

The MBTI Types and What They Can Learn About Writing

Adapted by Sandy McIver from *Writing and Personality* (DiTiberio, J. & Jensen, G.)

ISTJ

Hints: ISTJs are often looking for the right formula. Accept what follows (below) as the right formula for you. Do not try to convert others.

Revising: Lucky you—you can often write so well in your head that you can often keep your revising down to minor editorial changes

Needs: Explicit directions if you are writing for someone else or to meet requirements (e.g. for the major project). No change to your writing routine if you can find a way that works!

What works: Writing close to the deadline as long as you have written a draft in your head. Finding steps and procedures that work for you every time—keep following them!

Strengths and limitations: ISTJs can be extremely efficient writers and write best when writing concretely—from facts, data and authorities. You can be brusque and dry and overlook the human dimension in your writing.

Natural style: Begin with data like statistics. Be factual.

Contexts: ISTJs should ask for the specific direction they like (but you may not always get it!).

Outline: Turn the plan in your head into an outline before starting writing. For a longer paper (like your project) try putting key topics/headings on slips of paper/post-its. Move them around until you have your outline

Writing blocks: ISTJs experience relatively few blocks. The biggest one is finding data or authorities to back up or focus your ideas or beliefs. You can also struggle with complex issues that are hard to segment.

ISTP

Hints: ISTPs should begin and end your writing in isolation. Make sure you have the physical space to be by yourself when writing. Don't pick really abstract topics.

Revising: Because ISTPs tend to ramble, they should allow time for revision. You can often work independently at revising without feedback from others.

Needs: ISTPs need the pressure of a deadline. You may want to set an earlier-than required deadline.

What works: Nothing but the facts (unless it's humour—see below). Start by gathering facts about your topic.

Strengths and limitations: Humor is important. You could build humor into early drafts even if you have to take some of it out of later drafts. You can work with complex databases. Watch out for offending some readers if you don't think in advance about your audience. Take the time to take the 'ramble' out of your writings.

Natural style: ISTPs write about facts and data. You can also enjoy humour, satire etc.

Contexts: ISTPs can be defiant when facing feedback. It's good to discuss this in advance with faculty so it doesn't become an issue.

Outline: Get a rambling draft done and then work hard at connections, getting outside advice (e.g. a Writing Friend) if that helps. Then do an outline.

Writing blocks: When blocked, give yourself time and space to write without distractions.

ESTP

Hints: Writing can be a challenge for you. Some ESTPs would rather see, hear, touch, taste, smell or climb something than write about it. Focus can be vital!!

Revising: Because you often leave things to the last minute, revising can be tough and your anxiety high. Early 'deadline' dates may be helpful. You may also resist suggested revisions so actively work at understanding where the suggestions come from.

Needs: Doing lots at once—e.g. Writing more than one thing at a time (including multiple chapters of a master's project).

What works: Lots of quotes and information and sometimes elaborate computer files of research for longer writing pieces.

Strengths and limitations: Short pieces about facts for a functional purpose are best. Sorting out purpose can be really important. Longer pieces can seem overwhelming so be prepared for that. Be willing to read, re-read and work with abstract theory.

Natural style: Factual, analytical and critical.

Contexts: Try finding a 'Writing Friend' who is strong in the judging preference and get them to help push you towards deadlines and closure.

Outline: Start with a clear sense of direction and an outline if possible but be prepared to go off elsewhere. Linking things together through a revised outline and a revised text can help.

Writing blocks: Getting started!!! Know your deadlines, set an earlier one if that helps and get going. If you lose your train of thought try tape recording or telling a friend what you are thinking of and getting him/her to write as you talk.

ESTJ

Hints: ESTJs like to meet expectations so it is good to know what they are. Speaking in public (as in making presentations) is a really good way to get ideas out of your head.

Revising: Steady work is best for ESTJs including steady work at revising.

Needs: ESTJs need to know who their audience is so they can write to that audience. It can be best to think of a specific person.

What works: An early start (although ESTJs can write close to a deadline). Make sure you have a clear focus by the time you complete an early draft (see outline below)

Strengths and limitations: A strength is argumentative writing where you have a point to make. You can express yourself too harshly (which suggests feedback is helpful)

Natural style: The ESTJ can have a clear voice through a conversational style.

