

# 50

# *P*sychology

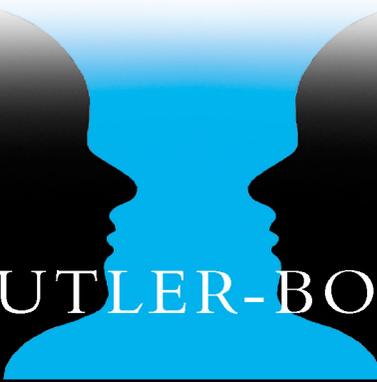
# CLASSICS

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WHO WE ARE, HOW WE THINK, WHAT WE DO -  
Insight and Inspiration from 50 key books

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# 50 Psychology Classics

Who we are, how we think, what we do  
Insight and inspiration from 50 key books

Tom Butler-Bowdon



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*For Cherry*

<i>Alfred Adler</i>	Gavin de Becker	Eric Berne
Robert Bolton	<i>Edward de Bono</i>	Nathaniel Branden
Isabel Briggs Myers	Louann Brizendine	<i>David D. Burns</i>
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Finally, this book could obviously not have been written without the wealth of remarkable ideas and concepts expressed in the classic books covered. Thank you to all the living authors for your contributions to the field.



# Isabel Briggs Myers

**T**he Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a test for gauging personality type that has been around since the 1940s. It helped lay the foundations of the psychometric testing methods that employers use today.

The test's origins are somewhat interesting. The story goes that one Christmas vacation, Isabel Briggs brought home a boyfriend, Clarence Myers. Though Isabel's parents liked the young man, her mother Katherine noted that he was different to the family. Katherine became interested in the idea of categorizing people according to personality type, and through reading autobiographies developed a basic typology of "meditative types," "spontaneous types," "executive types," and "sociable types." She discovered Carl Jung's book *Psychological Types* and it became the theoretical foundation for a lifetime's work, later taken up by her daughter (who became Isabel Briggs Myers).

Though Isabel never studied psychology formally, the head of a local bank enabled her to learn about statistics and personnel tests, and the first forms of her Type Indicator were created in 1944. Briggs Myers persuaded school principals in Pennsylvania to get the test taken by thousands of students, and also by medical and nursing students. A private educational testing firm heard about the Indicator and published it in 1957, but it did not go into wide public use until the 1970s. Since then, the MBTI has been administered to millions of people, mostly for job compatibility purposes but also in relation to teaching, marriage counseling, and personal development. The test has been refined over the decades, but Katherine Briggs' original intention of discovering "why people are how they are" remains its inspiration.

*Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* is Isabel Briggs Myers' personal explanation of her work, written with the assistance of her son Peter Briggs Myers and completed shortly before her death. If you are interested in the ideas behind personality typology, this is a key book to read.

When you do the actual MBTI test (consisting of yes or no questions) your personality preferences are expressed in a four-letter code, for example ISTJ or ESFP. Below is a summary of some of the key distinctions between the 16 types, and how this knowledge can be applied in practice.

## Ways of perceiving: Sensing or intuiting

In *Psychological Types*, Jung suggested two contrasting ways in which people saw the world. Some people can appreciate reality only through their five senses ("sensing" types), while others wait for internal confirmation of what is

true or real, relying on their unconscious. These are the “intuitive” types.

People who use the sensing mode are engrossed in what is around them, look only for facts, and find it less interesting to deal with ideas or abstractions. Intuitive people like to dwell in the unseen world of ideas and possibilities, distrustful of physical reality. Whatever mode people enjoy using and trust most, they tend to employ from an early age and refine over a lifetime.

### **Ways of judging: Thinking or feeling**

In the Jung/Briggs Myers understanding, people choose between two ways of coming to conclusions or judgments: by thinking, using an impersonal process of logic; and by feeling, deciding what something means to them.

People stick to their preferred method. Trusting their own way, the thinkers consider the feelers as irrational and subjective. The feelers wonder how the thinkers can possibly be objective about the things that matter to them—how can they be so cold and impersonal?

Generally, a child who prefers the feeling mode is likely to become someone good at interpersonal relations, while a child who prefers the thinking mode will become good at collating, using, and organizing facts and ideas.

### **The four preferences**

These orientations of Sensing (S), Intuition (N), Thinking (T), and Feeling (F) form four basic preferences that produce certain values, needs, habits, and traits. They are:

ST—Sensing plus Thinking

SF—Sensing plus Feeling

NF—Intuition plus Feeling

NT—Intuition plus Thinking

ST people like to proceed only on the basis of facts that their senses can verify. Practical minded, their best work is done in fields that require impersonal analysis such as surgery, law, accounting, and working with machinery.

SF people also rely on their senses, but the conclusions they make are more based on how they feel about the facts rather than cold analysis of them. They are “people people” and tend to be found in fields where they can express personal warmth, such as nursing, teaching, social work, selling, and “service-with-a-smile” jobs.

NF people also tend to be warm and friendly, but instead of focusing on the situation or the facts at hand, are more interested in how things might be changed or future possibilities. They like work that utilizes their gift for communication combined with their need to make things better, such as higher-level teaching, preaching, advertising, counseling or psychology, writing, and research.

NT people are also focused on possibilities, but draw on their powers of

rational analysis to achieve outcomes. They are likely to be found in professions that require ingenious solving of problems, particularly of a technical nature, such as science, computing, mathematics, or finance.

### **Extraversion and introversion**

A preference for extraversion (seeing life in terms of the external world) or introversion (greater interest in the inner world of ideas) is independent of your preferences for sensing, thinking, intuition, and feeling. You can be an extraverted NT type, for instance, or an introverted sensing and feeling type; that is, an ENT or an ISF. The first letter of the four letter code, E or I, indicates your extraversion or introversion preference.

