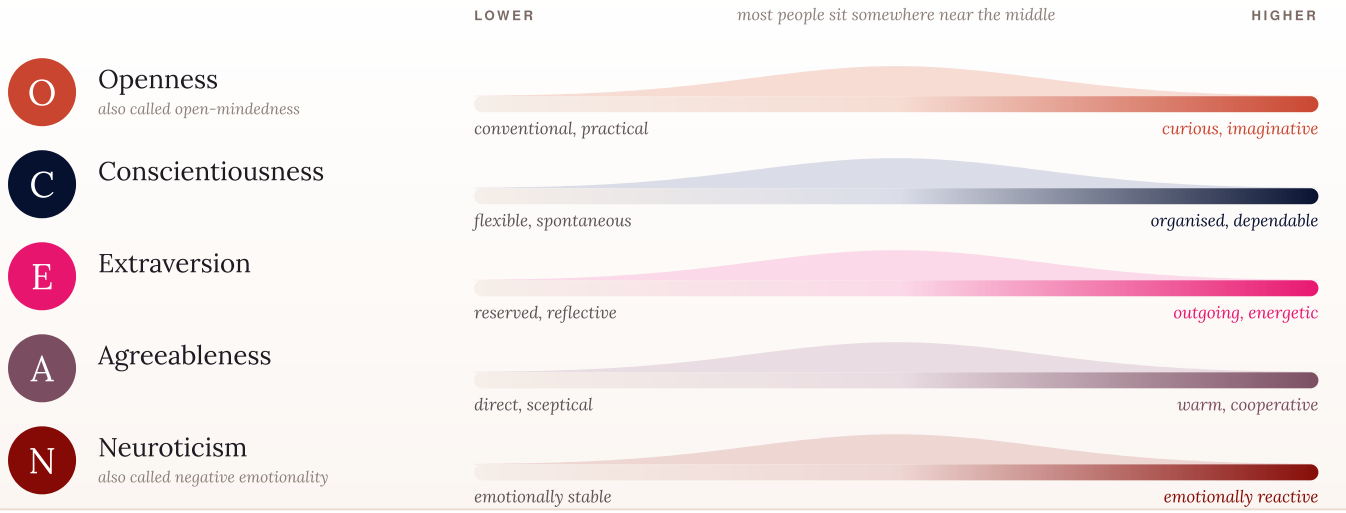
The Big Five Personality Traits

PERSONALITY · FIVE BROAD DIMENSIONS

Five dimensions that describe how people tend to think, feel and act

The Big Five, or five-factor model, emerged from decades of research showing that much of how people describe personality groups into five broad dimensions (Goldberg, 1990): openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The low end of neuroticism is often described as emotional stability. Each trait is a continuum, and neither end is simply better or worse.



01 The five traits in detail

facets from the BFI-2 (Soto & John, 2017)

TRAIT	FACETS	HIGHER SCORES OFTEN MEAN	LOWER SCORES OFTEN MEAN
Openness *open-mindedness*	*intellectual curiosity* *aesthetic sensitivity* *creative imagination*	Curious about ideas, drawn to art and novelty, imaginative, comfortable with complexity and abstract thinking.	Practical and concrete, prefers the familiar and proven, more conventional in tastes and approach.
Conscientiousness	*organisation* *productiveness* *responsibility*	Organised and dependable, plans ahead, persists with tasks, follows through on commitments.	Flexible and spontaneous, less bound by plans; routines, deadlines and follow-through may take more effort.
Extraversion	*sociability* *assertiveness* *energy level*	Outgoing and talkative, energised by company, comfortable taking the lead, enthusiastic.	Reserved and reflective, prefers smaller groups or time alone, quieter in groups, recharges with solitude.
Agreeableness	*compassion* *respectfulness* *trust*	Warm and considerate, cooperative, tends to trust others and avoid conflict.	Direct and sceptical, more competitive, comfortable disagreeing and challenging others.
Neuroticism *negative emotionality*	*anxiety* *depression* *emotional volatility*	Experiences worry, low mood and irritability more often and more intensely; more sensitive to stress.	Emotionally stable: calmer under pressure, even-tempered, recovers from setbacks more readily.

02 What the research shows

four well-replicated findings

5
Dimensions, not types
Everyone has a position on all five traits. Most people sit near the middle, and each end has advantages in some situations and costs in others.

~40%
Partly heritable
Around 40% of differences in personality between people are linked to genetic influences, and the rest to environment and experience (Vukasović & Bratko, 2015).

20–40
Traits shift with age
On average, people become more socially confident, conscientious and emotionally stable through adulthood, especially from 20 to 40 (Roberts et al., 2006).

24 wks
Change with intervention
Across 207 studies, interventions such as therapy were linked to measurable trait change over about 24 weeks, most of all in emotional stability (Roberts et al., 2017).

03 Common misunderstandings

what the traits do not mean

Introversion is not shyness.
Lower extraversion reflects a preference for quieter settings; shyness involves anxiety about social judgement.

Lower agreeableness is not unkindness.
It often means being direct and willing to disagree, which can be useful.

High neuroticism is not a diagnosis.
It describes a tendency towards stronger negative emotions, which can be worked with.

A trait is not a fixed verdict.
Traits describe tendencies, and behaviour still varies with the situation.

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04 My profile

a self-rating, not a test score

● fill in where I usually sit ○ circle where I sit under stress

O	Openness	*conventional, practical*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*curious, imaginative*
C	Conscientiousness	*flexible, spontaneous*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*organised, dependable*
E	Extraversion	*reserved, reflective*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*outgoing, energetic*
A	Agreeableness	*direct, sceptical*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*warm, cooperative*
N	Neuroticism	*emotionally stable*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*emotionally reactive*

05 How my traits show up

each trait has advantages and costs

TRAIT	HOW IT SHOWS UP IN MY LIFE	WHERE IT HELPS ME	WHERE IT CAN COST ME
O Openness			
C Conscientiousness			
E Extraversion			
A Agreeableness			
N Neuroticism			

06 Personality and my situation

fit between traits and circumstances

Which situations suit my personality, and which strain it?
work, relationships, routines, environments

Which trait is most connected to what I am finding difficult right now?
and how it might be contributing

07 A trait-related goal

traits shift through repeated behaviour

WORKING WITH A TRAIT

A specific, repeatable behaviour

For example: Conscientiousness. "Each evening, write my top three priorities for the next day, for four weeks. Review whether I completed them and adjust."

Trait I want to work with _____

Specific behaviour _____

How often, and when _____ **For how long** _____

How I will track it _____ **Review date** _____

Likely obstacle, and my plan for it _____

ABOUT THIS FORM

This form is a guide to understanding and discussing personality; it is not a diagnostic assessment. Your self-ratings are a starting point, and validated questionnaires such as the BFI-2 (Soto & John, 2017) provide a more reliable measure. No position on a trait is a problem in itself. Difficulties are more likely when a trait and a situation are a poor fit, or when a pattern such as high negative emotionality is causing ongoing distress. If that applies to you, speak with your GP or psychologist.

SOURCES

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