

# *Separated and Suffering?*

## How to Tell If Your Long Distance Relationship is at Risk

Millions of couples worldwide must deal with separation from the ones they love. These long distance relationships or “LDRs” create unique difficulties that can result in a frustrating struggle for many couples. While research has shown that LDRs do not break up or divorce any more frequently than more traditional relationships they can still take a toll on those involved. Couples whose relationships will survive the separation must learn new strategies proven to make a difference.

The Separation Inventory is a brief questionnaire developed by Dr. Gregory Guldner, the Director of the Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships and a leading authority on LDRs. The Separation Inventory will help determine how difficult an LDR will be for you, and will help pinpoint areas within yourself and within your relationship that may be particularly at risk from the separation. If you’d like, you can then read more about how to bolster each problem area in *Long Distance Relationships: The Complete Guide* by Dr. Guldner, available from [www.atlasbooks.com](http://www.atlasbooks.com) or fine bookstores everywhere.

The Separation Inventory is divided into two parts. The first part you take and score by yourself. It looks at your personality, your coping styles, and the demographics of your relationship (how far apart you are, how often you can visit, etc.). The second part requires that both you and your partner answer some questions separately. It looks at expectations and attitudes about separation.

### **The Separation Inventory: Part I**

The Separation Inventory: Part I consists of 25 items, each with three possible choices. Circle the choice that best fits you.

1. The distance separating you and your partner is/will be:
  - a. Less than 150 miles.
  - b. Between 150 and 900 miles.
  - c. Over 900 miles.
2. How long do you expect to be in an LDR prior to being able to live closer to one another?
  - a. Less than a year.
  - b. Between a year and three years.
  - c. More than three years or for an unknown amount of time.
3. How would you rank you and your partner’s combined financial situation?
  - a. We’re on a tight budget.
  - b. Not fantastic but we have enough spending money.
  - c. No problem; we have plenty of extra cash.
4. Do you and your partner have easy access to email?
  - a. No.
  - b. Yes, but it’s difficult to access it every day.
  - c. Yes, and we can both access it every day.
5. If the LDR was simply too difficult for one of you, could you move closer to one another?
  - a. Yes, either one of us could move to meet the other one.
  - b. Yes, one of us could move.
  - c. No, neither of us could move.

6. How *flexible* is your schedule with regard to being able to see one another?
  - a. We both have great control over our schedules. Scheduling trips will be no problem.
  - b. We have some control over our schedules but not as much as we'd like.
  - c. We have very little control over our schedules. We'll find the time to see each other, but it will be quite difficult.
7. How *predictable* is your schedule with regard to being able to see one another and talk to one another on the telephone?
  - a. We generally know exactly when we'll be able to see or talk to one another again.
  - b. We often know when we'll be able to see or talk to one another again, but sometimes there are unexpected changes.
  - c. We can rarely predict accurately when we'll be able to see or talk to one another again.
8. How would you describe your attitude toward talking on the telephone?
  - a. I could (and do) spend hours on the telephone.
  - b. I do okay for about 30 minutes or so, but then get tired.
  - c. I rarely know what to say on the telephone and prefer to talk as little as possible.
9. In the past month how many cards or letters have you written to anyone?
  - a. None.
  - b. One.
  - c. More than one.
10. Close your eyes and imagine that your partner is standing a few feet from you. Picture his or her face. Now imagine him or her saying how nice you look. Finally, imagine him or her giving you a warm hug. Do this now. Which of the following seemed most real (which was the easiest to imagine)?
  - a. I could most easily *hear* my partner's voice.
  - b. I could most easily *see* my partner's face.
  - c. I could most easily *feel* my partner's hug.
11. How concerned are you that your partner may have an affair while you are separated?
  - a. I think it's very likely that he/she could have an affair.
  - b. I think it's possible but not very likely.
  - c. I think it's virtually impossible.
12. How concerned are you that you may have an affair?
  - a. I think it is very likely.
  - b. It's possible but pretty unlikely.
  - c. I'm not concerned at all.
13. Over the past week, how many days have you felt sad or blue?
  - a. None or one.
  - b. Two or three.
  - c. More than three.
14. How would you describe the advantages of your LDR?
  - a. An LDR, while difficult sometimes, is the best choice right now for my career/education.
  - b. I think my LDR will help me focus on my career/education, but I probably could have done as well if my partner were living closer.
  - c. I don't think an LDR will help my career/education in any way.
15. How would you rate your self-esteem?
  - a. Better than most.
  - b. About the same as most.
  - c. Lower than most.