Contexts: Theories take on meaning with real examples. Take time to express opinions, which means often exploring where those opinions come from (see the many texts on qualitative writing).

Outline: Do a rough draft first, sometimes even before your research is complete. Then establish a structure and do an outline based on that.

Writing blocks: Lack of focus can be a killer. Try talking about the assignment to someone who is a good listener.

ISFJ

Hints: ISFJs start with the facts. A first draft is often a long presentation of data saying everything that they know about a subject.

Revising: The opening purpose only becomes clear to ISFJs after they have the facts. You revise more extensively when you receive feedback that is very specific and directive.

Needs: You need guidelines for a writing project to be clear.

What works: You work best with quiet concentration. ISFJs spend a lot of time thinking about what they are going to write. You benefit from talking to people and writing in your heads.

Strengths and limitations: ISFJs write in ways that are clear, factual and direct. You have difficulty with smooth transitions between sections. You typically work better alone.

Natural style: You prefer a narrative style that includes concrete observations and is based on practical experience.

Contexts: ISFJs like assignments that have a practical function and clear guidelines.

Outlines: Get the facts/quotes down first. Then and only then should you attempt an outline

Writing blocks: ISFJs can react to noise and to interruptions that increase anxiety. When stuck you should write what you know for sure (e.g. all your quotes) before moving into theory.

ISFP

Hints: Sometimes you have to check and double-check what is required. Don't feel badly if that is the case. Seek a model of what is being asked for if that helps. Choose a topic that you care about because it will be hard to keep motivated if you don't

Revising: Check back to make sure that you are fulfilling the intended purpose with various drafts. Work at developing conclusions. Stay focused on the purpose of the paper as you revise. Shorten drafts where appropriate.

Needs: You need feedback that is constructive and not too harsh. Ask for positives/praise about your writing if this is not given to you.

What works: ISFPs generally write best alone.

Strengths and limitations: ISFPs work well with topics about people (e.g. why people feel motivated). ISFPs should recognize the value of their insight about people. ISFPs can include too much data (the 'S') and too many options (the 'P').

Natural style: Write with conviction. If there are long range issues, make sure you explore them.

Contexts: Academic writing can be agony so there may be value in having a writing 'friend'.

Outline: Outlines can be an area of struggle—even a source of writer's block (see below).

Writing blocks: If an ISFP gets stuck, s/he should look for direct human contact though one on one conversations. This can also enlighten you as to what practical things you want to write about.

ESFP

Hints: For ESFPs, getting started can be the toughest part. You can bring fun and lightness to their writing. Get a friend to listen to and write down your best ideas. Or failing that, find a tape recorder.

Revising: Be prepared for marathon writing sessions to be followed by revisions that add structure and organization. Don't expect your rough drafts to be as polished as those of some other types might be.

Needs: ESFPs need to give themselves time to revise extensively. You can do so by setting yourself an early deadline. A good idea is to seek oral feedback to help you with your writing.

What works: Write quickly the first time around, without stopping to worry about grammar and other niceties (APA!!).

Strengths and limitations: A natural strength is writing stories. Seek out stories (including people telling narrative stories) as part of your research. Get advice through talking with others about the themes that may be coming out in your writing.

Natural style: Your natural style of writing is conversational. Seek topics that lend themselves to that (e.g. the integrative paper and/or qualitative research with narrative, for example)

Contexts: Creative writing can work. Being too abstract often doesn't work.

Outline: If you do a draft or drafts that get you off topic, use an outline to help you reel things back in and focus your writing.

Writing blocks: Writing slowly may block you so write at your best time of day, and quickly. Save decisions such as which details to include to later in the process in order to avoid getting bogged down.

ESFJ

Hints: ESFJs need to know and write about what they care about.

Revising: You need to revise early drafts by inserting near the front of your draft a general thesis statement about where the paper is going.

Needs: ESFJs enjoy collaboration in all things, including writing.

What works: ESFJs must be working closely with other people in order to prevent themselves from being stuck in their writing and reacting to what they regards as dull.

