Introverts, Extroverts, and the Limits of Personality Tests

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Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. shorthand
2. uncanny
3. flattering
4. arbitrary
5. pigeonhole
6. flimsy
7. spectrum
8. robust
9. holds up
10. gregarious
11. stimulation
12. mellow
13. wary
14. telling

Word Partners

Part A. 1 f 2 g 3 e 4 c 5 b 6 h 7 d 8 a

Phrases: an uncanny resemblance; a flattering photo; an arbitrary decision; a flimsy excuse; across the political spectrum; feel emotionally drained; mellow with age; be wary of strangers.

Part B. 1 uncannily 2 flatter 3 arbitrarily 4 stimulating 5 draining 6 wariness

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *What did some cafes and companies in South Korea ask job applicants for?*
They asked applicants for their four-letter MBTI type.

2. *What happened in Forer's 1948 experiment?*
A psychologist gave all his students the same vague, flattering profile, and they rated its accuracy 4.3 out of 5 on average.

3. *How does the MBTI sort people?*
It places people in one of two boxes on each of four scales, such as introvert or extravert, which produces sixteen types.

4. *Why is a cut-off at the midpoint of each scale a problem?*
Most people score near the middle, so the line is arbitrary: two almost identical people can be pigeonholed as opposites.

5. *Why does the writer call MBTI types flimsy? Give the evidence.*
Many people get a different type when they retake the test after about five weeks (roughly 40 to 75 percent in the full reading).

6. *How is the Big Five different from the MBTI, and why do researchers prefer it?*
The Big Five measures five traits on a spectrum instead of sorting people into types. The evidence is more robust: scores are fairly stable, and traits such as conscientiousness predict job performance and even a longer life.

7. *What are two weaknesses or open questions about the Big Five?*
It may not hold up everywhere: among the Tsimane of Bolivia, answers did not fall into five groups. Also, it relies on self-reports, which are prone to bias.

8. *How is introversion different from shyness?*
Shyness is a fear of being judged, while introversion is a preference for less stimulation, or quieter settings. A gregarious person can be shy.

9. *Why do you think the writer ends with a detail from the MBTI guidelines? Is it a convincing ending?*
   Open answer. A strong answer notes that the detail links back to the opening (MBTI in hiring), shows that even the test's supporters say it should not be used for hiring, and ends on a fact rather than a slogan. Accept a reasoned view that the ending is too weak or too strong.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "The students in the 1948 experiment were studying psychology." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Not Given. The reading says a psychologist gave the test to his students, but it does not say what they studied.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that four-letter types should never be mentioned, even in casual conversation." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says a four-letter type can be a fun conversation starter; the warning is only about letting it decide who gets a job.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the writer describe the 1948 experiment? Is it (a) to explain why a type description can feel accurate even if the test is weak, (b) to show that astrology can predict personality, or (c) to explain how the MBTI was first created?*
    (a) The experiment shows that vague, flattering descriptions feel accurate to almost anyone, which helps explain why test results can feel uncanny.

True or False

1. **T.** Some cafes and companies asked applicants for their type.
2. **F.** Every student received the same text.
3. **T.** On average they rated its accuracy 4.3 out of 5.
4. **F.** It places people in one of two boxes on each of four scales.
5. **T.** Most people cluster near the middle rather than at the ends.
6. **T.** Instead of types, it measures five traits, each on a spectrum.
7. **F.** The answers did not fall into five groups.
8. **F.** Shyness is a fear of being judged; introversion is a preference for quieter settings.
9. **T.** The reading gives this as an example of introversion without shyness.
10. **F.** The guidelines say the test was not designed for hiring.

Language Focus: Expressing Tendency: tend to, be prone to, on average

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. When I am under pressure, I tend to make lists and work late.
2. At large parties, I tend not to talk to people I do not know.
3. When I write in English, I am prone to mistakes with articles.
4. When I am tired, I am more prone to forgetting my keys.
5. On average, students in my country tend to study late at night before exams.
6. On a free Sunday, I tend to sleep late and then meet a friend for lunch.
7. When I am in a hurry, I am prone to typing errors and forgetting things.
8. My family tends to celebrate birthdays with a big dinner at home.
9. First-year students tend to worry about making friends and managing their time.
10. On average, I spend about four hours a day on my phone.

Accept tend not to for negatives. In Part A items 3 and 4, accept prone to + noun or prone to + base verb (prone to forget, prone to forgetting).

Notes on the Evidence

MBTI: origins, reliability, and use are from the Wikipedia article (accessed 26 October 2026), which cites the primary

literature. Development began during World War II; a handbook appeared in 1944; it builds on Jung's Psychological Types (1921). The 40 to 75 percent figure rounds the reported range of 39 to 76 percent of respondents receiving a different type on retest after about five weeks. Most studies find scores distributed around the middle of each scale rather than bimodally. Korea hiring: Kyunghyang Shinmun, 28 January 2022 (cafes and part-time jobs; Ourhome from 2021 and LS Cable & System from 2020 asked for types in self-introduction essays). The phrase "a few years ago" is relative to October 2026.

Forer (1948): 39 students, same profile drawn largely from an astrology publication, mean rating 4.30 on a 0 to 5 scale (Wikipedia, Barnum effect). The reading paraphrases two of the profile's ideas rather than quoting it. Big Five: lexical origin (Allport and Odbert 1936 to Goldberg 1981) and heritability estimates of about 42 to 57 percent from twin studies of self-reports (Wikipedia, Big Five personality traits); "roughly 40 to 60 percent" rounds this. Conscientiousness is linked to job performance (early meta-analytic correlation about 0.26) and to lower mortality. Cross-cultural testing: McCrae, Terracciano and colleagues, about 50 cultures (2005).

Tsimane: Gurven and colleagues, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (2013), 632 participants; factor analysis of a 40-item translated inventory gave two factors, interpreted as industriousness and prosociality (APA Monitor, March 2013). Sources describe the Tsimane as forager-horticulturalists or hunter-gatherers; the reading uses forager-farmers. Robert McCrae suggested translation and abstract items as possible explanations; the reading attributes this to "defenders of the model."

Introversion vs shyness follows Susan Cain's widely cited distinction (NPR, 2012) and mainstream trait psychology; the reward-sensitivity link is a leading but not settled account, so the reading says "many researchers link." Nine in ten: Jens Asendorpf's estimate, reported by Scientific American; it is an estimate, not a measured share. Age change: Roberts, Walton and Viechtbauer (2006), meta-analysis of 92 samples: social dominance, conscientiousness, and emotional stability rose most between about 20 and 40. Week-long trial: Jacques-Hamilton and colleagues, University of Melbourne (preprint reported by BPS Research Digest and Aeon/Psyche); one study, and the authors urged caution. Hiring: the Myers & Briggs Foundation's ethical-use page says the instrument is not designed for hiring.