Thematic Apperception Test
is a projective test consisting of a series of pictures in which the examinee is requested to create a story about the picture.

method of revealing to the trained interpreter some of the dominant drives, emotions, sentiments, complexes and conflicts of personality.
History:

- It was conceptualized by Henry Murray and Christina Morgan on 1935 but more fully elaborated in 1938 and 1943.
- It was believed that material derived from the test could serve as the X-ray of personality.
- By 1950, several books and more than 100 articles were published.
By 1971, more than 1,800 articles had been written based on the TAT.

The test is still not considered to have achieved a degree of comparable degree of standardization to MMPI and WAIS.

No clear agreement on scoring and interpretation system.

Varying methods of administration regarding number, sequence and types of cards that are given.

Yet it ranks as 6th most frequently used test by clinical psychologists.

Researchers were dissatisfied because it was not applicable for all populations like children, the elderly and minorities.
Several TAT-type tests have been designed to study specific problem areas.

Rosenzweig Picture Frustration Study to understand how people perceive and deal with frustration.

The Stress Tolerance Test to be used in understanding how a subject responds to stressful scenes of combat.
Murray’s Theory of Personality

- How individuals react with their environment
- How they are affected by their external forces
- How their attitudes, needs and values influence their reaction to world
- Murray developed a list of 28 needs
He developed a list of 24 possible forces in person’s environment named as press.

He gave the concept of thema “a pattern of related needs and press” derived from early infantile experiences.
General Conditions:

- to be administered in an interpersonal setting.
- TAT materials consists of 20 cards on which ambiguous pictures are presented.
  - ”M” for males, “F” for females
  - ”B” for boys, “G” for girls
  - ”BM” for boys/males, “GF” for girls/females.
The selection of cards may be idiosyncratic to the patient’s presenting problem.

**SEQUENTIAL NUMBERING SYSTEM (SNS)**

a) administered to *females and males* in exact order: 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 6BM, 7GF, 8BM, 9GF, 10, 13MF.

b) administered to *any males*: 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 6BM, 7BM, 11, 12M, 13MF.

c) administered to *any females*: 1, 2, 3, 3BM, 4, 6GF, 7GF, 9GF, 11, 13GF.
Keiser and Prather (1990) specified Murray’s frequent cards.

- 10 most frequent cards: 1, 2, 3BM, 3GF, 4, 5, 6BM, 6GF, 8BM and 8GF.

During administration, the subject should be seated beside the examiner with his or her chair turned away.
Instructions:
The examiner will show some pictures one at a time, and the subject will be making up as dramatic a story as he/she can for each picture card. 50 minutes for 10 pictures. The following story structure must be obtained:
a) current situation;
   • what is happening at the moment?

b) thoughts and feelings of the character(s);
   • what the characters are feeling and thinking?

c) preceding events;
   • what has led up to the event shown in the picture?

d) outcome;
   • what was the outcome?
Procedures:

- **TIME**
  
  time measured should begin when the picture is first presented and end when the subject begins his or her story.

- **RECORDING**
  
  a subject’s complete responses should be recorded, along with any **noteworthy behavioral observations**: exclamation, pauses, blushing, degree of involvement, and change in voice inflection.
QUESTIONING and INQUIRY
to produce an unhampered and free-flow of
the subject’s fantasy material.

ORDER OF PRESENTATION
usually, the cards should be administered
according to their sequential numbering
system.
Scoring:

The Psychological Corporation

For each of the scoring categories, practitioners should abbreviate their observations about the person. In some sections, practitioners are asked to indicate the levels of importance or strength for the per by putting one check (mere presence of characteristics), two checks (moderate) or three checks (strong). The entire scoring and interpretation procedure typically takes a half-hour.
H.A Murray, 1943 scoring the TAT involves evaluating the following five different aspects of the stories:

- **The Hero.** Scoring for the hero involves identifying who is central character(s) in the story.

- **Need of the Hero.** For Murray, it was also critical to identify the needs, motives and desire of the hero.

- **Identifying the presses.** A press refer to any important environmental factor that may influence or interfere with the need of the hero.