Strengths and limitations: ESFJ writing is practical, often in service of other people. You show heartfelt conviction and frequently tell stories. You can be weak at dispassionate categorization of data. You must revise first drafts in order to remove your heart from your sleeve and to give your writing deeper meaning.

Natural style: ESFJs excel at personal narrative: what, who, and how we felt. You like to communicate what you care about and value.

Contexts: ESFJs write best when someone will take to heart what they have to say.

Outlines: Do a first draft writing what you care about and then try to do an outline

Writing blocks: The biggest blocks are indifference from others and too many 'shoulds', both internal and external. You can get past blocks with support from others and by focusing on what your audience expects.

INFJ

Hints: INFJs feel personally connected to their writing and are likely to continue feeling that way after the writing is complete. Find a way to connect personally with your writing and that relates to your personal values.

Revising: You need to make a conscious decision to begin and end revising because you could spend endless hours searching for the perfect word. It can be difficult for INFJs to decide what to edit because each word is significant due to the connection between the writing and the writer's values.

Needs: The time and space to develop ideas without interruption from other people, or having to talk about the writing with others.

What works: Make sure that you have the time to develop and formulate your ideas before you share them with others. When working in a group, ensure that your group members understand that you need time to think/work by yourself before you share your writing.

Strengths and limitations: Originality of thought and expression; able to personalize and organize abstract ideas. Since INFJs need time alone to develop and express ideas, you might be reluctant to share ideas with others. Your desire to make sense of and integrate all aspects of complex abstract ideas may seem brilliant to some people but may totally baffle other readers.

Natural style: A personalized formal approach that integrates the human element and is usually interesting.

Contexts: You feel most comfortable writing about your personal values and when you have space to complete your work by yourself. Harsh criticism or strong direction from instructors or supervisors can have serious consequences and impact on your ability to produce your best work.

Outlines: INFJs like to think a great deal before starting a project, so you've likely already got a plan before you start typing. Make sure that you document your plan so that you can see if you're actually trying to incorporate too much information.

Writing blocks: Don't hang on to your ideas for too long before you start to write about them. Give yourself permission to write a first draft that doesn't have to be perfect (turn off grammar and spell-check while you're writing) – you can polish the work in the revising stage. Give yourself limits to when you're going to stop thinking about your document so that you're not endlessly looking for just the right word or sentence to express yourself.

INFP

Hints: Agony is common but can become pure joy. Your writing can be exquisite if you get it just right.

Revising: Need to present illustrations of their original point. Usually need to shorten drafts.

Needs: To feel personally engaged in the project—INFPs have to care about what they do.

INFPs often have a profound commitment to everything they do.

What works: Informal outlines work well (e.g. on random scrap paper or post-its)

Strengths and limitations: INFPs connect different sources and write well on human interest themes. You can lose track of the central points of your content since you focus so much attention on how it reads.

Natural style: A flair for word choice.

Contexts: The best contexts are interdisciplinary; building bridges across models. You benefit from genuine warmth and support

Outline: See above re. doing an informal outline on scraps of paper or post-its first and then refining it.

Writing blocks: You must not focus on mechanics too soon. You may imagine that readers will be critical. You may agree to too many projects at once. Almost any block can be relieved if you write about the block itself, thus getting your personal values engaged.

ENFP

Hints: The most important element is inspiration. Inspiration often comes from the outer world.

Revising: ENFPs are more likely to revise when they receive oral feedback or even when they read their text out loud to themselves. You revise by translation (e.g. a chaotic first draft into a more polished product).

Needs: You must stay invested in projects

What works: Generate ideas by talking to others or speaking into a tape recorder. You may want to do free-writing. You are better at writing when you have a firm deadline.

Strengths and limitations: ENFPs are creative and insightful and excel at analyzing people and personal narratives. You struggle with finishing and revising projects. Unrevised finished products are rambling, poorly focused and/or poorly organized.

Natural style: Narrative, expressive and conversational

Contexts: Hate routine writing. Prefer to write when inspired on a variety of topics

Outline: Do free writing first and then figure out an outline.

Writing blocks: When lacking in inspiration, ENFPs need to talk out their frustration and find either unique approaches and/or a link to their personal values. Fearing rejection from readers and writing critically about people can also cause blocks.

