

APT*i*
Association for
Psychological Type
International

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Frequently Asked Questions About the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Assessment *By Karen Keefer, APTi Faculty Member*

1. I took the MBTI® assessment awhile ago. Should I take it again?

If you verified your type and are comfortable that it describes you pretty well, you do not need to take the instrument again, unless there is another reason why you want to receive your results (e.g. you are being trained to use this tool).

However, if you would like to take it again, you certainly may. As with the first time, go with your most natural responses to the items.

2. If I do take it again will I come out the same?

The chances are that you will come out with the same type. In the research reported in the *MBTI Manual*, approximately 2/3 of people had the same four preferences upon retest, and approximately 90% had at least three the same. If your type does come out differently, it will probably be on just one letter, and that will be the preference where you were least clear before.

(See *MBTI Manual* pages 162-164.)

3. Do people ever change type?

Theoretically, you have a set of innate preferences which do not change. This is your “true type.”

In practical terms, your innate preferences may not be reflected accurately in your “reported type,” the way you answer the MBTI items. This can happen for a number of reasons:

- People are subject to pressures and expectations about how they ought to be and may try, consciously or unconsciously, to come out a certain way. e.g. to fulfill cultural norms, family expectations, gender roles, etc.
- There are also circumstances, such as stress, illness, and periods of personal growth, in which people are not functioning in their usual way. These can influence how they respond to the items.

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- When people have not differentiated their type (which occurs most often with younger people) or are lacking in self-awareness, they may not experience consistency in how they think or do things and may answer the items inconsistently.

People do grow and develop, acquiring comfort and facility with different preferences in the process. From the Myers-Briggs point of view, they are not changing type, but expanding beyond their preferred type.

(See *Manual* p. 20, “Factors That Influence Accuracy of Self-Report.”)

4. I think I’m a different type than the Indicator says – which one of us is right?

You are the final authority on your own type. The Indicator was designed as a tool to help you determine your type, to be used with other tools such as written descriptions of the 4-letter types and the expertise of your MBTI practitioner. In the end, you are the one who gets to say what your “best-fit” type is.

When you received your results, you should have had an opportunity to verify whether the indicated preferences and whole reported type seemed to fit you. This is the feedback procedure recommended in the *MBTI Manual*.

(See Chapter 6 in the *Manual*, beginning on p. 115.)

5. If I have to decide my own type anyway, why take the MBTI instrument?

There are several sorts of tools that can help you find your type without taking an instrument:

- Written descriptions of the preferences
- Published descriptions of 4-letter types
- The explanations and individualized exploration available from a trained MBTI practitioner
- Workshop exercises

Each of these gets at type in a slightly different way, and you can certainly develop a sense of your type through such means alone. However, all of the above depend on

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how well you or others understand both the theory's concepts and the ways type actually shows up in everyday life. (We have no way of measuring that understanding.)

The MBTI instrument develops its information about your type by a different means. You respond to items referring to small bits of everyday behavior, and the patterns emerge from your answers. The Indicator was carefully designed to be used by people who know nothing about type concepts, and the items have been extensively tested to make sure they work reliably.

Research indicates that around 75% of the people who take the MBTI assessment agree with all four of their reported preferences. (Note that random chance would have 6.25% of people agreeing with all four letters.) In my experience, most who disagree with their reported type settle on a best-fit type that is different on only one letter, and the preference clarity on that dichotomy is nearly always slight or moderate. Thus, even when people select a different best-fit type, it is highly likely to be close to the reported type, and in an area where they did not express a clear preference on the instrument.

(See *Manual* Table 9.17, p. 197.)

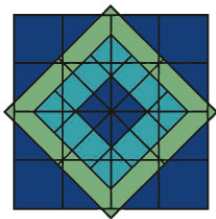
6. I took a personality indicator on-line and got a type – isn't that the MBTI?

Probably not. When the MBTI assessment is administered on-line, the results usually go to an MBTI practitioner, who gives them to the client in the course of a feedback session. (The one exception is CPP's new MBTIComplete, where you are guided through a self-assessment before receiving results, and then are given whole-type descriptions to read in order to confirm your best-fit type.)

