

## Observational Measurement of Behavior

Many contemporary personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions of personality, often referred to as the "Big 5" personality traits. These five primary personality traits are extraversion (also often spelled extroversion), agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.

Extraversion is sociability, agreeableness is kindness, openness is creativity and intrigue, conscientiousness is thoughtfulness, and neuroticism often involves sadness or emotional instability.

Understanding what each personality trait is and what it means to score high or low in that trait can give you insight into your own personality—without taking a personality traits test. It can also help you better understand others, based on where they fall on the continuum for each of the personality traits listed.

An Easy Way to Remember the Big 5 Some use the acronym OCEAN (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) to remember the Big 5 personality traits. CANOE (for conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and extraversion) is another option.

### History of the 5-Factor Model of Personality

Trait theories of personality have long attempted to pin down exactly how many traits exist. Earlier theories have suggested various numbers. For instance, Gordon Allport's list contained 4,000 personality traits, Raymond Cattell had 16 personality factors, and Hans Eysenck offered a three-factor theory.

Many researchers felt that Cattell's theory was too complicated and Eysenck's was too limited in scope. As a result, the Big 5 personality traits emerged and are used to describe the broad traits that serve as building blocks of personality.

Several researchers support the belief that there are five core personality traits. Evidence of this theory has been growing for many years in psychology, beginning with the research of D. W. Fiske (1949), and later expanded upon by others, including Norman (1967), Smith (1967), Goldberg (1981), and McCrae & Costa (1987).

### The Big 5 Personality Traits

Verywell / Joshua Seong

It is important to note that each of the five primary personality traits represents a range between two extremes. For example, extraversion represents a continuum between extreme extraversion and extreme introversion. In the real world, most people lie somewhere in between.

While there is a significant body of literature supporting these primary personality traits, researchers don't always agree on the exact labels for each

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dimension. That said, these five traits are usually described as follows.

### Openness

Openness (also referred to as openness to experience) emphasizes imagination and insight the most out of all five personality traits. People who are high in openness tend to have a broad range of interests. They are curious about the world and other people and are eager to learn new things and enjoy new experiences.

People who are high in this personality trait also tend to be more adventurous and creative. Conversely, people low in this personality trait are often much more traditional and may struggle with abstract thinking.

High Very creative

Open to trying new things

Focused on tackling new challenges

Happy to think about abstract concepts

Low Dislikes change

Does not enjoy new things

Resists new ideas

Not very imaginative

Dislikes abstract or theoretical concepts

Conscientiousness

Among each of the personality traits, conscientiousness is one defined by high levels of thoughtfulness, good impulse control, and goal-directed behaviors. Highly conscientious people tend to be organized and mindful of details. They plan ahead, think about how their behavior affects others, and are mindful of deadlines.

Someone scoring lower in this primary personality trait is less structured and less organized. They may procrastinate to get things done, sometimes missing deadlines completely.

High Spends time preparing

Finishes important tasks right away

Pays attention to detail

Enjoys having a set schedule Low Dislikes structure and schedules

Makes messes and doesn't take care of things

Fails to return things or put them back where they belong

Procrastinates important tasks

Fails to complete necessary or assigned tasks

Extraversion

Extraversion (or extroversion) is a personality trait characterized by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness. People high in extraversion are outgoing and tend to gain energy in social situations. Being around others helps them feel energized and excited.

People who are low in this personality trait or introverted tend to be more reserved. They have less energy to expend in social settings and social events can feel draining. Introverts often require a period of solitude and quiet in

order to "recharge."

High Enjoys being the center of attention

Likes to start conversations

Enjoys meeting new people

Has a wide social circle of friends and acquaintances

Finds it easy to make new friends

Feels energized when around other people

Say things before thinking about them Low Prefers solitude

Feels exhausted when having to socialize a lot

Finds it difficult to start conversations

Dislikes making small talk

Carefully thinks things through before speaking

Dislikes being the center of attention

Agreeableness

This personality trait includes attributes such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other prosocial behaviors. People who are high in agreeableness tend to be more cooperative while those low in this personality trait tend to be more competitive and sometimes even manipulative.

