

Have you taken a test in school recently? Besides tracking student progress, tests and exams are used for other purposes too. They are required for applying to college, graduate school, certain jobs, and professional certifications.

During the Han dynasty, China's emperors realized that they needed well-trained officials to help govern the country. The Han government began requiring civil service exams. A civil service exam is a test people must take before they qualify for a government job. Later, the Tang dynasty became well known for using tests to identify strong candidates for government jobs. The Tang dynasty placed a high value on learning and living by Confucian values. These values guided morality and focused on learning and the arts. To pass the civil service examination, a person needed to be an expert on Confucian principles. This is why the people working in government were called scholar-officials.



Song dynasty painting of a scholar-official under a willow tree.

The civil service exams in China used the same study materials over many dynasties. Incredibly, major changes in the imperial exam system were not seen until 1898. A specific set of texts and readings were all that were used. These included the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* by Confucius and his disciples and commentaries on these works. The tests were known to be very difficult, and the test-taking procedures were very strict. It is not surprising that some test takers tried to find ways to cheat on these exams.

Chinese dynasties like the Tang and Ming valued artistic achievements. Because of this, the scholar-official positions attracted many artists and poets. Painter Tang Ying of the Ming dynasty was one of them. While he was in the examination hall, officials caught him cheating.

Not all minds are well suited to memorization and recalling facts. Some people looked for other ways to pass the exams. Over the centuries, many methods of cheating developed in China. These methods included anything from fans with notes, tiny books that could be clasped in their hands, and quotes of Confucius embroidered inside shirts. Bribery was also a successful tool in cheating. Wealthy families were able to pay off the examination officials to get a passing score. Sometimes even bold moves like having an imposter take the test were used.

Now let's take a look at exams in current times. Students take standardized tests to measure their progress. In high school, students take exams that help colleges decide whom to admit. After their studies, adults take professional exams to be certified for a wide variety of professions, including lawyers, doctors, accountants, nurses, teachers, massage therapists, and government agents.

With the increased use of the Internet, cheating on exams is at an even higher level. There are a wide variety of tools that make cheating easier. Detailed instructions, small audio and video devices, and the actual answers for specific tests can be found online. Cheating is not unusual in the modern world, either.

The MCAT is the required exam to enter medical school. In January 2012 an elaborate MCAT cheating scheme was revealed in Vancouver, British Columbia. In the scheme, two men collaborated with a test taker to give him answers. A cell phone and a pinhole camera were used to communicate back and forth. The boldest part of the scheme was how they got the answers. The man feeding the answers to the test taker tricked three students into providing answers. They were told that they were being considered for positions as MCAT instructors. Authorities were contacted when one of the students became suspicious.

FBI personnel have also been involved in recent cheating. In September 2010 the U.S. Department of Justice investigated reports that people were cheating on a new exam that FBI personnel had to take to show their understanding of a new operations guide. The Department of Justice heard rumors that supervisors were involved in cheating to help their employees pass the test. The government conducted a full investigation and discovered that several methods were used to help people cheat on the test. Some supervisors gave out study guides or answer sheets. Some discussed the questions while the test was being given.

Even police officers have been involved in recent scandals. In Detroit it was reported that test results were being changed on the promotional exams for the police department of Dearborn. When top officers of the police force are being dishonest and breaking policies, it does not bode well for protecting the public.

Teachers have been involved in numerous cheating schemes with standardized tests. Standardized tests are given to students every year to track their progress. Teachers want their students to do well on the tests so their school can keep up with national standards. In some cases, student test scores are also used to judge how well a teacher is teaching. Clearly, there are motivating reasons for

teachers to correct answers on their students' tests. In 2011 up to 178 teachers in Atlanta were accused of participating in planned meetings to change student answer sheets. Not all the teachers were comfortable with these meetings, though. One teacher said that she feared that she would suffer consequences if she refused to go.

With cheating and methods of cheating being so widespread, maybe it is time for change. The logic seems quite clear. When something is broken, then it is time to re-evaluate. Perhaps the exam-giving institutions can look at ways to change the ways students take tests.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1. True or false: Study materials for the civil service exams in ancient China were changed often.**
 - A. true**
 - B. false**
- 2. According to the passage, in ancient China, tiny books, quotes embroidered into shirts, bribery, replacement test takers, and which other method were used for cheating on the civil service exams?**
 - A. passing notes**
 - B. writing on fans**
 - C. sharing answers**
 - D. swapping tests**
- 3. Which fictional news headline best illustrates a reason that people take professional exams?**
 - A. Restaurant Server Takes Exam to Keep Job**
 - B. Massage Therapist Tests for Certification**
 - C. Student Takes MCAT for Entry to High School**
 - D. Janitors Need Professional Exam for Employment**
- 4. The civil service exams of ancient China were an important part of society and still have an impact on life today. Why are professional exams required today, and, in your opinion, what can be done to lessen cheating on exams?**