

If your first introduction to the world of Myers-Briggs was through an online test, chances are you're confused about your type. Online tests are notorious for giving inaccurate/changing results, for the following reasons:

- (1) The questions are overly theoretical and can be unclear.
- (2) The self-bias factor (that is, seeing yourself as you'd like to be rather than as you are) skews results immensely. This is true for any self-assessment quiz.
- (3) Most of the free online Myers-Briggs quizzes test using the letter dichotomies (Telling you you're an I or an E, an F or a T, etc.) rather than employing the underlying theory of Type Psychology – the cognitive functions.

What are these “Cognitive Functions?”

Glad you asked. Cognitive functions are the technical term for “Modes of processing information and making decisions based on your Myers-Briggs type.” Each type has four (out of a possible eight) cognitive functions, which they use in a specific order. Identifying which functions you use – and in what order – is the most accurate way to type yourself or anyone else. The functions necessitate the four-letter type, not the other way around. This is why the best way to determine your type is to either visit a practitioner who types using cognitive functions, or to educate yourself on them and determine which ones you use.

Tell me more about these functions!

Of the eight cognitive functions, four are extroverted (oriented toward action and interaction with the world around you) and four are introverted (oriented toward analysis and reflection). Regardless of whether you're an extrovert or an introvert, we each have two extroverted functions and two introverted functions. Extroverts just prefer using their main extroverted function over their main introverted function and vice versa.

Of the eight cognitive functions, four are perceptive (focused on taking in new information and examining possibilities) and four are decision-based (focused on reaching conclusions and implementing plans). Regardless of whether you're a perceiver or a judger, we each have two perceptive functions and two judging ones.

Overall, you have one extroverted perceptive function, one introverted perceptive function, one extroverted judgment function and one introverted judgment function.

Of those functions, one is an intuitive function, one is a sensing function, one is a thinking function and one is a feeling function. This explains why Thinkers occasionally have feelings and Feelers occasionally make logical decisions. It also explains why Perceivers can sometimes be very structured and Judgers can sometimes go with the flow. We're all a bit of everything, but your type is ultimately determined by which cognitive functions you have and what order you use them in.

So what are my options?

Great, let's get to it. Here is an overview of the eight cognitive functions:

Perceptive Functions:

Extroverted Intuition (Ne):

Extroverted intuition generates new possibilities, synthesizes abstract ideas and picks up on connections in the external environment. Extroverted intuition is capable of entertaining multiple contradictory ideas simultaneously as it sees almost every side to every situation. It is predominantly a future-oriented function that examines all the possibilities of what could happen next.

People who lead with extroverted intuition are usually excitable, entrepreneurial and highly creative. They intrinsically enjoy debating ideas, exploring various interests and they view almost everything in life as a challenge. They are constantly thinking about what to do or experience next, but have a difficult time sticking with just one idea or plan long-term.

Introverted Intuition (Ni):

Introverted intuition forms a framework of how the world works based on thorough, abstract analysis of past and current events. It aims to identify the ‘essence’ of ideas, theories, people and situations in order to fit them into a larger schema. Introverted intuition is a forward thinking function that seeks to identify the optimal or most likely outcome of future events.

People who lead with introverted intuition are usually intense, focused and highly perceptive of inconsistencies that arise in their external environment. They enjoy riddles, puzzles and wordplay. They often experience ‘hunches’ or ‘aha’ moments that they may identify as epiphanies. Their intense foresight is a product of their future-oriented introverted intuition subtly pairing with their inferior extroverted sensing.

Extroverted Sensing (Se):

Extroverted sensing is focused on taking in the world as it exists in the present moment. It is highly in tune with the sights, smells, sounds and general physical stimulus that surrounds it. Extroverted sensing lives and thrives in the moment, more so than any other function.

People who lead with extroverted sensing are often naturally athletic, highly impulsive and enjoy ever-changing stimuli. They place a high value on aesthetics and lust after the ‘finer things in life.’ Extroverted sensors usually aren't interested in over-analyzing a situation – they simply see

what they want and they go for it. These types tend to exude a natural sense of confidence, as they are usually quite sure of who they are and what they want.

Introverted Sensing (Si):

Introverted sensing is a detail-oriented, information storage function. It takes note of facts, events and occurrences exactly as they happen and categorizes them, somewhat like an internal filing system. This is a past-oriented function that dwells predominantly on what has been and it often gives way to nostalgia.

People who lead with introverted sensing are organized and structured, as they believe in being prepared for any potential mishap. They hold tradition in high esteem and believe that the tried and true method is always the best way of getting things done. Introverted sensors believe that the future will repeat the past, more so than any other type.

Judging/Decision-Making Functions:

Introverted Feeling (Fi):

Introverted feeling is the in-depth analysis of emotional processes and morality. It seeks to break down emotions to their core and understand them as wholly as possible. It also develops a strong internal system of right and wrong, which the Fi user employs to make decisions. Introverted feeling searches for the deeper meaning behind absolutely everything. Introverted feelers are highly aware of and in touch with their own emotions, and when they put themselves in the shoes of others, they can often feel their pain or joy on a personal level.

People who lead with introverted feeling are compassionate, analytical and often highly concerned with moral issues. They are usually highly creative or artistic, and may feel as though nobody else truly understands who they are deep down. Because their feelings are introverted, Fi-dominant types aren't always comfortable expressing how they feel outwardly. They have a rich inner world that they want to guard and yet they often secretly wish that others were capable of tapping into it.

