

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR®

'16 different ways of being normal'

This article may be especially helpful for those about to explore their MBTI-preferences for the first time, seek to be reminded of some of the principles or, towards the end, may want to know a little more of its richness.

It covers:

- **Background**
- **Applications**
- **The basics**
- **Finding our 'true type'**
- **Sample book-list**
- **Questions often asked**
- **Type development** (only for the enthusiast!)
- **Under stress?**
- **What may persuade us?**

See also [Short profiles of the 16 Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Types](#) for more detailed information.

BACKGROUND

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®) is reported to be more widely used to describe and understand our behavioural preferences than any other psychometric tool. It is almost certainly the most widely researched and best validated, and at least 5 million people worldwide are said to undertake it every year.

Based on Carl Gustav Jung's *Psychological Types*, it was developed by Katharine Cook Briggs (1875 – 1968) and her daughter, Isobel Briggs Myers (1897 – 1980), over more than 60 years of painstaking and detailed research which continues to this day.

APPLICATIONS

Knowledge of our innate preferences can significantly aid self-understanding in many aspects of our lives; for example:

- learning from or teaching others,
- negotiating, influencing or being influenced,
- managing or being managed,
- communicating and advocating,
- leading, and envisioning,
- problem solving and deciding,
- team-playing,
- entertaining and being entertained,
- relationship building and caring for others,
- working at our best, coaching and mentoring,
- acting under pressure,
and much more!

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Note that the MBTI® does not aim to predict future capability or suitability, for example in a job or relationship, and should not be used for this purpose.

It can however illuminate our probable preferences which might suggest both particular strengths and areas of potential development. in a wide variety of situations.

THE BASICS

The MBTI® can offer a rich understanding to illuminate and inform our own behaviour, if used sensibly, ethically and responsibly.

The four preferences described by MBTI are:

Extraversion (E)	or	Introversion (I)
Sensing (S)	or	iNtuition (N)
Thinking (T)	or	Feeling (F)
Judging (J)	or	Perceiving (P)

Carl Jung's theory suggests that while we may need to explore the attributes of *both* our 'E' and 'I', 'S' and 'N', 'T' and 'F', and 'J' and 'P' for healthy psychological development, only *one* of each will be our 'innate preference'. But, note: no preference is 'better' than the any other? – just different.

The sixteen possible combinations of these preferences can produce significantly different profiles (see separately for more information), which are known by their initial letters as:

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ	'Decisive Introverts'
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP	'Adaptable Introverts'
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP	'Adaptable Extroverts'
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ	'Decisive Extroverts'

Extraversion (E) – Introversion (I)

Extraverts tend to have a preference first to explore their 'outer world' of other people and their ideas, from whom to draw their energy and inspiration, and to share their thoughts, hopes and concerns. In contrast, Introverts tend to prefer first to go 'inside themselves', from which to draw energy, to reflect and to consider. 'I's may well then go out into to the outer world to test their conclusions afterwards; 'E's may well subsequently reflect privately on what their outer world has told them. But the theory suggests that only one of these will be a true and natural preference, given a free choice and no social pressures.

Research in the UK reported by Oxford Psychological Press suggests that a small but noticeable majority of women will report an 'E' preference, and a smaller majority of men will report an 'I' preference.

Sensing (S) – iNtuition (N)

This is the information-gathering function, known as the 'perceiving function'.

Sensing types tend to prefer to focus on the concrete past and the here and now, of what they have seen, heard, felt, tasted and smelt – and all the other information provided from our vast array of physical senses. With this Sensing preference, the focus tends to be on the detail, the specifics, the practicalities and the present. Past events may also most commonly be described in strict, time-ordered, detail. Conversely, Intuitive types, perhaps not very helpfully described as such, tend to gather information through patterns, relationships, themes and trends, often with a focus more on the future, consequences and possibilities, rather than the detail and the present.

More people across the world appear to report a Sensing preference to Intuition, and in the UK, the proportion of women preferring Sensing as their 'information gathering' function appears to be even larger than men.

