



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Defining Issues Test (DIT and DIT-2)

## Author(s)

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## Description

The Defining Issues Test is a validated instrument that measures an individual's moral development and moral reasoning skills. The DIT is one of the first ethical assessment measures developed. It can be used across a wide range of disciplines. It is available through the University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Ethical Development.

## Body

**Home Page:** <https://ethicaldevelopment.ua.edu/about-the-dit.html>

**Description:** The Defining Issues Test is a measure of moral judgment that reworks Kohlberg's phases of moral development into a series of schema. These schema are: pre-conventional (focusing on personal interest and encompassing Kohlberg's stages 2 and 3), conventional (emphasizing maintaining norms, stage 4), and post-conventional thinking (advanced moral development, stages 5 and 6). The DIT seeks to activate moral schemas in the respondent's long-term memory by asking them to read a scenario, decide the best choice of action from a series of options, rate the importance of issues presented in the scenario to indicate how the issue impacted the decision, and rank the top four items in terms of importance to the decision-making process.

**What it Measures:** The DIT-2 measures an individual's moral development and moral reasoning skills based on Kohlberg's moral development phases.

**Format:** The DIT2 consists of five moral dilemmas followed by a series of statements that respondents are asked to rate and rank in terms of their moral importance. It takes around 30-45 minutes to complete. The DIT-2 has been widely used to assess the effectiveness of ethics education interventions, especially full-semester ethics courses.

### **Disciplines it Assesses**

- Business
- Engineering
- Physical Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Life and Environmental Sciences

**Audience:** High school students, undergraduate and graduate students.

**Use Notes:** The DIT or DIT2 is usually administered as a pre and post-test to measure ethics education interventions, often in the form of an ethics course or a course with substantial ethics content.

**Access/For More Information:** The DIT or DIT2 can [be ordered](#) from the University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Ethical Development. The cost of the measure depends on how you decide to administer the test (paper or online) and the size of the audience you wish to assess. The Center offers assistance on scoring and interpreting the results as part of this fee.

## **Associated References**

**Bebeau, Muriel J. 2002. "The Defining Issues Test and Four Component Model: Contributions to Professional Education." *Journal of Moral Education*. 31(3): 271-295.**

- *Describes the development of a well-known and much-used standardized test, the Defining Issues Test or DIT-2 that can be used to measure the growth of moral reasoning skills in students over time.*

**Drake, M. J., Griffin, P. M., Kirkman, R., & Swann, J. L. (2005). Engineering ethical curricula: Assessment and comparison of two approaches. *Journal***

## **of Engineering Education, 94, 223-231**

- *The paper assesses two approaches for delivery of engineering ethics: a full semester ethics course and an engineering course that includes an ethics module. The Defining Issues Test was used to compare the improvement of a student's moral reasoning ability in each class as compared to a control class. Our findings were that the module approach used did not provide any improvement in moral reasoning. In addition, although the ethics course showed improvement when compared to the module, it was not significantly different from the control class. We also found that there was little distinction between males and females and no distinction by age, although education level did have an impact. The results suggest that to improve a student's moral reasoning and sensitivity to ethical issues, engineering ethics must be integrative, delivered at multiple points in the curriculum, and incorporate specific discipline context.*

## **Rest, J. R. (1979). Development in judging moral issues. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.**

- *Describes the development of the original DIT test, which has been widely used and updated in the past few years.*

### **Rights**

Use of Materials on the OEC

### **Resource Type**

Assessment Tools

### **Parent Collection**

Evaluation Tools

### **Topics**

Evaluation and Assessment

### **Discipline(s)**

Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences

Engineering

Life and Environmental Sciences

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Teaching Ethics in STEM