

INTP

(About 3.3% of the U.S. population)

INTPs are driven by a never-ending quest for perfection, cleverness, competence, conceptual precision, and self-mastery. To arrive at what seems like perfection, only to have it challenged by new insights, is exciting to this type. As a result, they are their own greatest critics. They pride themselves on being the first to knock down their own theories or correct themselves with a better word or improved idea. INTPs have a *talent for defining* the underlying principles of something and recognizing its essential qualities. They bring coherence and precision to systems based on the pattern of organization that is naturally there. They easily notice inconsistencies. They enjoy elegant theories and models – both for their own sake and for use in solving technical and human problems.

INTP Personality Highlights

- Their **Introversion** allows them to focus and reflect inward.
- Their **iNtuition** helps them explore possibilities with great imagination.
- Their **Thinking** focuses their attention on the objective analysis of information.
- Their **Perceiving** creates an open-ended and flexible attitude, which prompts them to be responsive to whatever new data are present.

INTPs are often caught up in the paradoxical goal of trying to make a stable, coherent whole from an endlessly proliferating amount of data. They struggle to fit pieces of information together into a complete picture, which keeps expanding with the continual discovery of new pieces. As a result, all thoughts, ideas, and plans are subject to last-minute changes when new data become available. This is very exciting to INTPs and very frustrating to others, especially those with a preference for Judging (Js). What looks like a hard-and-fast decision to the J is simply a temporary notion for this Perceiving (P) type – subject to revision when new data appear.

Here are some other characteristics. INTPs...

- Enjoy any project that presents itself as a mental challenge, from fixing a leaky faucet to writing a business plan, to taking a vacation; they think through every stage of the task at hand.
- Focus on a project and create a plan open-ended enough to allow for improvements. (Once a plan has been developed, a considerable amount of energy will go into critiquing and improving the rough draft.)
- Find more excitement in the drafting process than in actually doing something.
- Think projects through and then may lose interest in them.
- Often conceptualize; it can be difficult to interrupt their concentration when they are working on an idea.
- Believe that whatever the subject, the joy is in the learning.

INTPs in Personal Life

You can expect an intellectual challenge when relating to an INTP. They see words and thoughts as an invitation to expand, clarify, argue, and rethink. Although they aren't as reactive as their cousins, the ENTPs, they are sure to think about and deliver a response that will cause everyone to re-evaluate the issue at hand. Such discipline and rigor brings growth and new direction to a relationship. But tact and poise are generally secondary to their intellectual pursuits. As a result, when INTPs are absorbed in thinking or questioning, they can seem hard to reach or even downright rude to others.

This clarity of thought and words accompanies most of what INTPs do. They are the natural writers and editors of life – the ones who paint pictures with words. Their capacity to say exactly what's on their minds and to help others do the same is a talent not found in most other types. The mind of an INTP is a steel trap, always tracking conversations and restructuring them into perfect expressions. They can often repeat exactly what another person has said, even months later. If you try to fend off something with an idle promise ("We'll talk about it later"), the INTP will undoubtedly be back to remind you of your promise.

INTPs at Home

While INTPs may not remember birthdays or anniversaries, these events are important to them and their forgetfulness is unintentional. Family occasions offer material for thought about the meaning of the family and its place in the sequence of life. As INTPs grow and mature, even bedtime may be a stepping-stone to exploration; it opens the door to dreams, which provide more opportunities for understanding and growth.

The senior years for INTPs will give them time to theorize and dream with much less accountability. During some of that time they may experience more Extraversion (E) and subjectivity (Feeling), which may be simultaneously scary and quite exciting. But as that phase passes, they will settle into years of developing new thoughts and ideas to present to younger generations.

INTPs as Children

As children, INTPs may be socially shy or terribly argumentative, with little in between. In school they may be viewed as unfocused, pursuing too many things unrelated to the curriculum. Their behavior can also be seen as disruptive. The result, inevitably, is that they must work harder than most to tolerate and survive grade school. If they successfully make it through the primary and secondary school system, they are likely to thrive in college, where many university faculty members are INTPs. The inquisitiveness encouraged in higher education is the INTP's dream come true.

INTPs as Parents

Parenting for the INTP is seen as an opportunity to help young minds develop and grow. Very patient and accepting of differences in children, these parents want their children to grow up enjoying, expressing, and living through independent thought. INTP parents clearly prefer that children develop their minds over their bodies. But they have an amazing tolerance of, and support for, each child's personal pursuits.