Thinking (T) – Feeling (F)

This is the decision-making function and complements the information-gathering function described above. It is known as the 'judging function'. The use of this function without equally healthy development of an information-gathering function, can lead to prejudice and ill-informed opinion. Equally, the lack of development in this decision-making function can lead to an inability to reach decisions and conclusions, or even to form an opinion.

Thinking types tend to prefer first, to step *back* from a problem or issue and consider it analytically, objectively and rationally. On the other hand, Feeling types prefer first to step *into* a problem or issue, to check with their values and those of others involved, and to test any decision with what seems 'right', reasonable and fair. This is not to suggest that Thinking types don't 'feel', nor that Feeling types don't 'think', but rather to indicate where their innate preferences lie first. Both preferences are equally important, but theory suggests that they are not both equally *preferred*. This can lead to typical gender stereotyping and even a battle between the sexes, as close to 2/3rds of men in the UK seem to report Thinking as their innate preference, and even more women report Feeling as theirs.

An organisation with all 'T' and no 'F' might appear a somewhat task-driven place to work in, if rather cold, while one with all 'F' but no 'T' may perhaps feel particularly values-sensitive but lacking in practicality.

Partners in any organisation, from a marriage to a large multi-national corporation, may be much more effective by embracing the qualities of both 'T' and 'F' preferences, if they can learn to live constructively with their differences - as with all the other MBTI preferences.

Judging (J) – Perceiving (P)

These describe a personal preference either for 'Judging', which does not mean being judgemental, but preferring organisation, schedules, plans and the removal where possible of ambiguity; or for 'Perceiving', which in this context means keeping options open, being flexible and spontaneous, 'going with the flow' and living more for the moment.

As with all type differences, this can lead to conflict. 'P's may see 'J's as over-organised, closed and even impetuous. 'J's may well experience 'P's as unreliable, possibly late for appointments and seemingly un-decided. In truth, both preferences have great value and one of the great benefits of the MBTI® is to recognise this. 'J's might typically be those who meet deadlines early and plan things ahead. 'P's may typically leave things to the last minute in case new information or perhaps something better comes along. Both have their place.

The world seems to have rather more 'J's than 'P's. While the 'J's may help a team to organise and plan, 'P's may well help the team to look at all the options and not jump to conclusions or act precipitately.

FINDING OUR 'TRUE TYPE'

The challenge in deciding our own true type is that our innate preferred behaviours may inevitably be masked by past life experiences and social conditioning. For example, even as young children, those with an intrinsic Introvert preference (in Jungian terms) may be pressured by parents to "go out and play with friends" more than we really wanted to, while those with an Extravert preference may be encouraged to "sit down and read" when we might far rather be engaged in the company of others.

Moreover, healthy psychological development requires us to develop and use our non-preferred behaviours too. For example, those with an Intuitive preference might need to learn to attend to detail despite being more interested in the bigger picture, while those with a Sensing preference may need to learn to see patterns and broad principles in their

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studies, although they be much more interested in the facts.

Accordingly, establishing 'true type' requires great care, through the MBTI Step I Questionnaire® available in the UK from Oxford Psychological Press, governed by the professional ethics of the British Psychological Society which requires its administration by a trained and licensed user.

{For those who want to delve even deeper, there is also a MBTI Step II Questionnaire® which explores five different facets of each preference to add further granularity. This can be particularly helpful in explaining to some why they may *appear* to be a mix of types, because some facets of their behaviour may be 'out of preference'. (So for example, it may be quite possible to report as an Extrovert, but still feel uneasy about initiating new conversations or meeting with large groups of strangers, which may appear more commonly-found characteristics of some Introverts.) Note however, that the sum of the facets of any element of Step II is never greater than the preferences revealed by Step I.}

In particular, those who have not yet reached their late teenage years may find it very difficult to recognise their true preferences, while those who have reached middle-age and have learned to use both their preferred and non-preferred functions may then not then be sure which were their original, innate preferences.