The most commonly used on-line type inventory is the Keirsey Temperament Sorter, which is also published in the book, *Please Understand Me (Please Understand Me II* has a revised Sorter, which is the version currently available on-line.). The Temperament Sorter was created by David Keirsey at the request of his publisher and is not the equivalent of the MBTI questionnaire. In fact, *Please Understand Me* is based on a different theory of personality - temperament theory - whose categories happen to be describable using Myers-Briggs preferences and 4-letter types. Temperament Sorter items are similar to, but do not duplicate, the Myers-Briggs items, and have not undergone the rigorous analysis and testing for reliability and validity conducted by Myers and her publishers. No training is required to use the Temperament Sorter and there is no manual to guide interpretation of results.

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There are also other questionnaires that purport to give you the same information as the MBTI instrument, but more quickly, inexpensively, or without the bother of having to meet with someone to obtain your results. These, too, are unvalidated instruments, which may or may not reflect your innate preferences accurately.

Ironically, when unvalidated instruments are used for determining type, the process of individual verification of results becomes even more important due to the greater odds that the reported type is not the “true type.”

(Note: There are other validated instruments based on Jung's theory. They have published manuals or guides to their use.)

7. How is temperament different from type?

Temperament theory describes four patterns of motivations, values and needs (Artisans, Guardians, Rationals and Idealists). Jung's theory and the Myers-Briggs framework are based on four patterns of mental functioning (Sensing, Intuition, Thinking and Feeling), and the ways people use them: in inward or outward orientation and in a hierarchy of preference (dominant, auxiliary, etc.).

Both theories are looking at similar patterns in human behavior, but emphasize different aspects of those patterns. For Jung, the Introversion-Extraversion dichotomy was of primary importance; much of his book *Psychological Types* is devoted to demonstrating its existence and influence.

For Keirsey, the most important difference is between the abstract and tangible frames of perception (the S-N dichotomy). For those who naturally use the abstract, Intuitive frame, the second most important dichotomy is the focus on people vs. focus on task (the T-F dichotomy). For those who naturally use the Sensing framework of tangible reality, the second most important difference is the emphasis on structure vs. process (the J-P dichotomy).

Although the overlap is not 100%, most people with NT preferences recognize themselves in the Rational temperament description, NFs tend to identify with the Idealist temperament, SJs tend to see themselves as Guardians and SPs as Artisans.

(Recommended reading: *An Introduction to Temperament*, by Linda V. Berens.)

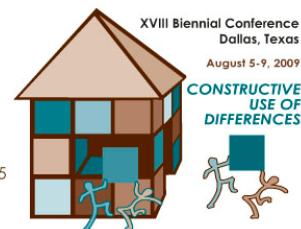
8. I can look at any of these type descriptions and say it's like me.

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You might try reading a description for your indicated type and a description for the type that is opposite on all four preferences. Do they fit you equally well?

Two studies reported in the *Journal of Psychological Type* (Vol. 5) asked college students to read descriptions of their indicated type, their opposite type, and either two or three other descriptions that varied systematically, and to select the one that seemed most like them. They had taken the MBTI assessment but had not yet received an explanation or their results. In both studies, the students most often chose the description of their indicated type, and rarely selected their complete opposite type.

(This research is summarized in the *MBTI Manual* on p. 197, with other related studies on that page and the next.)

9. How can you tell anything important about me from these trivial questions?

Human beings are quite adaptable in their behavior, responding to what the present circumstance appears to call for. Our preferences are simply that – the ways we prefer to operate; we can and do use our non-preferences every day. What distinguishes preferred from non-preferred is not whether we can function in that mode, but how much energy and concentration it takes to do it.

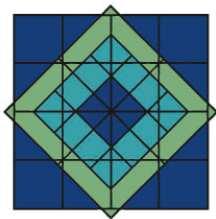
Myers believed our preferred ways of functioning would be more likely to show up in situations where we are able to be our most natural selves, i.e. in ordinary circumstances where there is little or no pressure to behave in a particular manner. The questions may appear to be trivial, but extensive research supports their ability to reflect a person's natural preferences.

10. I can't relate to these "either/or" items. Sometimes I do one thing, and in a different situation I might do the opposite. Isn't human behavior really a continuum?

Human beings are indeed adaptable, and we do respond to circumstances. Some of us have "pockets" in our behavior where we naturally and effectively do the opposite of our preference (the Step II instrument is helpful in identifying such areas). Additionally, we all have the ability to stretch beyond our natural preferences and do the opposite as the occasion – or the whim – calls for.