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16. How often do you think about your partner?
- Constantly. I often find it difficult to concentrate on my work because I'm thinking about my partner.
  - A lot, but it never seems to interrupt my work/study.
  - Not very often. Probably several times a day.
17. How likely do you think it is that your relationship will survive the physical separation?
- 20% chance of making it.
  - 80% chance of making it.
  - 99.9% chance of making it.
18. Do you feel that your partner acknowledges and appreciates your efforts to maintain your long-distance relationship?
- My partner often does not realize how much effort I put into making the relationship work.
  - My partner usually recognizes and appreciates my efforts but sometimes fails to realize how hard I work at it.
  - My partner almost always acknowledges and appreciates my efforts to make this relationship work.
19. How do you view the physical separation between you and your partner?
- I see it as a potential crisis in our relationship that will take a great deal of work to maneuver through successfully.
  - I see it as an obstacle that we'll overcome with our efforts to make it work.
  - I see it as an opportunity for us to grow, both individually and as a couple.
20. Do you currently have a special friend (not including your partner) with whom you can discuss issues about your relationship?
- Yes, and this person is also in an LDR.
  - Yes, but this person is not themselves involved in an LDR.
  - No, I have no one with whom I can easily discuss these things.
21. How would you describe the support for your relationship from your *family*?
- They all seem to encourage me/us and think that an LDR is a good idea.
  - Most encourage the LDR but several think we're crazy.
  - Most think we're crazy for trying an LDR.
22. How would you describe the support network that you have (or will have) while separated?
- I have several friends who could take me to the airport, have lunch, go to a movie, chat about the relationship, etc.
  - I have one or two friends who could do those things.
  - I have no one who could help me out with those things.
23. How would you describe the support for your relationship from your *friends*?
- They all seem to encourage me/us and think that an LDR is a good idea.
  - Most encourage the LDR but several think we're crazy.
  - Most think we're crazy for trying an LDR.
24. How would you describe your relationship with your partner's friends?
- When we get together with each other we often find time to spend with friends.
  - When we get together we usually spend time with just each other, although we could easily get together with friends if we wanted to.
  - My partner's friends don't understand our relationship and we choose not to spend much time with them when we get together.

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25. How often do you feel isolated from the activities of others in your community?

- a. I often find that I'm not included or not welcome in events where I live, and I feel socially isolated much of the time.
- b. I occasionally feel excluded or not welcome in events where I live, and sometimes feel socially isolated.
- c. I rarely feel excluded or not welcome in events where I live, and rarely feel socially isolated.

### **Scoring the Separation Inventory**

The Separation Inventory: Part I gives you four scores: one overall score that we'll discuss below, and three subscores that help pinpoint difficult areas.

First, transfer your answers from the Separation Inventory answer sheet to the Separation Inventory scoring sheet found in the appendix. Now, add all of the point values together to get your total score. Then, add the points for each item in each subscale. This should give you four scores:

- A total score from 0–50
- A demographics score from 0–14
- A personality score from 0–24
- A support score from 0–12

Before I discuss the results, I would like to make an analogy that I've found helpful. Think of your LDR as a complicated aircraft, and you are the pilot. When the plane reaches its cruising altitude, you don't have to pay much attention. In fact you may have the autopilot doing most of the minute-to-minute changes. Yet during landing and takeoff you must focus intensely on what you're doing.

Most of the time is spent cruising and requires little effort. This represents the time away from each other when your attention is, for the most part, focused on issues other than the relationship, such as career and education. Every so often the air traffic controller chimes in with a suggestion, or the plane hits a bit of turbulence and the pilot needs to make a brief adjustment. The pilot must return his or her focus to the plane for a few moments.