For parents and teachers interested in exploring the preferences of younger children, the Meisgeier Profile may be especially helpful.

SAMPLE BOOK LIST

- Gifts Differing - Understanding Personality Type
Isabel Briggs Myers, Peter B Myers; Davies-Black Publishing Paperback
ISBN 0891060642
- Type Talk - The Personality Types that Determine How We Live, Love and Work
Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen; Dell Trade Paperback
ISBN 0-4440-50704-9
- Please Understand Me - Character and Temperament Types
David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates; Prometheus Nemesis Book Company
ISBN 0-9606954-0-D
- People Types and Tiger Stripes - A Practical Guide To Learning Types
Gordon Lawrence; CAPT
ISBN 0-935652-08-6
- I'm Not Crazy - I'm Just Not You
Roger R Pearman and Sarah C Albritten; Davies - Black Publishing
ISBN 0-89106-096-0
- Health Care Communication Using Personality Type – Patients Are Different!
Judy Allen & Susan Brock; Routledge
ISBN 0-415-21374-6
- Using Type in Selling
Susan A Brock; Consulting Psychologists Press Inc (Tel: 800-624-1765, USA)
- In the Grip: Our Hidden Personality
Naomi Quenk
Consulting Psychologists Press Inc (Tel: 800-624-1765, USA)

- Introduction to Type and Careers
Allen L Hammer; Consulting Psychologists Press Inc (Tel: 800-624-1765, USA)
- A Comparison of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Profiles and Belbin Team Roles
Malcolm Higgs; Henley Management College
ISBN 1-86181-0261
- Intimacy and Type
Jane Hardy Jones and Ruth G Sherman
Center for Applications of Psychological Types
ISBN 0-935652-23-X
- Katherine and Isabel
Frances Wright Saunders; Consulting Psychologists Press
ISBN 0-89106-049-9
- Introduction to Type – European English Version
Isabel Briggs Myers, revised Linda Kirby and Katharine Myers
Oxford Psychologists Press ISBN 1-85639-060-8
- MBTI Manual
Isabel Briggs Myers, Mary McCauley, Naomi Quenk, Allen Hammer
Consulting Psychologists Press ISBN 0-89106-130-4
- Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
Isabel Briggs Myers and Mary H McCauley; Consulting Psychologists Press
ISBN 0-89106-027-8
- Introduction to Type Dynamics and Development – European English Version
Katharine Myers, Linda Kirby; Oxford Psychologists Press
ISBN 1-85639-021-7

QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED

What is a 'type'?

In psychometric profiling terms, a type is an 'either/or' preference – rather like being right or left-handed. One preference isn't 'better' than the other, just different. And whichever preference we may have, that doesn't mean we can't use the other, but it may not be as well developed.

This is as opposed to a trait – a common feature of us all which, once accurately described, we might all have to even measurably different degrees, such as intelligence, compassion, affiliation or a sense of humour.

Isn't everyone different?

Yes, everyone *is* different! - and the MBTI® does not seek to put anyone 'in a box', as some occasionally fear. Rather, it aims to offer a point of reference of how people of similar types may often prefer to behave, to describe how our own individual gifts and differences might be better understood, and to offer possible paths for our own further development if we so wish.

Will the questionnaire ask me any embarrassing questions?

No! The MBTI® asks no invasive questions and the feedback is intentionally non-judgemental.

Will I be given any feedback?

Yes, this is a fundamental ethical requirement of all psychometric profiles.

Who else will see my results?

Nobody (other than your administrator of course), without your express permission. Naturally however, if you are not willing to share your results with those you live or work with, you may not see theirs!

What if I don't agree with my results?

Only you should decide your type, and some may still not be sure even after detailed feedback. But nobody else should decide for you.

What if I don't like my results?

You should have been told when completing your questionnaire that there are no right answers! Your feedback should be delivered utterly impartially and neutrally, and note that no profile is better or worse than any other. All 16 MBTI types have their special gifts *and* areas some may see as weaknesses. But you can develop these if you want to!