  Example: (parents or boss), (the lock on the door is broken)
Scoring for themes. Scoring for themes in TAT stories involves noting the nature of the interplay and conflict between the needs and presses, the types of emotion elicited by this conflict, and the way the conflict is resolved.

Scoring for outcome. Scoring for the outcome of the story involves analyzing how the stories end by noting a happy versus unhappy ending and assessing the extent to which the ending is controlled by the strengths of the hero and forces in the environment.
Interpretation:

Nomothetic and Idiographic.

1. **Nomothetic Interpretation** refers to the practice of establishing norms for answers from subjects in specific age, gender, racial, or educational level groups and then measuring a given subject’s responses against those norms.

2. **Idiographic Interpretation** refers to evaluating the unique features of the subject’s view of the world and relationships. Most psychologists would classify the TAT as better suited to idiographic than nomothetic interpretations.
In interpreting the responses of the TAT, the examiners typically focus their attention on one of the three (3) areas:

- The content of the stories that the subject tells;
- The feeling or the tone of the stories;
- The subject’s behavior apart from responses. These behavior may include: Verbal Remarks (e.g. comments about feeling stressed by situation or not being good story teller) as well as Nonverbal Actions or Signs (e.g. difficulties making an eye contact with the examiner, etc.)
The 3 Levels of Interpretations suggest by Bellak & Abram, 1997 are:

- **Descriptive Level** - it is the mere repeat of the story
- **Interpretative Level** - It extends the descriptive level by an alteration of it [if one does the X, then the outcome will be Y.].
- **Diagnostic Level** - It is the further extension that an interference is made about the client.
In Example Given:

PICTURE 1

- **Descriptive level** (the boy is practicing to increase his competence.)
- **Interpretative level** (If one practice, then he or she will improve.)
- **Diagnostic level** (The client has a high need for achievement with a high level of self-efficacy.)
Results:

The results of the TAT must be interpreted in the context of the subject’s personal history, age, sex, level of education, occupation, racial or ethnic identification first language, and other characteristics that may be important.
The results of the Thematic Apperception Test are difficult to generalize. The results are often subjective and do not use any formal type of scoring system. However, a close analysis of the stories told by the subject normally gives the tester a decent idea of the traits mentioned above (personality, emotional control, and attitudes towards aspects of everyday life).
Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

**Picture 1:**

A boy is sitting at a table looking at a violin placed on the table in front of him.
Picture 2: Country scene with a woman holding a book in the foreground. In the background, a man is working a field while a woman watches.
General Discussion

- This is the only card in the series that presents the group scene and gives information relating to how the individual deals with the challenge of people living together.
**Picture 3BM**: A boy is huddled next to a couch. On the floor next to him is an ambiguous object that could be a set of keys or a revolver.
General Discussion

- This is identified as one of the most useful pictures for it concerns themes of guilt, depression, aggression, and impulsive control.
  - For example, if the object is described as a gun, is it used or intended to be used for: *Intra-aggression*- the subject is going to use it to damage oneself, or *Extra-aggression*- the subject has used it or going to use it to damage or harm another person.

- This picture is particularly important for depressed patients, whether male or female, because it can reveal important dynamics regarding the manner in which the depression developed and how it is currently being maintained.
Picture 3GF: A woman is standing next to an open door with one hand grabbing the side of the door and the other holding her downcast face.
The same general trend that hold for Picture 3BM are also true here, in that both pictures tend to bring out depressive feelings.
Picture 4: A woman is grabbing the shoulders of a man who is turning away from her.
General Discussion

- This picture typically elicits a good deal of information relating to the feelings and attitudes surrounding male-female relationship.
Picture 5: A woman is looking into a room from the threshold of a door.
General Discussion

This picture often reveals information surrounding attitudes about the subjects mother in her role of observing and possibly judging behavior. It is important to note how the woman is perceived and how the situation is resolved.

