

The DO's and DON'Ts of Lie Detection Tests

Contrary to popular belief, lie detection test questions are scientifically based. Some questions should not be asked. The following recommendations help answer the question: What questions can be asked in a lie detection test?

DO – You can ask	DON'T – You shouldn't ask
<i>Do</i> ask between 1 to 3 distinct, relevant questions per test	<i>Don't</i> ask more than 3 distinct, relevant questions per test
<i>Do</i> ask about past behaviors or actions	<i>Don't</i> ask about a person's emotions, opinions, intent, desires, or knowledge
<i>Do</i> focus on the examinee's personal experience	<i>Don't</i> question the examinee about the actions or experience of someone else
<i>Do</i> use time frames to narrow scope of test	<i>Don't</i> be broad or vague with the scope of the test
<i>Do</i> consider if pretest admissions have been made – adjust test	<i>Don't</i> ask if someone did something they have made previous admissions on – adjust test
<i>Do</i> focus on behaviors or actions that have impact or consequence to the examinee	<i>Don't</i> ask questions with little or no consequence; the examinee must be motivated to pass test
<i>Do</i> be concise and clear with test language – no subjectivity	<i>Don't</i> use accusatory, emotionally charged, judgmental or legal language
<i>Do</i> ask questions where the examinee must deny a behavior or action	<i>Don't</i> test victims, witnesses, or those who wish to prove their innocence.
<i>Do</i> include test topics that are distinct and different from each other	<i>Don't</i> include test topics that crossover in type or timeframe

When choosing a test topic, ask the following questions:

- 1. Is the topic concrete? Is it an inarguable act or behavior?**
If not, the question is likely not about a past act or behavior. Questions about future acts, desires, intent, opinions, emotions, or knowledge are less effective.
- 2. Can a test question be interpreted differently by someone else?**
If the question is subjective, multiple parties may view the issue differently. Test topics should be clear and straightforward.
- 3. Will the examinee know if they were involved in the target behavior?**
Do not ask about an issue that may be uncertain in the examinee's mind. These are often called memory tests, where the examinee is asked how something happened. Asking the examinee if they did something when not fully conscious or aware also will not yield reliable results.
- 4. If the examinee is guilty, could they reason away their guilt?**

If the question is subjective or can be interpreted in different ways, the examinee may feign innocence. The topic should be inarguable from any standpoint. Did the examinee participate in the act, or not?

5. If found guilty of one topic, is the examinee automatically guilty of another?

This implies question crossover exists. Test topics should be distinct. If similar, the examinee may test positive when not merited.

6. Is the examinee attempting to prove innocence about an act that occurred?

Lie detectors measure deception, not truthfulness. If someone wants to prove innocence, don't use a lie detector.

7. Is the examinee motivated to pass the test?

If the examinee is unconcerned about test results, the physiological reaction may be suppressed. For best results, examinees must be motivated to pass, and the consequences of failure should be significant.

8. Does the test topic matter? What is of most importance?

Focus on behaviors or actions that have the most impact. Smaller infractions may reduce accuracy and dilute test effectiveness. It is better to get a sure conclusion to a greater issue than various issues of lesser significance.

What if the client insists on not following these rules?

Our recommendation is to strongly encourage clients to follow these rules. Poor test questions yield inaccurate results. Converus does not support tests that disregard best practices.

If the client demands the examiner disregard best practices, Converus recommends having the client sign a waiver indicating their understanding that disregarding best practices will likely impact test accuracy. This helps ensure the examiner is indemnified.