exercises were developed with the input from professionals in the field.
6. Manuals were developed, edited, and revised.
7. Materials are now being field-tested and initial inter-raters reliability studies conducted via graduate students at Mississippi State University, staff of the Talladega Institute by vocational evaluators of the blind in the Southeast region of the United States, and review of dimensions and exercises by an Occupational Expert Committee for each of the five career clusters.
8. Criterion-referenced standards are being developed. Trainers and educators are being surveyed via a national survey concerning the skill level on dimensions that would be expected of individuals prior to or early in their training program. Additionally, the Department of Labor's job analysis of the traits and their levels that could be demonstrated on each exercise. Relevant "accommodation skills" for blind persons - e.g. use of braille, etc. - was also described based upon a review of the literature, job analysis interviews, and consultation with experts in the field.
9. Publications of Materials. These should be available from the RRTC-BLV, P.O. Drawer 5365, Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762 (601) 325-2001.

Assessment Exercises for Each TOP-VIP Job Cluster

Each TOP-VIP module is designed to provide experiences that will allow a visually impaired person to be involved in job related tasks and be assessed on important occupational dimensions. Assessment exercises in each module are summarized below:

Counseling/Social Work

Orientation and occupational information.

This section provides an overview to the counseling and social work assessment process; information on occupations, career ladders, salaries, and projections on the availability of jobs; information on the variety of counseling and social work jobs performed by visually impaired persons and the alternative techniques to sight used in performing these jobs and a description of training opportunities and behavioral dimensions important in training and on the job.

Simulated interview. The simulated interview is structured in three major parts: (1) a simulated interview in which the participant conducts an initial counseling interview with a role-played client; (2) development of a short report documenting the interview; and (3) discussion and feedback interview between the assessor and participant.

In-basket. A series of memos and activities are presented to the participant who plays the role of a newly hired counselor. The task of the individual is to prioritize items and indicate how they would respond. A feedback interview is held to determine the rationale for responses on various items.

Leaderless Group Discussion. A Leaderless Group Discussion involving group discussion of a topic of vital interest to the group is held. Several topics are suggested that may be most appropriate in a rehabilitation facility for the blind e.g. "to what degree should blind persons be independent and be expected to compete in jobs with sighted persons"? Such discussions will provide an opportunity both for assessment and treatment/counseling realities.

Situation Exercises. These are a series of situations which might arise in counseling and social work. This allows the participant to demonstrate their ability to handle particular client situations. The participant plays the role of a worker in a welfare department. The task is to read the situation description (two or three sentences) which the participants answer by indicating: (1) immediate response, (2) on-going approach, (3) referrals made, (4) method of involving the client. This allows the participant to demonstrate ability to deal with very difficult ethical concrete problems encountered in the field.

MANAGEMENT

1.0 In-Basket. The participant plays the role of a new office manager for Fred's Financial Services, Inc. He or she is presented a series of memos and activities and asked to respond. The participant must respond to absentee problems, interpersonal conflicts, and other work related problems by prioritizing items and developing written responses.

2.0 Analysis. The participant plays the role of an agency director in which information must be analyzed and recommendations developed.

3.0 Leaderless group discussion. A Leaderless Group Discussion involving group discussion of

a topic of vital interest to the group is held.

4.0 Scheduling. The participant is involved in a simulation in which data is presented and scheduling decisions must be made. A written report is made which explains the assignments made and the rationale for making the assignments.

5.0 Interview simulation. The participant plays the role of a new supervisor of personnel for a motel. His or her task is to convince an employee to participate in a new job rotation program.

SALES

1. Orientation and Occupational Information
2. Case Simulations. The participants complete three case studies of actual sales situations for which participants must write a course of action.
3. Leaderless Group Discussion. Participants discuss a topic of concern and reach a consensus as to how to solve the problems involved.
4. In-Basket. The participant sells office equipment to various businesses across town.
5. Sales Interview. The participant simulates a sales interview to present equipment to the manager of a company opening a branch office across town.

Allied Health

1.0 Therapist simulation. A simulation of basic activities engaged in by physical and occupational therapist assistants. This includes applying head pads, giving massage, and teaching flexion exercises as well as teaching exercises which increase strength, reach and leisure time activities to a "patient recuperating from an accident".