This card elicits paranoid fears of attack.
Picture 6BM: An elderly woman is standing parallel to a window. Behind her is a younger man with his face down. He is holding onto his hat.
General Discussion

It usually proves to be rich source of information regarding attitudes and feelings toward their mother or maternal figures in general.
Picture 6GF: A young woman sitting on the edge of a sofa looks back over her shoulder at an older man with a pipe in his mouth who seems to be addressing her.
This card was originally intended to be the female counterpart to Picture 6BM, and it was hoped that it, too, would elicit attitudes and feelings toward paternal figures. However, because the two figures are often seen as being about an equal age, the card frequently does not accomplish its intended purpose. When clear father-daughter plots are not discussed, the picture reflects the subject’s style and approach to instructed heterosexual relationship.
Picture 7BM: An older man is looking at a younger man, who appears to be peering into space.
The picture deals with hierarchical personal relationships and usually takes the form of an older, more experienced man interacting with a younger, less experienced one. Thus, the card can clearly show how the subject deals with external demands and attitudes toward authority.
Picture 7GF: A young girl is seated on a couch and is holding a doll in her hands. Behind her is an older woman who appears to be reading to her out of a book.
General Discussion

When older women are the subjects, the picture often elicits feelings and attitudes toward children. Because both figures are looking away, either figure is sometimes perceived as rejecting the other. Thus, the card often elicits negative feelings and interactions, and it is important to note how these feelings are resolved, expressed, or avoided.
Picture 8BM: A young boy in the foreground is staring directly out of the picture. In the background is a hazy image of two men performing surgery on a patient who is lying down.
General Discussion

The picture can be seen as a thinly veiled depiction of a young man’s oedipal conflicts, with concomitant feelings of castration anxiety and hostility. Thus, it is important to note what feelings the boy or the other characters in the story have toward the older man performing the surgery.
Picture 8GF: A woman is sitting on a chair staring into space with her chin resting in her hand.
This picture is difficult to generalize about. Typically, it produces somewhat shallow stories of a contemplative nature.
Picture 9BM: Four men in a field are lying against one another.
Picture 9GF: A woman in the foreground is standing behind a tree, observing another woman who is running along a beach below.
Picture 10 : One person is holding his or her head against another person’s shoulder. The gender of the two persons is not defined.
Picture 11: On a road in a chasm, several figures are proceeding along a path toward a bridge. Above them and against the side of a cliff appears to be a dragon.
Picture 12M: A man with his hand raised is standing above a boy who is lying on a bed with his eyes closed.
Picture 12F: A portrait of a woman is in the foreground; an older woman holding her chin is in the background.
Picture 12BG: A country setting depicts a tree, with a rowboat pulled up next to it. No human figures are present.
Picture 13MF: A young man is standing in the foreground with his head in his arms. In the background is a woman lying in a bed.
Picture 13B: A boy is sitting in the doorway of a log cabin.
Picture 13G: A girl is climbing a flight of stairs.
Picture 14: A person is silhouetted against a window.
Picture 15: A man is standing among tombstones with his hands clasped together.
Picture 17BM: A naked man is climbing up (or down) a rope.
Picture 17GF: A female is standing on a bridge over water. Above the bridge is a tall building, and behind the building the sun is shining from behind clouds.
Picture 18BM: A man dressed in a long coat is being grabbed from behind. Three hands are visible.
Picture 18GF: A woman has her hands around the throat of another woman. In the background is a flight of stairs.
Picture 19: A surreal depiction of clouds and a home covered with snow.
Picture 20: A hazy, nighttime picture of a man leaning against a lamppost.
Reliability

- The TAT involve complex, meaningful verbal material. Because of the complexity of this material, exact quantitative analysis is difficult. This issue is further complicated because there are so many different scoring systems. Reliability (and validity) for one system may not mean that adequate reliability will be present for another system.
Interscorer reliability across different scoring systems has generally been found to be good, ranging between .37 and .90, with most reports .85 or higher.
Validity

- Reviews of the TAT’s validity have shown wide variability
- One reviewer might be impressed by a correlation of .25 while another sees it as highly deficient
- Research done on it likewise allows readers to project their biases, needs, and expectations onto the TAT
Advantages

- Offers access to the covert and deeper structures of an individual’s personality
- Less susceptibility to faking because the purpose of projective techniques is usually disguised
- Intrinsically interesting and nonthreatening
Disadvantages

- difficulty establishing adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliability
- the effectiveness of the technique is often more dependent on the clinician’s individual skill than on the quality
- sensitive to situational variables such as mood, stress, sleep deprivation, and differences in instruction