My colleagues/partner/family don't like my results!

Your preferences are yours! We are all allowably different, even if these differences between us can sometimes be a source of annoyance. But understanding people's different preferences can be a very helpful way of first recognising these and then valuing each others' quite different strengths. Which is why the MBTI[®] can make such a useful team-building, coaching and mentoring tool.

My profile seems to have changed since last time.

There may be several reasons for this, although the theory is that our true preferences do not change – only grow develop. So as part of your healthy development, you may have learned to use your non-preferred behaviours more felicitously. But it is also possible that at least one of your results was not right because you answered the questionnaire under pressure, in a rush or with your mind on other matters.

I have been warned against 'type-bias'. What is this?

'Type-bias' is most commonly an assumption that all common types are the same and therefore predictable. You might hear it for example as "You are a typical 'N', hopeless at detail", or "You're like all 'T's, all mind and no heart". These generalisations are an abuse of the richness of MBTI[®] and to be avoided.

Can I use MBTI[®] for recruitment?

No! This instrument is very helpful in guiding personal development and productive relationships, but it is not ethically acceptable to use for assessment for the suitability of anyone for a job.

Aren't all psychometric profiles no more than 'smoke and mirrors'?

No! Not if they have been properly researched and validated to the requirements of the British Psychological Society. (That is not to say all other such tools do!)

All these profiles look very general to me – they could apply to anyone?

A classical feature of some rogue questionnaires is the use of 'Barnum phrases', that may appear very insightful but *do* apply to anyone! (A great example? "Sometimes you feel very confident, but at other times you don't".) One of the requirements of any ethical profiling tool such as MBTI[®] is that such a trap is rigorously avoided!

TYPE DEVELOPMENT (*Only for the enthusiast!*)

The Theory of Type Development suggests that:

- a) We are all born with a '**dominant function**'. This then becomes the function we

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developed first in our early childhood, used most, and so learned to rely upon most as it was the best developed. This will either be the information-gathering function, of either S or N, or the decision-making function, of either T or F.

- b) Assuming we develop healthily, we will then learn to develop the other of these two functions in our profile, called the **'auxiliary function'**, so that both functions may valuably inform the other.
- c) The opposite to our auxiliary function is described as our **'tertiary function'**. (So if our auxiliary function was 'S', our tertiary will be 'N', and so on). Being tertiary, this function may not be very well developed. Part of healthy type-development in adulthood can be to help make this function more serviceable.
- d) Finally, we come to the fourth and least-preferred element of our profile described as our **'inferior function'**. It is the polar opposite of our 'dominant function' and the one we probably use least effectively and is usually least well developed.

Theory also suggests that each function may be either 'extraverted' or 'introverted', depending on our I-E and J-P preferences. If our dominant function is extraverted, our auxiliary function will be introverted, to make sure we both 'go out into the world' and 'go into ourselves', and *vice versa*.

(The tertiary function is generally seen to be too weak to say whether it is extraverted or introverted, although some theorists suggest it will match our dominant function dominant function is introverted, so will be your tertiary function. Most agree that the inferior function is the *complete* opposite of our dominant function. So for example, if our dominant function is 'extraverted Sensing', our inferior will be 'introverted Intuition'.)

Useful Rule 1:

The J-P axis determines which function we extravert. If we have a J preference, theory suggests we will extravert our 'Judging preference' of T or F. If we have a P preference, we will extravert our 'Perceiving preference' of S or N.

Useful Rule 2:

Our E-I preference helps to determine our 'dominant function' – the one we most rely upon. If we have an E preference, our dominant function will be the one we 'extravert'. If our preference is for I however, our dominant function will (quite reasonably) be the one we 'introvert'.