2.0 Science Skills. This is actually a list of tests used to measure scientific aptitudes and achievements. You should use discretion when using this section. Consult a testing expert to determine which test is best suited for your client. While science skills are important, no one best test of these skills has emerged.

3.0 Measurement. This exercise provides the participant to use metric measurement. It is divided into two parts. The first part involves making calculations. The second part has the participant take actual measurements.

Dimension Rating

TOP-VIP uses an approach to scoring and rating drawn from assessment centers. Essentially critical "dimensions", or clusters of behaviors, have been identified for each career cluster. These have been defined and examples of positive and negative behaviors provided. For example, selected sales dimensions are provided below. Followed by an example of a "behavioral description" of a counseling/social work dimension.

SELECTED SALES DIMENSIONS

- 1.0 Sales Orientation and Presentation. Demonstrates interest, confidence, and enjoyment in contacting people to sell products or services; presents and/or demonstrates product or service enthusiastically and effectively;

handles and displays merchandise well; responds to objections in sales interview.

- 2.0 Interpersonal Skills. Establishes comfortable rapport with people; listens well; asks clarifying questions concerning problems and needs; shows sensitivity.
- 3.0 Achievement Orientation. Demonstrates motivation to achieve through high energy and activity level; is persistent in the face of rejection; works hard and longer hours than required if necessary; initiates tasks on own.
- 4.0 Customer Service Orientation. Communicates sincere interest in needs of customers; describes products and services accurately and honestly; makes realistic promises to customers.
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Examples of Dimension
and Behavioral Description

Dimension 1.0 Interactive Skills. Individual establishes comfortable rapport with people; listens attentively; and communicates a sense of caring and concern verbally and non-verbally.

Positive Behaviors

- Listens to individual talking.
 - Makes statements that indicate understanding of the other persons.
 - Maintains comfortable eye contact without staring.
 - Asks questions or makes statements that encourage the individual to discuss their needs more.
 - Shares personal perceptions and feelings related to other individual's concern or needs.
 - Expresses concern non-verbally. For instance, by attentive body posture, caring feeling facial expressions and appropriate touching.
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Negative Behaviors

- Poor eye contact
- Tense, rigid body posture
- Talking so much that the other individual has little chance to express themselves
- Constant "fidgety" movements
- "Closed" body position - e.g. arms tightly folded, and legs tightly crossed.

- Interrupts individual
 - Expresses verbal or non-verbal disapproval and judgement of individuals
 - Body position so relaxed as to communicate indifference
 - Gives constant advice
 - Statements indicate that the other individual has not been understood.
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The procedure used for rating dimensions is described below:

1. Observe the performance or response of the individual on each exercise and describe them in behavioral terms. For written exercises, such as in-baskets or situation exercises, actual written records of the exercise may be used and summaries of written responses may be developed.
2. Responses and performances must be "coded" according to dimensions. This means that each behavior observed should be associated with a dimension that it represents.
3. Rate dimensions on the five point scale. Using observations (Step 1) and dimension coding (Step 2) assign qualitative ratings to each dimension for each exercise. This process will be used with each exercise. Behavioral descriptions are intended to provide "behavioral anchors" for the assignment of ratings on the scale. Additionally, the

Dimension Rating Guidelines Chart

Rating of	When
5 Very Good	Behaviors checked are mostly positive or Critical behaviors are strongly positive and negative behaviors are minimal.
4 Good	Positive behaviors predominate but some negative behaviors are present or Positive behaviors are weak in strength
3 Fair	Positive and negative behaviors are of about equal weight and Offsetting strong positive or negative behaviors do not occur
2 Poor	Negative behaviors predominate with some positive behaviors present or Negative behaviors are mild

1 Very Poor Behaviors checked are mostly negative or
Critical behaviors are strongly negative

4. Compare ratings to requirements for entrance into training programs. Ratings of the individual may then be compared to survey data that provides information regarding skill levels on dimensions important for success in training. Additionally, procedures are provided to conduct a "dimension analysis" of local training programs to assist in setting criteria. Additional, interpretive procedures are described in the TOP-VIP manual.

Conclusion

TOP-VIP is being introduced to provide materials for use with blind and visually impaired persons. It is hoped, however, that the model of assessment provided may provide evaluators with procedures to assist them in developing and expanding their programs.

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AUTHOR:

Michael Peterson
Rehabilitation Education Program
College of Education
Drawer GE
Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762
