

TRANS- NATIONAL REPORT

Bridging the science-
practice gap:
Competency development
in psychological
assessment report writing
for I-O psychology
education

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ABOUT TWOPAC BUILDING PRACTICAL SKILLS FOR REAL WORLD IMPACT.

TWOPAC is a European Erasmus+ cooperation project dedicated to transforming how Industrial and Organizational (I/O) Psychology is taught in higher education.

WHY CURRENT TEACHING PRACTICES NEED TO EVOLVE.

While the field is rapidly expanding and organizations increasingly depend on highly trained professionals to address complex challenges in talent management, personnel selection, career development, and psychological risk assessment, university teaching often remains predominantly theory-driven.

Many academic programs continue to rely on classical textbooks and abstract conceptual discussions, leaving students insufficiently prepared for the data-rich, evidence-based, and high-stakes decisions they will face in professional practice.

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Background

Writing clear, accurate psychological assessment reports is one of the most important skills an industrial and organizational (I-O) psychologist can have. Psychological assessment reporting includes the ability to communicate assessment results clearly, accurately, and in a way that supports decision-making. These reports translate psychological data into concrete recommendations that shape decisions such as personnel selection and organizational development. These reports must meet ethical standards and, increasingly, they also have to meet legal requirements: Psychological risk assessment, for example, is mandatory across the EU.

Despite this, research and practice consistently point to a gap between what university programs teach and what employers expect. Many psychology programs in Europe still rely heavily on textbook-based teaching, while report writing is a practical, applied skill that is harder to develop in a lecture hall. As a result, practitioners often continue to rely on intuition rather than evidence-based methods and validated instruments in areas such as personnel selection or talent management.

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GOALS

Bringing together perspectives from students, lecturers, and practitioners in Austria, Germany, and Romania, this report addresses three core questions:

1. What are the key competencies required for psychological assessment reporting?
2. What gaps exist between current teaching practices and industry demands?
3. How can teaching and learning in this area be improved?

The aim is to turn the answers into practical, evidence-based recommendations for university programs — developed by listening directly to the people closest to the problem: Students, lecturers, and practitioners.

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Methods

To answer these questions, we conducted focus group discussions with students, lecturers, and practitioners. Focus groups let people describe their experiences in their own words and build on each other's points. Three features shaped the design:

- **Three viewpoints:** We spoke separately with students, lecturers, and practitioners, since each group experiences the problem differently.
- **Three countries:** Sessions were run in Austria, Germany, and Romania, allowing a comparison across different educational systems and labor markets.
- **Systematic data analysis:** Interviews were carefully analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2017), a widely used and transparent way of identifying recurring patterns in qualitative data.

HOW THE SESSIONS WORKED

Each session lasted 80–120 minutes and took place either in person or online, depending on logistics. Every session followed the same structure: A welcome and introduction to the project, followed by a discussion guided by a set of core questions and a closing summary that gave participants the chance to add or correct anything. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from everyone, and sessions were audio- or video-recorded.

PARTICIPANTS

Nine focus groups were conducted in total, with 40 participants. In each country, one focus group was held with students, one with lecturers, and one with practitioners.

Participants were recruited through cooperation partners in Austria, Germany, and Romania. The final sample included 14 students, 15 lecturers, and 11 practitioners.

Participants by stakeholder group and country

	Austria	Germany	Romania	Total
Students	6	3	5	14
Lecturers	5	5	5	15
Practitioners	4	3	4	11
Total	15	11	14	40

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KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS EMERGED ACROSS THREE CATEGORIES:

1. COMPETENCY DOMAINS
2. MAIN GAPS IN TEACHING
3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING

These findings were largely consistent across Austria, Germany, and Romania, pointing to a shared, cross-national challenge and suggesting that the findings could apply broadly across European I/O psychology programs.

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COMPETENCY DOMAINS

We identified ten competency domains for psychological assessment report writing:

1. Theoretical knowledge
2. Methodological skills
3. Effective communication
4. Organizational understanding
5. Ethical and legal frameworks
6. Project management
7. Soft skills
8. Cognitive abilities
9. Digital literacy & AI
10. Theory application

THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

Participants across all groups agreed that a solid grounding in psychological theory is not just an academic requirement but a practical tool. A strong grasp of theories, models, and concepts was seen as essential for analyzing situations, making decisions, and developing interventions. This knowledge sets psychologists apart from other professionals. As one practitioner put it,

“[t]here are certain things that [students and graduates] simply need to know. There are knowledge components, and the curriculum should already be adjusted to include them.” (ATP4, 151)

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METHODOLOGICAL SKILLS

Participants highlighted the importance of holistic methodological, statistical, and psychometric knowledge. A key challenge is seen in integrating information from multiple sources, such as tests, interviews, and observations, into one coherent report. A Romanian practitioner, for example, stressed that graduates need

“strong knowledge of statistics, so that they understand what underlies all the tests and questionnaires.” (ROP2, 50)

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication skills were described as essential in both written and oral form. Participants emphasized that communication must be adapted to the target group, whether speaking with management, workers, or other stakeholders. While report writing remains important, oral communication (e.g., moderation, consultation) is increasingly relevant. This shift was linked to the growing use of AI in report writing.