SUMMARY

{ (i) suggests the relevant function is introverted, (e) that it is introverted }

TYPE	ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ	ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
Dominant	S(i)	S(i)	N(i)	N(i)	T(i)	F(i)	F(i)	T(i)
Auxiliary	T(e)	F(e)	F(e)	T(e)	S(e)	S(e)	N(e)	N(e)
Tertiary	F	T	T	F	N	N	S	S
Inferior	N(e)	N(e)	S(e)	S(e)	F(e)	T(e)	T(e)	F(e)

TYPE	ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP	ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ
Dominant	S(e)	S(e)	N(e)	N(e)	T(e)	F(e)	F(e)	T(e)
Auxiliary	T(i)	F(i)	F(i)	T(i)	S(i)	S(i)	N(i)	N(i)
Tertiary	F	T	T	F	N	N	S	S
Inferior	N(i)	N(i)	S(i)	S(i)	F(i)	T(i)	T(i)	F(i)

(If this all seems confusing, look at the short profiles on offer and you will find more detailed analysis is done for you to establish your dominant function and what this may mean for you.)

Why is Type Development relevant?

First, MBTI can help inform where all our relative strengths and weaknesses may lie, as you explore your own Type Profile further.

Secondly, this might help explain how many detailed reports for each Myers-Briggs Type, distilled on this website and elsewhere, have come to be written – based on careful observation, research and experience, founded on an intriguing theory of Type Development that seems to enrich many people's life-experience.

Thirdly, it can point the way to your own future development if you choose this path. The more you can learn about yourself and others, the better equipped you will be to develop not just your apparent weaknesses, but reinforce and exploit your inherent and special strengths, and to live and work more effectively and productively with those who are important to you.

See below!

UNDER STRESS?

Research by Dr Naomi Quenk suggests that two things can happen to us when pressured. First, we may exaggerate our **Dominant function** (not always helpfully!); and when that ceases to serve us well, under extreme pressure we may flip, quite unaware, into the mirror-opposite of our **Inferior function**.

Because our **Inferior function** may be so little used and under-developed, this can lead to especially unhelpful behaviour about which we may feel we can do little in the moment – described graphically as being in *'The Grip'*. Naturally, for each Type, this can manifest itself quite differently (indicated in the Summary Profiles) – but forewarned is to be forearmed!

Many people may never reach this state of such acute stress and so might not recognise it. But for those who have ever experienced the Grip, they may find it particularly helpful to know of this deeply insidious process, which seems to be common to all MBTI Types according to their 'true type'. Having understanding colleagues or partners at home who understand this remorseless process may then be at a special premium.

WHAT MAY PERSUADE US?

Research by Dr Susan Brock suggests that different Types may be influenced quite differently, and indeed seek to influence others according to their own Type quite unhelpfully.

The essence of this appears to be in the combination of our preferred 'information-gathering' and 'decision-making' functions – the two middle letters of any MBTI® profile.

'ST's, for example, may need the facts to be really convinced, and seek to provide them in order to convince others. They may be quite surprised however to find that other types may be far less convinced by these facts than they are, nor even choose to support their own propositions with them.

Instead, 'NT's may find 'facts' far less convincing than the rationale and logic, which they may much more greatly value. But they may in turn expect everyone else to be convinced by their logic, and then wonder why this has not convinced others as it did them.

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Meanwhile, 'SF's may be much more focussed on personal service to others (and themselves), rather than either the 'facts' or the 'rationale' – and equally be quite surprised that their own appeals to service, which they hold so dear, may seem to go unheeded.

And finally, 'NF's may be convinced by none of these of these concerns above, but rather by a sense of wider vision and values, which they may see as paramount, never to be gainsaid.

Why is this important?

Persuading and influencing others in the same manner as we might in turn wish to be persuaded, may only work with 'people like us'.

With different folks, different strokes may be needed - and this will apply just as much to those we meet at work as to those we are close to at home.

This understanding therefore has special relevance to teachers for example, especially in persuading apparently difficult children who are 'only' different types; to nurses, doctors and the medical profession in persuading patients to follow their advice and course of treatment; to sales people, buyers, managers, negotiators, fund-raisers, lawyers, politicians – and of course, parents and their children!

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