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That being said, it is important to recognize that human behavior has both “continuum” and “either/or” qualities.

We are accustomed to talk about behavior in terms of traits, i.e. characteristics that can vary in amount or intensity. For example, we can characterize a person as more or less “sociable.” Sociability is an example of a continuum.

When we talk about preferences and types, however, we are looking at behavior from the “either/or” point of view. For example, extraversion and introversion involve a different flow of attention. We are oriented either outward to the world of people, things and situations, or inward to the world of thoughts, feelings, impressions, memories, etc. When we are focused outward we ignore the inner world, and when we focus on the inner world, we shut out the outer world. We may move back and forth between them very quickly, but we cannot do both at the same time. They are truly opposite modes of operating.

Because Jung’s theory is based on pairs of opposites, the MBTI assessment is constructed in an “either/or” format. Instead of asking how often you do something, the items ask whether it’s more typical of you to do that thing or something else.

Sometimes confusion arises from the fact that preferences are expressed in behavior as traits. Thus, the preference for extraversion is often expressed in sociability. Another way to say this is that the trait of sociability correlates with extraversion and can be used as a tentative indicator of that preference.

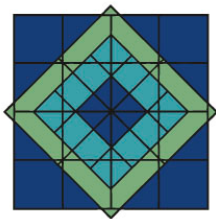
Where we get into trouble is when we assume that extraversion equals sociability, and we talk about extraversion as though it were a trait. This leads to misuses of type language such as saying a person is “very extraverted.” It also leads to unwarranted assumptions about people based on limited observations of their behavior. Some people who have the introverted preference are naturally sociable, some who prefer extraversion are not, and most introverts will behave sociably on some occasions. Sociability does not conclusively identify a preference for extraversion.

11. Doesn’t the MBTI pigeonhole people?

Knowing a person’s type does not tell you all about them, nor will it accurately predict his or her behavior 100% of the time. People are much more than just their type.

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Knowing your own type does not in any way limit what you can or should do. Your type is not a box you live within. (Nor is it an excuse for doing or not doing anything!)

In the APT Qualifying Training we often describe the type table as a house with 16 rooms. Each person has a favorite room, but no one spends all their time there – we can and do function in many different modes, sometimes even surprising ourselves. It is, however, very useful information to know what your own or another person’s “favorite room” is like.

12. Is it better to have a high score or a low score?

On most psychological measures, your score has some sort of meaning, such as “better,” “worse,” “normal” or “abnormal.” With the MBTI instrument your “score” (preference clarity index, or pci) simply reflects how clearly you expressed your preference when you answered the items; it has no meaning beyond that.

The *MBTI Manual* states on p. 121:

The preference clarity index is an estimate of relative confidence that a preference has been accurately identified. Any other quantitative interpretation of MBTI results is incorrect and leads to misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

13. Aren't there actually better and worse types to be?

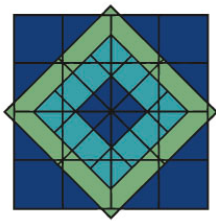
Life is a complicated business, and each of the preferences is particularly suited to certain areas and tasks. People tend to gravitate toward work that allows them to use their preferences, and we often arrange our lives to give our preferences more scope while avoiding having to use our non-preferences. However, life still demands that we deal with aspects that require our non-preferences. Most of us have to use all 8 of those letters every day! Although each type has its strengths and its blind spots, all 16 are perfectly good ways to get through life.

14. We did the MBTI in an hour at the start of a staff retreat – isn't it pretty much just a parlor game?

No trainer could adequately explain all the preferences and have a group of people find their best-fit type in such a short time frame. Most practitioners consider 3-4 hours to be minimal for such an undertaking. Superficial uses such as this trivialize the instrument

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and deprive people of the richness of knowledge and understanding possible when the preferences are adequately explored.

15. Everyone at my workplace had to take the MBTI instrument – is that ethical?

APT's ethical principles specify that taking the MBTI instrument needs to be voluntary. It is the responsibility of the type practitioner to establish this. As a practical matter, pressuring people to complete the instrument can create an atmosphere that undermines its effective use. People may complete it grudgingly or attempt to figure out what the "right" answers are, lowering the chances that their results will reflect their true preferences.

(The *Manual* discusses this issue in detail on pp. 360-361.)