INTPs in Professional Life

At work, INTPs are sources of ideas and inspiration who often work most effectively on their own. They are generally creative, with tendencies toward high energy and occasional bursts of fun. They are not beyond dropping everything to join in on some new project or brainstorming session. If you expect too much detail or attention to the bottom line, though, you'll find them frustrating. Also, time constraints aren't a top priority for INTPs and they will sometimes stretch deadlines.

INTPs have little patience for those who talk out of both sides of their mouth, make small talk, or appear to be theoretically inconsistent (e.g., being both in favor of capital punishment and against war). When they encounter these inconsistencies in a discussion, INTPs may suddenly erupt "out of nowhere."

Work that does not involve mental activity and the opportunity for mastery soon becomes drudgery for INTPs. In fact, if a job doesn't offer them these challenges, they are better off seeking new employment. Otherwise, over the long term, they can become listless, stressed out, accident-prone, and perform poorly.

INTPs are free-spirited idea mills and absent-minded professors, which makes them fun to be around, easily diverted, and unendingly creative. Their love of the abstract is so deep that it can lead them during a single working day through a maze of inventive and challenging programs, policies, products, and processes.

INTPs as Leaders

One of the strengths of the INTP is an affinity for independent thinking, both in themselves and in others. To be able to develop something from scratch and think it through from beginning to end is a sign of real maturity. The great theories of all time, from relativity to personality, evolution to thermodynamics, Parkinson's law to Murphy's law, probably had their incubation in the mind of an INTP.

INTPs may avoid decisions about taking action or establishing order and structure. They gather conceptual information so it can be sorted into categories and may not act until guiding principles are clear. Their focus is on the accuracy of a theory and the clarity of a model. Logistical decisions are seen as trivial; they will be either slighted or labored over. Interpersonal decisions are made to avoid disruption and keep the peace.

Masterful at developing competence and expertise in many fields, INTPs enjoy solving complex problems so much that they may fail to delegate to others. They tend to believe that there is an underlying theory in all things – including human behavior – and build their understanding and actions around their theory of choice.

INTPs as Employees

The INTPs' iNtuitive-Perceiving (NP) nature frequently leads them astray in the pursuit of new adventures, which can interfere with their need for time to be alone and to think. After all, it's hard to stay removed and reflective in one's internal world when the outer world is so full of ideas and possibilities. The INTP is a very heady, conceptual type whose ideas can be pure genius. But sometimes these ideas get lost because INTPs are continually reworking them and don't always share their latest thinking with their colleagues.

INTPs are easy to work for and with. They enjoy banter, independent thinking, and especially self-directed projects. All of life is about learning for iNtuitive-Thinkers (NTs) in general, and the INTP embodies this most completely. Anything that can develop intellectual awareness has value. From hands-on mechanics to proposal writing, it's one grand opportunity after another to learn, improve, and grow.

INTPs have a vision and enthusiasm for whatever project is underway. Sometimes their Introversion (I) may block them from expressing what is going on inside. However, they can usually take the general thoughts expressed by others and translate them into an inspiration and vision that motivates others. The INTP has a gift for adding to the ordinary until it becomes extraordinary. Daily jobs become far more fulfilling when they are reframed by INTPs as an integral part of an organization's mission. If INTPs are given a moment to get their thoughts in order, their summary may be artfully stated. They view this mental process as natural; to others it's seen as inner vision.

The INTP's easygoing nature and conceptual spaciness may put them at odds with the Thinking-Judging (TJ) management style of most organizations. If their talents are misunderstood, their employment file will usually contain at least one reprimand of some kind about an INTP needing to be "more grounded" and less "out to lunch." "Stop daydreaming and get back to work," and "I'd like to see you show a bit more respect for rules and regulations," are two common demands made of INTPs.

INTPs' Workplace Stressors

Perhaps the INTPs' most serious shortcoming occurs when one of their strengths is carried to the extreme: they fail to translate their rich inner concepts into meaningful action. It is common for INTPs to perform a job from beginning to end, but only in their mind. Whether assigned to write a request for a proposal or design a heater valve, they will gather all the necessary data by reading, listening, investigating, or questioning others. But the next step – translating this research into a report, drawing, or plan – may never happen. INTPs can think something through completely and, in the process, even become excited about it. Then, having thought it through to completion, they lay the matter to rest. This lack of follow-through can be extremely frustrating to those counting on tangible results. And the INTPs can get frustrated too, knowing that the job is incomplete but having little or no motivation to complete it.