High Has a great deal of interest in other people

Cares about others

Feels empathy and concern for other people

Enjoys helping and contributing to the happiness of other people

Assists others who are in need of help Low Takes little interest in others

Doesn't care about how other people feel

Has little interest in other people's problems

Insults and belittles others

Manipulates others to get what they want

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is a personality trait characterized by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability. Individuals who are high in neuroticism tend to experience mood swings, anxiety, irritability, and sadness. Those low in this personality trait tend to be more stable and emotionally resilient.

High Experiences a lot of stress

Worries about many different things

Gets upset easily

Experiences dramatic shifts in mood

Feels anxious

Struggles to bounce back after stressful events Low Emotionally stable

Deals well with stress

Rarely feels sad or depressed

Doesn't worry much

Is very relaxed

How to Use the Big 5 Personality Traits

Where you fall on the continuum for each of these five primary traits can be used to help identify whether you are more or less likely to have other more secondary personality traits. These other traits are often split into two categories: positive personality traits and negative personality traits.

Positive Personality Traits

Positive personality traits are traits that can be beneficial to have. These traits may help you be a better person or make it easier to cope with challenges you may face in life. Personality traits that are considered positive include:

Adaptable

Ambitious

Considerate

Cooperative

Friendly

Gracious

Humble

Insightful

Objective

Optimistic

Respectful

Steady

Thorough

Well-rounded

#### Negative Personality Traits

Negative personality traits are those that may be more harmful than helpful. These are traits that may hold you back in your life or hurt your relationships with others. (They're also good traits to focus on for personal growth.) Personality traits that fall in the negative category include:

Aggressive

Arrogant

Cold

Deceptive

Egotistical

Guarded

Intolerant

Judgmental

Moody

Neglectful

Pompous

Selfish

Unreliable

Withdrawn

For example, if you score high in openness, you are more likely to have the positive personality trait of creativity. If you score low in openness, you may be more likely to have the negative personality trait of being unimaginative.

#### Universality of Primary Personality Traits

McCrae and his colleagues found that the Big 5 personality traits are remarkably universal. One study that looked at people from more than 50 different cultures found that the five dimensions could be accurately used to describe personality.



Based on this research, many psychologists now believe that the five personality dimensions are not only universal but that they also have biological origins. Psychologist David Buss has proposed an evolutionary explanation for these five core personality traits, suggesting that they represent the most important qualities that shape our social landscape.

#### Factors Influencing Personality Traits

Research suggests that both biological and environmental influences play a role in shaping our personalities. Twin studies suggest that both nature and nurture play a role in the development of each of the five personality traits.

One study of the genetic and environmental underpinnings of the five traits looked at 123 pairs of identical twins and 127 pairs of fraternal twins. The findings suggested that the heritability of each personality trait was 53% for extraversion, 41% for agreeableness, 44% for conscientiousness, 41% for neuroticism, and 61% for openness.

Longitudinal studies also suggest that these big five personality traits tend to be relatively stable over the course of adulthood. One four-year study of working-age adults found that personality changed little as a result of adverse life events.

Studies show that maturation may have an impact on the five personality traits. As people age, they tend to become less extraverted, less neurotic, and less open to an experience. Agreeableness and conscientiousness, on the other hand, tend to increase as people grow older.

#### A Word From Verywell

Always remember that behavior involves an interaction between a person's underlying personality and situational variables. The situation that someone finds themselves in plays a role in how they might react. However, in most cases, people offer responses that are consistent with their underlying personality traits.

These dimensions represent broad areas of personality. But personality is also complex and varied. So, a person may display behaviors across several of these personality traits.

## Reference

[Research Skills for Medical Students \(Becoming Tomorrow's Doctors Series\)](#)

[Clinical Ethics Handbook for Nurses: Emphasizing Context, Communication and Collaboration \(The International Library of Bioethics, 93\)](#)