16. Management says they need to know everyone's results, but I thought they were supposed to be confidential.

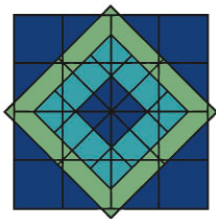
Yes, MBTI results belong to the person taking the instrument and are confidential. This is another area where the type practitioner has the responsibility for seeing that the instrument is used ethically.

(See p. 361 in the *Manual* for suggestions about how to handle this.)

17. My company uses MBTI results for hiring and promoting people – is that okay?

This is one of the most common misuses of the Indicator. The sort of information that is useful for hiring and promotion decisions has to do with skills, knowledge and demonstrated performance. Predictions about future performance or the capacity to develop new skills are poorly served by theoretical speculations based on type in the absence of other evidence because:

- Type preferences do not indicate skill. Preferences must be exercised and developed before they can be used skillfully. MBTI results do not measure development.



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- People can develop skill with their non-preferences.

The *MBTI Manual* includes this highlighted statement on p. 360:

It is inappropriate to use the MBTI for hiring, promotion, or selection. Results on the Indicator simply do not give information that will be helpful in these functions.

18. Can the MBTI assessment be used with kids?

The vocabulary of Form M corresponds to a 7th grade reading level, and the items refer to situations encountered in adult life (though many of those situations are also relevant for children and teens).

There is an instrument designed for children in grades two through eight, the Murphy-Meisgeier Type Indicator for Children (MMTIC). It uses simpler vocabulary and refers to situations familiar to children, such as playing on a team and relating to teachers. Because young people are still developing their preferences, when a preference is not indicated clearly it is not reported as “slight” but rather as “undetermined.”

The standard MBTI instrument is valid for teenagers, although this age group is likely to have more pci results in the slight range than people in their 20's and beyond. Adolescence is a time of exploration and experimentation, and teens are often still in the process of discovering their preferences.

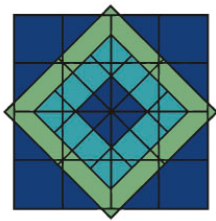
Although children and teens may not be able to identify all their preferences with certainty, they do grasp type concepts and find them useful in understanding themselves and others.

19. Does the Indicator work cross-culturally – in other countries and with ethnic minorities in the U.S.?

A growing body of research supports the cross-cultural validity of type theory. In studies around the world, people find that type concepts and descriptions make sense and are useful to them. Type distributions for whole populations and for vocational subgroups in other countries are very similar to what has been found in the United States. The

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National Representative Sample, which was used to develop Form M, included African Americans and Hispanics; the type distributions of these samples can be found in Table 14.1 on p.379 of the *MBTI Manual*.

However, although type appears to be universal, how it is expressed is influenced by cultural values. Practitioners need to be sensitive to this and also to cultural customs and issues around psychological testing and the relation of the individual to the group. Foreign language versions of the MBTI instrument cannot be simple translations but must be normed on the populations for which they are intended.

(The *Manual* has a helpful chapter on using the MBTI assessment in multicultural settings.)

20. Can I use the standard MBTI version with non-native English speakers?

You will want to consider how well they understand English and American idioms. If you have doubts, it is appropriate to explore the language issue with your client. It may be that they will get a more accurate result if they can take the instrument in their native language, even though the feedback session will be in English. Support materials such as *Introduction to Type* are also available in some languages.

Asian language MBTI versions are distributed by CPP. European language versions are distributed by Oxford Psychologists Press.

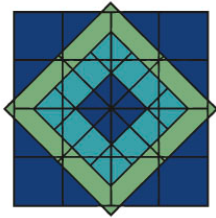
21. How many of my type are in the population?

The best current estimate comes from the National Representative Sample, collected by CPP in 1998. The data for this sample can be found in the *Manual* in Table 14.1 (p. 379). Separate distributions for men and women are in Table 7.14, p. 157 and Table 7.15 on p. 158.

22. What's the best type for me to be in a relationship with?

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Research has not identified any best type for a particular type to pair with. Each combination of types has its own set of blessings and challenges. The important factors in relationship success appear to be appreciation of the other person's gifts and strengths, and commitment to making the relationship work.

23. How does type relate to careers/learning/management style/health, etc.?

There is a wealth of information available on such topics. A good place for the practitioner to begin might be the applications chapters in the *Manual*. The APT Interest Area Consultants can recommend books, articles, trainings, etc. to address these questions.

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