Extroverted Feeling (Fe):

Extroverted feeling is highly concerned with maintaining social norms and keeping the peace. It is a decision-making function that strives to do what is best for the group and picks up naturally on the emotions of others. It is a mirroring function that may cause the user to have trouble deciphering their own feelings without the input of others. Extroverted feeling requires social interaction to stay fulfilled, more so than any other function.

People who lead with extroverted feeling are highly reactive to the feelings of others. They seek out social interaction relentlessly, as they feel the happiest and most alive when they are in the company of loved ones. They seek to maintain harmony and keep the peace at all costs – they cannot fully enjoy themselves unless the people around them are healthy, happy and comfortable.

Extroverted Thinking (Te):

Extroverted thinking seeks to impose order on the external environment as efficiently and logically as possible. It values productivity above all else and is a results-based, action-oriented function. Extroverted thinking naturally implements concrete plans for accomplishing goals and is quick to make decisions.

People who lead with extroverted thinking are frank, decisive and highly productive in every capacity. They are natural leaders in the workplace as they are quick to take charge and impose order. Dominant extroverted thinkers may come across as bossy or opinionated to those who lack the function, but in reality they are simply pointing out what they believe to be the most efficient course of action for everyone involved.

Introverted Thinking (Ti):

Introverted thinking is an information-gathering function that seeks to form a framework for how the world works on a concrete, tangible level. It is adept at understanding systems and naturally notices inconsistencies within them. Introverted thinking seeks a thorough understanding of how things work – it wants to deconstruct things to look at the individual parts and see how things function as a whole.

People who lead with introverted thinking are logical, systematic and objective to a fault. They enjoy finding 'short-cuts' that increase efficiency within a given system. Ti-dominants are often heavily introverted, as they take a great deal of time to understand how things work before they feel comfortable sharing or acting on their knowledge.

Which type uses which functions?

It is important to note that you cannot pick and choose cognitive functions: They work in specific groups, some of which are mutually exclusive. For example, you cannot have extroverted feeling AND introverted feeling: You have one or the other.

Also, the order in which you use each function is incredibly important. While looking at the types, think of which functions you use all the time, which you use some of the time, and which you rarely use. You may not even notice yourself using your third and fourth functions on a regular basis, so it's best to identify which two functions you use most regularly.

How do I know what order I use my functions in?

It can be confusing trying to figure this out. We're often more aware of our second function than our first, as we are somewhat removed from our second function and can see it more objectively.

Think of it like this: You are in a swimming pool and your first (or “dominant”) function is the water. It’s everywhere. It’s what you do without thinking about it. It’s your natural first impulse to every situation – it comes to you so naturally that you may not even notice yourself using it.

Your second function (known as your auxiliary function) is like the ladder, or the waterslide. To an extent, you can choose to use it or not use it. You are very aware of its presence. You can’t make it go away, but you can temporarily ignore it. You have to swim through the water to get there.

Your third and fourth functions (Or your “tertiary” and “inferior” functions) are less accessible to you, as you may not fully develop them until you are nearing middle age. When you’re younger, your third and fourth functions are primarily called upon when you are under stress. If you started drowning in the water, your tertiary and inferior functions would be the life raft that you cling to. Eventually, you can integrate them to become pool toys that you use on a regular basis. Once you’ve done this, you will finally have a well-balanced, relaxing pool experience. We can also refer to this as type actualization.

The breakdown of functions and the order in which they’re used is as follows for each type:

ENFP: Ne – Fi – Te – Si
INFP: Fi – Ne – Si – Te
INFJ: Ni – Fe – Ti – Se
ENFJ: Fe – Ni – Se – Ti
ISTJ: Si – Te – Fi – Ne
ESTJ: Te – Si – Ne – Fi
ISTP: Ti – Se – Ni – Fe
ESTP: Se – Ti – Fe – Ni
INTJ: Ni – Te – Fi – Se
INTP: Ti – Ne – Si – Fe
ENTJ: Te – Ni – Se – Fi
ENTP: Ne – Ti – Fe – Si
ISFJ: Si – Fe – Ti – Ne
ISFP: Fi – Se – Ni – Te
ESFJ: Fe – Si – Ne – Ti
ESFP: Se – Fi – Te – Ni

Any type can, theoretically, access any of the eight cognitive functions, but tapping into a function that is not part of your type’s stacking will be an incredibly exhausting experience.

Why is it important to know about functions?

Understanding cognitive functions is imperative to understanding type. The four-letter dichotomies cannot possibly explain the complexity of our personalities – we are all thinkers, feelers, sensors and intuitives in various situations. The cognitive functions allow us to understand when we use each function and how it impacts our decision-making process.

Cognitive functions also help us to distinguish between types with clarity. No more thinking you’re an ENFP/J! Now you know that ENFPs and ENFJs actually share zero cognitive functions. If you’re an ENFP who employs a great deal of structure into your life, it simply means you’ve developed your extroverted thinking function effectively.

Lastly, having a thorough understanding of cognitive functions helps us understand how type can develop without actually changing (theoretically type does not/cannot change throughout a lifetime). An INFP may begin developing their extroverted thinking in their thirties or forties but that does not mean they are now an INTP! It simply means they are becoming a more well-rounded version of their own type.

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