Extraverts tend to move quickly and try to influence situations directly, while introverts give themselves time to develop their insights before exposing them to the world. Extraverts are happy making decisions in the thick of events, while introverts want to reflect before taking action. Neither preference necessarily makes better decisions than the other; it simply represents the style that each is comfortable with.

### **Dominant and auxiliary processes**

Although we each favor certain ways of being, one will dominate above the others. Consider NT types. Although possessed of both intuitive and thinking preferences, if they find thinking more attractive this becomes their dominant process. They may intuit something as being right, but this must be confirmed by objective thinking. As thinking is a process of judgment, the final element in this person's type is "Judgment." They are ENTJs. Other people's final letter is P for "Perception," indicating their strong desire to understand better.

The need for a dominant process to bring cohesion to the self is perfectly understandable, but Jung went further to suggest that each person also needs an "auxiliary" process. Introverts have extraversion as their auxiliary so they can "put on a public face" when necessary. Extraverts use introversion as their auxiliary to take care of their inner lives. In both cases, if the auxiliary is little used, the person lives in one extreme and their life suffers accordingly. Briggs Myers noted that in our extravert-oriented society, there is a greater penalty for introverts who do not develop their auxiliary than for extraverts who fail to take account of inner things.

The aim of personality typing is to acquire greater powers of perception and judgment, which are both assisted by the use of the auxiliary. Briggs Myers observes: "Perception without judgment is spineless; judgment with no perception is blind. Introversion lacking any extraversion is impractical; extraversion with no introversion is superficial."

## **Better relationships through type awareness**

The fact that people don't get along all the time suggests that we don't understand or value the ways other people see the world. A thinker, for instance, will underrate a feeling type's judgment, because the thinker cannot understand how the feeling type can come to good decisions without using logic. The thinker makes this assumption because their own feelings are erratic and unreliable. But the feeling type has cultivated their dominant process to such an extent that it delivers them good perceptions and judgments, even if it doesn't do so for the thinker.

In the same way, because a sensing type must perceive and judge based on what they see, hear, smell, and touch, the views and conclusions of an intuitive type, who just "knows" if something is good or bad, seem incomprehensible. For the intuitive, the sensing type seems to plod along without the "breath of life," inspiration. To take another example: Thinkers think that feeling types talk too much. When thinkers talk to someone they want information. Therefore if a feeling type wants anything from a thinker, they should try to remember to be concise.

In all these cases, what each type fails to appreciate is that the dominant process of another person works, and works well. Trying to tell that person that their perception or judgment is wrong is like telling grass that it shouldn't be green.

## **Dealing with the types at work**

In work situations, if you have some idea of how your colleagues think, you can expect to be more effective in getting your ideas accepted and reduce any friction. You would know that:

- ❖ With a sensing type you have to articulate the problem very quickly before you can expect them to provide a solution.
- ❖ Intuitives will only be interested in helping if an enticing possibility is dangled before them.
- ❖ Thinkers need to know what sort of result they are looking for and to have the situation explained in a set of logical points.
- ❖ Feeling types will need to have the situation framed in terms of what it means to the people involved.

With all types, it is as well to remember never to focus on the people involved, but to attack the problem. If we are aware of each type's contributions, there will be less conflict, less chance of loss of face, and a greater opportunity for a perfect solution to emerge.

## Final comments

Isabel Briggs Myers' lack of formal psychology qualifications ensured that she was never fully accepted by the psychological establishment. Some have questioned whether she interpreted Jung correctly, and therefore whether the whole methodology for identifying personality types is unsound. Jung himself was wary of applying his general principles to particular individuals, and skeptics also claim that the type explanations are too vague and could apply to anyone. Judge for yourself. You may find, if you take the test or a variant of it, that the description given of you is remarkably accurate.

On her own scale, Briggs Myers came out as an INFP (Introverted–Intuitive–Feeling–Perceiving). She noted that introverts often gain the most from doing the test. As three out of every four people are extraverted, and for every intuitive there are three sensing types, we therefore live in an “extravert’s world.” As a less common type, introverts may, not surprisingly, feel some pressure to be something they are not, and the MBTI allows them, perhaps for the first time, to feel it is OK to be who they are.

One of the fascinating insights in *Gifts Differing* is that recognition and development of our type may be more important to success in life than IQ. Isabel Briggs Myers' view was that personality type is as innate as left- or right-handedness; anyone who tries to be a right hander when they are really a leftie is asking for stress and misery, whereas going with our strengths massively increases our chances of fulfillment, happiness, and productivity.

## Isabel Briggs Myers

*Born in 1897, Briggs was schooled at home by her mother in Washington DC. Her father, Lynam Briggs, was a physicist and for over a decade was the director of the National Bureau of Standards. Isabel married Clarence Myers in 1918 and the following year graduated from Swarthmore College with a BA in political science.*

*Her tests of over 5,000 medical students were conducted at the George Washington School of Medicine. She followed up the study 12 years later, finding that the students had generally followed paths (i.e. research, general practice, surgery, administration) that might be expected of their type. The nursing study involved more than 10,000 students. The MBTI was first published in 1957 by the Educational Testing Service.*

*Isabel Briggs Myers died in 1980. Her work is continued today through the Myers & Briggs Foundation.*

*Peter Briggs Myers, born in 1926, was a Rhodes Scholar in physics. A scientific researcher and administrator, he was a staff director at the National Academy of Science. Involved in the development of the MBTI since his teens, he is now Chair of the Myers & Briggs Foundation and a Trustee of the Myers-Briggs Trust.*