“It makes a difference whether I'm talking to top management, where I have to be more neutral, factual, and use numbers, or if I'm talking to, let's say, construction workers.” (ATL2, 57)

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ORGANISATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

Participants stressed the need to understand organizational structures, goals, language, and culture and emphasized aligning psychological interventions with organizational goals. Participants also stressed the importance of thinking systemically and to understand

“the organization as a living organism rather than just a structure.” (ATP3, 144)

ETHICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Participants discussed the importance of ethical standards and legal requirements, including integrity, transparency, privacy, and awareness of legal frameworks. This was especially relevant in relation to psychological risk assessment, where compliance with legal requirements matters alongside ethical practice. An Austrian practitioner insisted students

“need to know what the legal framework conditions are.” (ATP1, 7)

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management was seen as useful. However, some participants were unsure whether it should be taught within university curricula.

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SOFT SKILLS

Self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence were seen as important for professional effectiveness. Perspective-taking, empathy, and active listening were also highlighted as important for working well with others. Objectivity was seen as crucial, albeit difficult to achieve.

“If we are not very well trained [...] it is possible to have certain biases that influence and distort what we write.” (ROS2, 184)

COGNITIVE ABILITIES

Analytical thinking, critical evaluation, and reflective thinking were identified as key cognitive abilities. Participants linked these abilities to scientific thinking and to the need to question assumptions carefully. They also connected these abilities to AI, noting that people need to be able to assess and interpret AI-generated outputs critically. As one practitioner stressed, students need

“the ability to analyze, i.e., the ability to put your eyes, ears, and mind together.” (GERP3, 26)

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DIGITAL LITERACY & AI

Digital literacy was described as increasingly important. This included general IT skills, understanding human-technology-organization interactions, and critically evaluating AI-outputs. Participants stressed that AI should be used consciously rather than blindly. They also noted that students need to understand what these tools can and cannot do, particularly because

“in three years (...), AI will have completely transformed these workflows.” (ATP1, 195)

THEORY APPLICATION

Participants emphasized that theory alone is not enough. Psychological knowledge must be translated into practice, including in relation to diagnostic tools and communication with stakeholders. Participants agreed that theoretical knowledge only matters if graduates can actually use it and, for example, translate models into language that clients and employees understand, and apply knowledge to real situations. As one practitioner put it:

“Theory is one thing. But how do I explain it to an employee or a manager? That's what I needed.” (ATP1, 132)

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GAPS IN TEACHING

WHAT ARE THE GAPS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY DEMANDS?

“I would probably be very scared to apply my psychological knowledge now, because [...] I actually have no idea how that works.”
(ATS3, 47)

Students, lecturers, and practitioners all pointed to too **little practical application** in psychology curricula. Students often felt unprepared for real-world work, while lecturers described difficulties in combining theory and practice within existing course structures. Practitioners also observed weak applied competencies and stressed the need for more hands-on experience.

Participants described a **lack of confidence** among some psychology students and graduates. Austrian students in particular expressed anxiety about applying psychological knowledge in practice, while Romanian students appeared more confident. Practitioners noted that graduates can have substantial knowledge yet still come across as insecure. Lecturers also pointed to the need for students to learn how to present and advocate for their competencies.

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TEACHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Dedicated modules

Participants recommended dedicated modules or courses and more time for psychological assessment and report writing in curricula.

Holistic learning

Lecturers in particular recommended holistic courses that guide students through a full assessment process, from beginning to end.

Clear structure

Students want clearer course structures, including explicit learning objectives and clearer explanations of what each session is meant to achieve.

Feedback

Students emphasized the value of continuous feedback from lecturers and peers. They saw this as important for improving reports and understanding how to develop further.

Materials

Participants suggested that teaching would benefit from more comprehensive materials, including sample reports, case studies, recordings, and instrument overviews.

TEACHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Teaching methods

Participants recommended more active teaching methods such as case studies, simulations, role-playing, discussions, and real-world projects. They also argued that teaching should move away from a purely lecture-based format.

Practical experience

Practical experience was seen as essential. Participants supported partnerships with practitioners and organizations, as well as fieldwork, guest lectures, and practice-based assignments.

Digital tools

Digital tools were generally welcomed, especially when used to support rather than replace in-person learning. Participants also supported teaching students to use AI critically and with awareness of its limits.

Self-efficacy

Participants recommended learning experiences that help students feel capable. Practical application and constructive feedback were seen as important for confidence.

Career orientation

Students and lecturers recommend clearer guidance about career paths and job opportunities.

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TAKE-AWAYS

Assessment report writing is a core skill for I/O psychologists, but university teaching currently does not fully prepare graduates. We conducted nine focus groups with students, lecturers, and practitioners across Austria, Germany, and Romania to identify key competencies required in practice, main gaps between current teaching practices and industry demands, and targeted recommendations for teaching.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- **Ten competency domains emerged:** Theoretical knowledge, methodological skills, communication, organizational understanding, ethics and legal knowledge, project management, soft skills, cognitive abilities, digital literacy, and the ability to apply theory in practice. Methodological integration and communication stood out as especially important.
- **Two gaps dominate:** A divide between theory and practice, and underdeveloped student confidence.
- **Ten concrete recommendations followed:** Dedicated report-writing modules, holistic learning experiences, clear course structure, continuous feedback, richer learning materials, active learning, real-world practice, thoughtful use of digital tools and AI, confidence-building, and career guidance.

PROJECT PARTNERS



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KOMIT

