

Digit Span Forward or Backward Tests

Digit Span tests are used to assess short-term and working memory. They generally involve hearing or seeing a series of numbers or letters and then repeating those back. The length of the given sequence increases by one item until the person fails twice at a particular level/number of items.

In the Forward Test, the person repeats the items back in the same order they were presented.

In the Backwards Test, the person repeats the items back in the reverse order they were presented.

Example Test Items (usually the test starts at 2 items and may have more items per level)

	Researcher says...	Digits Item A	Correct or Incorrect	Digits Item B	Correct or Incorrect	
Forward Digit Span	"Please say these numbers back to me in the same order that I say them."	6 – 4 – 2		7 – 3 – 9		<i>If both items were correct, move on to the next level.</i>
		8 – 4 – 7 – 5		2 – 1 – 6 – 8		
Backward Digit Span	"Please say these numbers back to me in the REVERSE order that I say them."	4 – 7 – 5		2 – 9 – 4 – 5		
		8 – 3 – 9		3 – 7 – 6 – 8		

Complete Sample Tests

- From the [Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis](https://www.mesa-nhlbi.org/PublicDocs/MESAExam5Forms/V5%20MESA%20Digit%20Span%20Test.pdf), a medical study sponsored by the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, a pdf with directions for test administration and test items for Forward Digit Span and Backwards Digit Span. This is suitable for use in classes and to demonstrate what the test is like.

<https://www.mesa-nhlbi.org/PublicDocs/MESAExam5Forms/V5%20MESA%20Digit%20Span%20Test.pdf>

- From Staffordshire City Council (UK) resources for Education, a pdf with directions, test items, and percentiles for scoring. This is suitable for use in classes and to demonstrate what the test is like.

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response-toolkit/School-toolkit/Cognition-and-learning/SEN-support-in-school/Auditory-Memory-Digit-Test.pdf>

Interpretation

Digit span is six or seven digits for most adults, although it may be as low as four or as high as ten+.