Each time you call your partner or get an email or run to the store to find the right "I miss you" card, you are that pilot making some minor adjustments to help keep the relationship on course. Then comes the landing and takeoff, which are similar to the time you actually spend with your partner when you're very focused on the relationship. Unfortunately, for some, there are also the occasional times when the midair collision warning alarm starts screaming, and they find that they have to focus intensely on the relationship, usually with a good helping of butterflies in the stomach.

I mention this analogy to help bring into focus the meaning of your Separation Inventory. Each of the groups below needs to pilot their relationship a little differently.

### **If Your Total Score on Part I of the Separation Inventory Is Between 41–50**

Long-distance relationships pose few difficulties for you. You'll find that while there will be some areas that will give you trouble, as a whole you have an excellent combination of personality, support system, and environment for a long distance relationship. This is the group who pretty much fly on autopilot. It's

unlikely that you'll have to make many adjustments, except for the occasional glance at the instruments and out the window. You won't feel like you'll need to put a great deal of energy into the flight.

### **If Your Total Score on Part I of the Separation**

#### **Inventory Is Between 21–40**

Most people in LDRs fall in this range, and they usually say that while they prefer the LDR to the other available alternatives they do have a difficult time with it. This is the group of people who can benefit the most from assessing their strengths and weaknesses and making an effort to bolster their LDR survival skills. Whether the relationship will flourish or wither with the distance is difficult to say with this group, and depends mostly on the effort of those involved.

Use this information as simply a yellow warning light to signal that you need to be on guard for problems that come with most LDRs. You may need to change some things to make the relationship work. This group doesn't have the luxury of leaving things on autopilot. Keep your hands on the stick and your eyes on the gauges, but stay calm and comfortable. You'll likely have a relatively smooth and pleasant flight.

### **If Your Total Score on Part I of the Separation**

#### **Inventory Is Between 0–20**

Long-distance relationships pose some particularly difficult issues for you. By no means does this mean that your LDR is doomed to failure—it just may take more work than most. As I mentioned for the group above, you should consider this an early warning signal and prepare yourself for the challenge. Buckle your safety belts and wake up the copilot; you'll need to focus on the bumpy ride ahead. But take heart—sometimes the most enjoyable and fulfilling flights are the wild rides (once you've safely landed). You may consider attempting to cut short the flight if you can. Talk with your partner and plan on reevaluating the relationship every few months. Try to change what you can to make this relationship a little easier. Use the Separation Inventory to focus on the areas that seem to need the most help and to change those things that you can. Incidentally, the copilot refers to your partner. Make sure they know that you need them awake and alert in the cockpit.

### **The Separation Inventory: Part II**

Part II of the Separation Inventory is designed to see how well you and your partner's preferences match. There are no right or wrong answers in Part II. Your score as a couple is calculated by looking at the differences between your answer and your partner's answer. The overall score will help decide if this is an area you'll both need to work on. Individual items on which you differ should stimulate discussion between the two of you. One of the themes that will come up again and again in long-distance relationships is that it doesn't matter so much what you decide, as long as you discuss it openly and come to an agreement. Realize that these decisions differ for every couple. You should first answer the questions in Part II yourself. Then, have your partner answer the questions either by email, fax, regular mail, or telephone. Be very careful not to influence your partner's answers if you do this over the telephone. Have them silently write down their answer for each item as they go.

1. Over the next six months, how often, on average, will you visit one another face-to-face?
  - a. Weekly.
  - b. Twice a month.
  - c. Monthly.
  - d. Every other month.
  - e. Once every four months or less.
2. Over the next six months, how often, on average, will you speak to one another on the telephone?
  - a. Daily.
  - b. Every other day.
  - c. Twice a week.
  - d. Once a week.
  - e. Less than once a week.
3. If you were leaving your partner to return home, which of the following would you prefer?
  - a. Saying goodbye at his/her place and taking a taxi or shuttle to the airport.
  - b. Having him/her drive me to the airport, and saying goodbye in the car. (He/she doesn't get out of the car.)
  - c. Having him/her drive me to the airport, and saying goodbye at the curb. (He/she gets out of the car.)
  - d. Having him/her drive me to the airport and stay with me as long as possible before saying goodbye.
4. One night you're watching a program on TV you've been waiting to see all week. The telephone rings right at the most interesting part of the show. You're pretty sure it's your partner calling. (Consider the VCR broken for this question.) You:
  - a. Don't answer the telephone. You'll check your messages after the show.
  - b. Answer the telephone, tell him/her you want to finish watching the show, and you'll call back when it's done.
  - c. Answer the telephone, talk to your partner, and watch TV at the same time.
  - d. Answer the telephone and talk to your partner, missing the rest of the TV show.
5. How long will your geographical separation last before you'll be able to live closer to one another? Your best guess would be:
  - a. Less than 6 months.
  - b. Six months to 1 year.
  - c. Between 1 year and 18 months.
  - d. Between 18 months and 2 years.
  - e. Between 2 and 3 years.
  - f. Between 3 and 4 years.
  - g. More than 4 years.

