

The Four Myers-Briggs Personality Scales

Extravert or Introvert

Extraverts are more outwardly focused - that is, they direct their energy toward the world outside themselves. As a result, they are more aware of the external environment, almost as if they are equipped with radar and are constantly scanning to see what and whom it picks up. This explains why Extraverts tend to be easily distracted. Extraverts look at a situation and ask, "How do I affect that?" On the other hand, Introverts are more inwardly focused, directing their energy toward themselves and their own ideas or thoughts. Introverts tend to ask themselves, "How does that affect me?" They are more naturally self-centered, but in a literal, not a pejorative, sense. Another important difference is that when problems or issues develop in a relationship, Extraverts usually need to talk things out in order to understand or resolve them. Introverts, however, need to mull things over—sometimes only for a minute, other times for much longer, depending in large measure on how important the issues are.

Another distinction between Introverts and Extraverts is the amount of social interactions each prefers. Typically, being around other people stimulates Extraverts. It seems to charge their batteries. As a result, they generally look forward to gatherings, even with people they don't know, and often have a large and varied circle of friends and acquaintances. Conversely, Introverts' energy is often drained by having to be with lots of people, especially for sustained periods of time. This is not to suggest that Introverts are recluses or are unable to interact with others. Instead, Introverts are generally more comfortable interacting one-on-one or being by themselves, whereas their Extraverted counterparts like and need to be around others and frequently feel lonely when they're not.

Extraverts and Introverts have different gifts. For Extraverts, it's breadth of experience; for Introverts, it's depth of experience. Whereas Extraverts are often interested in a variety of subjects and ideas, Introverts are usually more selective about their interest and almost always prefer to explore them in greater depth.

The term "shooting from the hip" (or, perhaps more accurately, "shooting from the lip") was undoubtedly coined to describe an Extravert. When you ask an Extravert a question, he or she will usually start talking. This is because Extraverts think out loud. But with Introverts, the opposite is more often true. When you ask an Introvert a question, he or she will usually pause before answering. Introverts need to think things through before they are ready to speak. Their thoughtful, deliberate reasoning process often leads Introverts to be misunderstood and even underestimated. Not only do Extraverts speak first and think second, but they also tend to act before they think. As a result, they are usually quick to become engaged in new and interesting situations, they like being out in front, and they are comfortable in the spotlight. Introverts tend to be more selective about the activities they choose to get involved in and often like to maintain a lower profile.

Sensor or Intuitive

People perceive the world primarily in one of two very different ways—either as Sensors or as Intuitives. Sensors take in information through their five senses, paying close attention to what something looks, sounds, feels, tastes, or smells like. That's why they're usually such realistic and practical people. In contrast, Intuitives look at the world quite differently. Rather than focus on what is, they see what could be, questioning the reasons why it is as it is and how it's related to other things. Rather than trust and

rely on their five senses, it's as if they use their sixth sense to understand and make sense of things.

Naturally, there are special gifts unique to both Sensors and Intuitives. For example, Sensors tend to notice, remember, and be accurate about details. Intuitives often quickly forget the specifics of a situation and, in fact, aren't likely to notice many details unless they are unusual or out of the ordinary. On the other hand, Intuitives tend to easily imagine the possibilities and see subtle patterns, connections, and implications that may elude the more literal and practical Sensors.

Another key distinction between Sensors and Intuitives has to do with the way they view time. Sensors are very present-oriented, so whatever they are engaged in at the moment commands their full attention. As a result they tend not to worry too much about possibilities that may or may not occur in the future, especially those things over which they have little or no control. By contrast, Intuitives are generally more future-oriented, so they tend to dream about tomorrow and imagine how present events will affect the future.

Another distinction between Sensors and Intuitives is their attraction to new ideas. Most Intuitives love ideas. To them, ideas are interesting in their own right and really don't need to have any practical utility to be worthwhile. Similarly, theories—proven or not—are worth considering because they represent a new or different way of looking at things. Sensors also like ideas, but only if they can be demonstrated to have some practical usefulness and can be used to address an immediate need or solve a real problem. And they tend to have little patience for theories unless someone can provide hard proof that a theory is valid and makes sense in some way. Sensors also tend to be hands-on people who trust direct experience. Intuitives often forsake the lessons of history and rely on their own gut instincts.

Thinker or Feeler

Both Thinking and Feeling are rational decision-making processes. It's not that Thinkers have no feelings or that Feelers are incapable of being logical. But when faced with a decision, Thinkers tend to step back, look at the situation objectively, and decide based on impersonal analysis. In contrast, Feelers tend to step forward and decide based on their personal values, how they feel about the issue, and how others are likely to feel about them.

For example, the prevailing stereotype is that men are more logical, objective, fair-minded, and competitive than women, and then generally have a thicker skin. Women are seen as more emotional, sensitive, cooperative, and nurturing and as having a thinner skin. However, the first group of words, the "male" words, more accurately describes Thinkers, and the second group of words describe Feelers, regardless of gender. Certainly, we all know people who don't fit the stereotypes—men who are sensitive and gentle, women who are assertive and tough. Frequently, such men are described as "feminine" and such women as "masculine." More than likely, those men are Feelers and the women are Thinkers.

Ultimately, Thinkers are concerned about making decisions that are logical and fair, whereas Feelers are fueled by their own personal values and how others will be affected by their decisions. Thinkers feel an obligation to adhere more firmly to the principles they consider important. To be fair, an important principle to most Thinkers, one must be consistent and hold everyone to the same standard. Feelers are more often driven by their personal values. Since they are naturally concerned and aware of how other

people feel, they are more inclined to look for and accept extenuating circumstances.