Social awkwardness can also cause stress. INTPs can exhibit wide swings, from genuine interest in a few special people to nearly total disdain for just about everyone else. They may even be aware that

this is happening. At times their keen interest in intellectual pursuits may draw them to someone, but such bonds can be easily broken if their intellectual focus shifts. INTPs gravitate to where the intellectual action is.

INTPs can be somewhat independent, anti-authoritarian, and argumentative. They are sometimes shy and socially awkward, depending on the strength of their Introversion. They are not particularly interested in following most of society's customs and traditions. It's not that they are against any of those traditions; it's just that they can miss the subtleties of some basic social gesture because they are absent-minded.

INTPs can be quickly stressed when they can't figure out intellectually why something is going on. Relationships in general can be stressful, and when there is conflict, INTPs can feel powerless. Although they are sensitive to others, they often lack the people skills needed to interact empathically and show their genuine caring. With people as with projects, designing and theorizing take precedence over logistical and tactical implementation. Follow-through and "making it happen" can leave the INTP feeling burdened and inadequate.

Like other iNtuitives (especially iNtuitive-Perceivers), INTPs can become very removed from the practical, realistic side of life. Deadlines get stretched, and they can appear rigid or flaky when it comes to dealing with specifics. Their behavior can be anything from loud and obnoxious to pensive and withdrawn.

INTPs' Careers

With their strong analytical skills and creativity, INTPs may be attracted to careers in the hard sciences, computer programming, journalism, and academia. They are the most common type among university-level faculty, and thus seem to perpetuate the "absent-minded professor" label.

Summary

The intellectual basis for most of our life would not exist were it not for the INTP; they are the architects of our ideas. INTPs provide the conceptual framework by which manuals, organizational procedures, and even work assignments are translated and put into action.

Adapted from the writing and teaching of Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen.

INTPs On a Team

Naturally Bring to a Team

- Clarity to define problems; their relationships are about sharing expertise
- Ability to design and theorize; they often grasp underlying principles and define essential qualities
- Analysis, seeing differences, and developing categories
- Using words to express exactly what they and others want to communicate
- Focus on the principles of a project

Teamwork Style

- Engineer connections, usually around an area of expertise; help connect people with ideas and information as well as network people to other individuals
- Communicate the general outline of a vision
- Can provide autonomy and options, assuming others want it as much as they do

Potential Blind Spots

- Are impatient with errors, covering ground already covered, and other signs of inefficiency
- May be seen as not caring or not being a team player when they detach to analyze, critique, and problem solve
- Might avoid conflict too long, hoping it will go away
- Can irritate team members by being too theoretical

To Help Them Succeed

- Provide them enough freedom to reflect on how things work, to generate ideas, see connections and patterns
- Provide them opportunities to direct their energy toward the acquisition of knowledge and confidence
- Give them the logic, rationale, or proof behind standard operating procedures, conventions, and protocols
- Provide coaching in interpersonal skills

Adapted from Quick Guide to the 16 Personality Types in Organizations by Sue A. Cooper, Roger R. Pearman, et al.

Managing the INTP

WORK LABEL – DEFINER

- Reserved and impersonal
- Lives in a world of ideas
- Skilled with hair-splitting logic
- Strongly defined interests
- Enjoys theoretical and/or scientific subjects

STRENGTHS

- Independent
- Creative
- Conceptual
- Analytical
- Imaginative

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Improve follow-through
- Nurture relationships
- Remember to communicate
- Be sensitive to others' needs
- Take care of details

TO FUNCTION BEST Freedom to work independently. Opportunities to design, problems to solve. Intellectual variety and support for their ideas.
INTPs NEED: Positive feedback, recognition, and a reason for what they are doing.

INTPs ARE FRUSTRATED BY: Being told what to do and how to do things.
Unintelligent demands. Routine and redundancy.
Overly emotional responses.

INTPs IRRITATE OTHERS BY: Appearing arrogant and not communicating. Hurting others' feelings. Skepticism and hair-splitting. Refusing to deal with details and a lack of execution.

INTPs VALUE: Concepts, intelligence, and ingenuity.

ON A TEAM: They work alone for the group.