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6. Your partner calls and casually mentions that she/he had dinner yesterday night with a new friend who turns out to be single and just your partner's type. (Your partner doesn't say this, but you know him or her pretty well.)

How do you feel about this?

- a. I think it's a major mistake to have dinner with someone like this, even casually. I would prefer my partner have nothing to do with this person.
- b. It worries me a lot. I'd prefer my partner only be around this person if they are in a group. Doing things with this person alone is a mistake.
- c. It worries me. I'd prefer my partner not be having dinner with this person, though a business lunch alone with them is probably okay.
- d. It worries me a little. I'm comfortable with my partner having dinner alone with this person, but I'd like to know that they're not spending too much time together.
- e. It doesn't worry me at all. I'm glad my partner has found a friend.

7. You and your partner have not seen one another for four weeks when you get together for a three-day weekend. During this three-day weekend, how much of your time should you spend apart from your partner (for instance, how much time alone or with friends other than your partner)?

- a. I'd prefer that we be together the entire weekend. I'm alone enough most of the time.
- b. I'd like to spend the vast majority of my time with my partner but an hour or two out of the weekend I might spend by myself.
- c. I'd spend most of the time together, but I'd probably take one evening or so (out of three) to spend without my partner.
- d. I enjoy spending time with my partner, but I also need time for myself. I'd probably spend about half of the time without my partner.

8. You and your partner have been away from one another for four weeks.

How soon after you reunite would you like to have sex? (If you and your partner are in a relationship that does not yet include sex, answer the question as if sex was part of your relationship.)

- a. In the airport if we could get away with it.
- b. We'd head home and take care of a couple of necessities (hanging up clothes that don't do well in a suitcase, etc.), but definitely within the hour.
- c. I'd like to have a nice dinner out with my partner, and then head home after a couple of hours.
- d. I need some time to get to know my partner again before sex; probably several hours of talking about what's been happening in our lives, but almost certainly we'd make love the first night.
- e. I need a little longer to become emotionally close to my partner after we've been away. We'd definitely make love at some point but probably not the first night.
- f. Sex is not that important to our relationship. If it happens, great. Otherwise, it's not a big loss.

9. We all face the struggle of balancing our needs for intimacy and autonomy.

Both are very important, but we each value them differently. Which statement sounds most like you?

- a. Autonomy is clearly more important, but intimacy is necessary as well.
- b. They are almost equal, but autonomy is probably more important.
- c. They are almost equal, but intimacy is probably more important.
- d. Intimacy is clearly more important, but autonomy is necessary as well.

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10. You and your partner have been separated for four weeks when you get together for only a single day. You will have to part again tomorrow for three weeks. Which of the following itineraries for the day best suits you?

- a. Drive to a motel, order room service, and hide away from the rest of the world.
- b. Just the two of you go for a walk around the city, have dinner at a fancy restaurant, catch a movie, and then head back home.
- c. Join a couple who are good friends with both you and your partner, have dinner and a movie with them, and then you and your partner head back home.
- d. Call up a group of your friends and go out as a group, catch dinner and a movie as a group, and then head back home.

11. Some couples like to use the telephone and the mail to enhance their sex life while physically separated. What is your opinion about telephone sex and erotic letters? (Note: telephone sex refers to fantasizing with your partner over the telephone, *not* the 1-900 numbers.)

- a. I'm very comfortable with the idea and plan on frequent telephone sex and the occasional erotic letter.
- b. I'm a little uncomfortable with the idea, but I'd be willing to try it if my partner was.
- c. I could send erotic letters without much difficulty, but I don't think telephone sex is for me.
- d. I don't think either telephone sex or erotic letters would work for me.