Because Thinkers tend not to take things as personally as Feelers, they often enjoy the give-and-take of a good debate. Using logic to analyze an issue and make a point is usually fun for a Thinker, a form of intellectual stimulation. This is especially true of Thinkers who are also Intuitives. However, Feelers rarely experience a debate in the same way. When two people argue and the goal is for one to convince the other of his or her position, one person is going to win and the other is going to lose. To most Feelers, this feels like disharmony, which is distressing and something to be avoided.

Because Feelers are so sensitive to others, they will often go out of their way to avoid hurting people's feelings. This means they are usually very tactful and diplomatic, but it also means they can be less than 100 percent honest. They know what other people want to hear, so they may tell little white lies or be insincere in their compliments. Thinkers, however, place a high value on honesty and directness. As a result, they are more likely to offend someone unintentionally. What they see as being frank and forthright, others may perceive as being blunt and insensitive. And because Feelers value harmony and avoid conflict, they are not likely to confront a Thinker who offends them. Ironically, the Thinker may never know the effect his or her actions or words had on the Feeler. Thinkers and Feelers in relationships struggle with this difference more than any other Type preference, and it creates the greatest challenge to open communication and a close connection.

Judger or Perceiver

One of the key aspects of Judging and Perceiving has to do with the issue of closure. Judgers like things to be settled and often feel a certain tension before a decision has been made. Since making decisions relieves the tension, they typically take in only as much information as is necessary to make a decision and then move on. By contrast, Perceivers feel tension when they are forced to make a decision. To alleviate that tension, they avoid making decisions and try to leave their options open as long as possible. As a result, they are often (but not always) prone to procrastination.

Before continuing with this discussion, it's important to point out that just because a person is a Judger doesn't mean he or she is necessarily judgmental, any more than a Perceiver is especially perceptive. This dimension simply describes which way of deciding is more natural and comfortable for a person. Another thing to keep in mind when trying to decide whether you are a Judger or a Perceiver is that there is a lot of pressure in American culture to be a Judger, since so much of people's identities are tied up in their work. And regardless of their natural preferences, nearly everyone has to act like a Judger at work: we have to be there at a certain time, follow rules and procedures, meet deadlines, and be productive. To more accurately identify your preference, think of how you are in your home life rather than how you may have to behave at work.

Judgers are planners, and they like to be prepared. Because they expect a set plan to be followed, they often have a hard time shifting gears when the plan unexpectedly changes. By contrast, Perceivers often are hesitant to commit themselves for fear that if they do, they may miss some great opportunity that will come along later. Besides, Perceivers like to act spontaneously and usually adjust well to surprises. These opposite preferences result in some predictable behaviors: Judgers are usually very time conscious, while Perceivers are more casual about time. Judgers make "to do" lists, cross off items as they are accomplished, and then make new lists. Perceivers may make lists but seldom

accomplish all the tasks or even look at their lists again. Judgers are more likely to write appointments in ink and rely on their calendars to organize each day, whereas Perceivers are more likely to write things in pencil and try to respond to opportunities as they arise.

One of the hallmarks of Judgers is their penchant for organization. The expression "a place for everything and everything in its place" was no doubt penned by a Judger (and probably as an admonition to some perennially messy Perceiver). It is distracting to Judgers to live amid clutter, because it calls out to be put away. Although "mess equals stress" to many Judgers, the same is not usually true for Perceivers. Some Perceivers also like a neat and clean home, but they tend to have a more casual attitude. They often leave projects unfinished, clothes scattered on the bed, and unwashed dishes in the sink. And when it comes to keeping track of things—especially paperwork—Judgers tend to be "filters," while Perceivers are often "pilers."

In our conversations with couples, therapists familiar with Personality Type, many expressed the belief that couples who are different on the Judging/Perceiving scale seem to have the most conflicts. It clearly affects which issues are the sources of conflict.

A central issue for many couples who are different on this dimension has to do with the issue of control. In their drive for closure, Judgers often believe a decision has been made when in fact it was only discussed. On the other hand, Perceivers often consider actual decisions as tentative agreements. Many Judgers have a strong need to be in charge of whatever situation they are in, and many Perceivers have an equally strong need to be free to do as they like. So when Judgers try to exert control, Perceivers often feel reined in and constrained.

Add to the mix the Judgers' strong work ethic (work before play) and the Perceivers' strong play ethic (play before work), and you have the potential for enduring conflict.

Generally, Judgers prefer to handle their responsibilities well ahead of any deadline (real or self-imposed). It's very hard for most Judgers to enjoy themselves when there are still chores to be done or projects to be finished. By contrast, most Perceivers feel that there's always more time, so why not relax or take advantage of some unexpected opportunity?

Another difference is that Judgers tend to want to follow the rules and to do what is expected of them, whereas most Perceivers don't mind bending or ignoring the rules occasionally. They are especially likely to disregard rules that they think are unnecessary or restrictive.

Also, Judgers tend to make a lot of declarative statements and voice their strong opinions freely. Perceivers are much more inquisitive, so they ask a lot of questions. This can be a source of irritation between couples when one is a Judger and the other a Perceiver. Perceivers often feel that Judgers shut down discussions too quickly, make blanket statements that are oversimplifications, and are sometime judgmental. Judgers sometimes find the endless questions from their Perceiver partners to be redundant and annoying.

Finally, the casual and spontaneous style of most Perceivers can be a nuisance to the more planful and serious Judgers. Many is the time a Perceiver distracts a Judger with some question, comment, or urge to do something fun. Most Judgers find it hard to leave what they're doing, and this sort of disruption is really irritating, even if they are faced with a great opportunity. Perceivers are equally annoyed when their uptight Judging partners can't or won't be flexible. What a Perceiver views as a fun impulse is often seen as being irresponsible by a Judger.