12. Some people place more importance on writing and receiving letters than do others. Which statement best fits you?

- a. I write several letters a week and expect to receive at least a letter a week from my partner.
- b. I enjoy letters and hope to write and receive at least one a month.
- c. I'm not a letter writer, but I'll probably send a card once in a while and expect the same from my partner.
- d. I much prefer the telephone and will only send a card or letter on special occasions.

13. You are flying in to see your partner after a four-week separation. Your flight arrives at rush hour, and getting to the airport, as well as trying to park, is rather difficult. Which of the following would you prefer?

- a. I'd just as soon catch a shuttle or taxi home so that my partner doesn't have the hassle of traffic and parking.
- b. I'd have my partner pick me up at the curbside of the airport so that they don't have to hassle with parking.
- c. I'd prefer my partner meet me inside the terminal. I'd do the same for them.

14. How often would you like to discuss issues or problems that come up in the relationship?

- a. I want to have routine planned discussions, even if there aren't any obvious issues or problems, so that nothing big surprises us.
- b. I want to have daily or weekly discussions if there is an ongoing issue that we're trying to resolve.
- c. I want to have at least monthly discussions if there is an ongoing issue that we're trying to resolve.
- d. I want to have a discussion about once every three to four months, but the rest of the time things will work themselves out.
- e. I don't want any planned discussions; things will just work themselves out.

## Scoring Part II of the Separation Inventory

Part II is simple to score. A score sheet can be found below. Assign each of the letters a numerical value: a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, d = 4, e = 5, f = 6. Then, compare your partner's and your own answer for each question, and subtract the smaller number from the larger. If you both answered the question the same, then the score for that question is 0. For example, if you answered "a" and your partner answered "c" your score for that question would be 2 ( $3 - 1 = 2$ .) Add the score for each of the 14 items. This will give you a subtotal of between 0 and 50. Now subtract this subtotal from 50 for your final score for Part II.

### *Interpreting Your Score on Parts I and II of the Separation Inventory*

You now should have the three subscores of Part I: *Demographics*, *Personality*, and *Support*, along with your score for Part II that looks at *Relationship* aspects. Below, you'll find the *Separation Inventory Scoring Circle*, a circle divided into four quadrants, representing each of the four areas mentioned. Place an X on the dotted line in each quadrant corresponding to your score on that section of the Separation Inventory. Now draw a circle that connects the Xs. You should note that the circles for you and your partner will be different, because Part I of the inventory should be taken separately by each of you. However, your relationship score will be the same for both of you.

The larger your circle, the less difficult the LDR will be for you. Conversely, if your circle is very small, you'll need to work harder on this relationship than you might have expected. Most people find that they do not have a perfectly round circle, but that some areas are more collapsed than others. The areas where the circle tightens toward the center are the areas on which you need to concentrate the most. You may find that more than one area needs work.

By adding all four of your scores (personality, demographics, social support, and relationship) you will have a number between 0 and 100. This is your total score for the Separation Inventory. You can use this number as a more global measure of where your LDR stands. By taking the Separation Inventory every few months you can determine if your relationship is heading in the right direction (increasing score) or if it needs more focused effort (decreasing score).

If you'd like to learn more about long distance relationships you can go to the website for the Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships at [www.longdistancerelationships.net](http://www.longdistancerelationships.net) or you can read *Long Distance Relationships: The Complete Guide* available from [www.atlasbooks.com](http://www.atlasbooks.com) and fine bookstores everywhere.

**Appendix: Score Sheets for Part I of the Separation Inventory**

Instructions: Each question on the Separation Inventory has a value of 0, 1, or 2. Locate each question along the left-hand side. Locate the column that corresponds to your answer to that question, either A, B, or C. Circle the number that corresponds to the answer for that question. For example, if you answered “B” on item 2, you would circle the number “1” located under the “B” across from the item number 2. Then add each of the items together to obtain the subscores, and then a total score.

Item Number	Your Answer		
	A	B	C
1)	2	1	0
2)	2	1	0
3)	0	1	2
4)	0	1	2
5)	2	1	0
6)	2	1	0
7)	2	1	0
Total	_____ (Demographics Subscore)		
8)	2	1	0
9)	0	1	2
10)	2	1	0
11)	0	1	2
12)	0	1	2
13)	2	1	0
14)	2	1	0
15)	2	1	0
16)	0	1	2
17)	0	1	2
18)	0	1	2
19)	0	1	2
Total	_____ (Personality Subscore)		
20)	2	1	0
21)	2	1	0
22)	2	1	0
23)	2	1	0
24)	2	1	0
25)	0	1	2
Total	_____ (Support Subscore)		
<b>Demographics</b>	_____		<b>(0–14)</b>
<b>Personality</b>	_____		<b>(0–24)</b>
<b>Support</b>	_____		<b>(0–12)</b>
<b>Total (of all items)</b>	_____		<b>(0–50)</b>

## Separation Inventory–Part II

### Answer Sheet

Instructions: Write down your answer next to the corresponding question below.

Then write in your partner's answers under the corresponding column. Convert the

letters to numbers with a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, d = 4, e = 5, and f = 6. For each item,

subtract the larger number from the smaller and write this result under the column

*Item Score*. Add all of the numbers in the *Item Score* column for a subtotal. Subtract

this number from 50 for a total score. For details see pages 23 and 24.

Question Number	My Answer	My Partner's Answer	Item Score
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____
6	_____	_____	_____
7	_____	_____	_____
8	_____	_____	_____
9	_____	_____	_____
10	_____	_____	_____
11	_____	_____	_____
12	_____	_____	_____
13	_____	_____	_____
14	_____	_____	_____

**Subtotal** \_\_\_\_\_ (add all of the item scores)

**Subtract Subtotal from 50 to Calculate Total Score**

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_ (0–50)

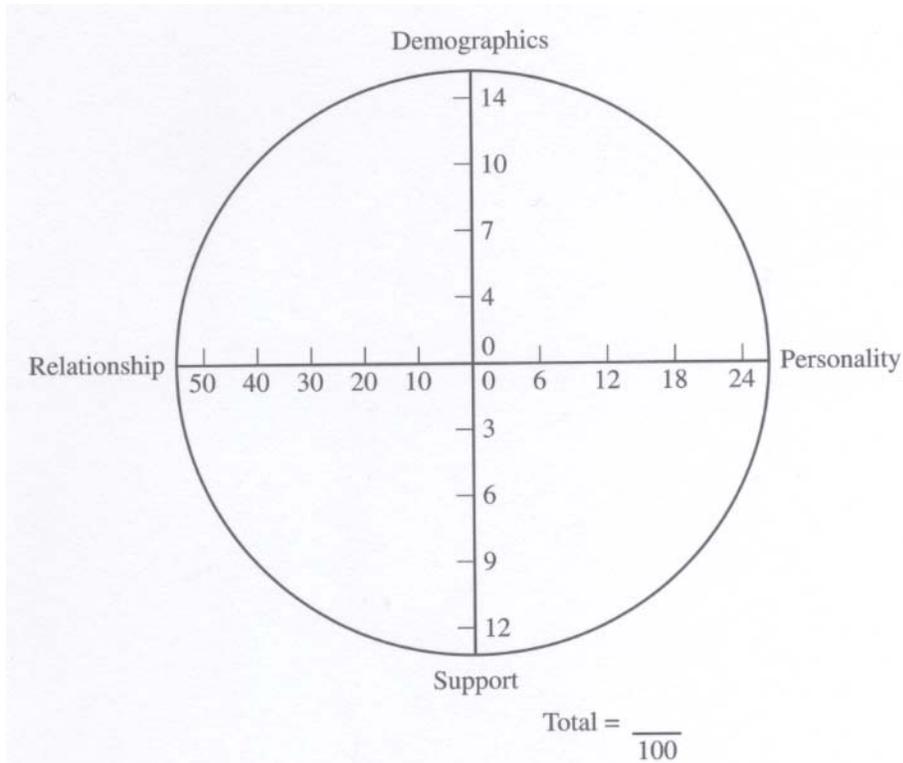


Figure 1. The Separation Inventory Scoring Circle

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