ENFJ

Hints: An ENFJ can begin a new writing project by conversation. Try doing a first draft after a conversation with someone else. Get an early start and move energetically towards completion.

Revising: Because of the many themes that can be included in a single paragraph, the ENFJ is often well advised to separate out themes when doing revisions. Also talk about wordiness and some conversational parts in later drafts (unless they fit of course!)

Needs: ENFJs would do well to focus their early drafts on a topic which is personal and which has linkages to their values.

What works: Prioritize among alternatives. Organize your ideas in a sequence of importance.

Strengths and limitations: ENFJs can be motivational, entertaining, anecdotal and metaphorical. There can be a 'performance' aspect to an ENFJs writing, which can be a positive with the right audience.

Natural style: The natural ENFJ style is uplifting and expressive, with personal illustrations. You can be persuasive and should value that in your writing.

Contexts: Figure out who your audience is. Try to write on topics that relate to people.

Outline: Try talking through your ideas in order to organize them. Then use a written outline as an organizing tool.

Writing blocks: Too much writing can be a block—talk about a topic or try doing something to do with the topic before writing about it. Get personal support for what you are trying to write in a big paper or dissertation.

INTJ

Hints: INTJs like topics that work in the real world. Find them.

Revising: INTJs should now allow their desire to closure to prevent them from revising. Use revision time and energy to add and expand on what you write in your first draft(s).

Needs: INTJs like a original, logical and orderly structure. Allow for that.

What works: Start working on the project early. Stop yourself from submitting the final product too early. That time could be used for revision and revisiting. Be prepared to write several introductions because you may not like the direction your earliest ones take you in.

Strengths and limitations: INTJs excel at writing about theories and ideas—the abstract. Quick completion and avoidance of feedback can be a real drawback to a quality piece of work, especially on more complicated projects.

Natural style: Clear, consistent, organized.

Contexts: Get the go-ahead to develop original ideas and pursue some degree of independence.

Outline: INTJs may want to write only one draft so a good outline helps. INTJs plan extensively in their heads. It is really worth putting in the time to do a really good outline.

Writing blocks: Learn to stop and wait if blocked early. Recognize that too much ‘noise’ or advice from others can cause blockage. The very search for some original angle can also cause blockage. Work at being spontaneous

INTP

Hints: INTPs need to surround themselves with quiet for concentration.

Revising: INTPs are strong at working and reworking a draft. Sometimes you have to pull yourself away to get perspective.

Needs: INTPs have an intense need to understand and analyze. You work well alone.

What works: INTPs benefit from having a rationale for why they are writing about what they are writing about.

Strengths and limitations: Humor and making complex material understandable are strengths. Leaving out human examples can be a limitation to successful writing in fields like leadership.

Natural style: Incisive, original, cuts to the chase. Investigating what is behind something.

Contexts: Get rid of distractions. Use your capacity for analysis.

Outline: Start with a matrix or some other form of listing of essential ideas and then develop an outline from there.

Writing blocks: Sometimes INTPs can put off writing until they have read everything available on a topic. In academic fields such as leadership, reading everything is an impossible task. INTPs should stop when blocked and write about the logical purpose(s) for writing what they are writing about.

ENTP

Hints: Discussions about abstract topics energize ENTPs. You like debate to clear your thinking.

Revising: At revising time, you must pay attention to mechanics.

Needs: ENTPs generally do not like to sit. Dictating or tape recording your discussions can help them begin the process. A conversation should precede writing.

What works: The more external stimulation, the better. An ENTP can compose early drafts while also talking to a colleague.

Strengths and limitations: ENTPs like conceptual models and can point out flaws in arguments. You are good at critical analysis. ENTPs can overstate principles without supporting evidence.

Natural style: They build into their writing their playful sense of humor. You can write intellectual, inspiring, and challenging pieces.

Contexts: You need room to roam, freedom to challenge. Inspiration is big.

Outline: Have a conversation with someone about your overall themes and topics and then attempt a very rough outline.

Writing blocks: You need liveliness: on line searches, a lively discussion with someone else with someone taking notes and engagement of your free spirit and sense of autonomy.

ENTJ

Hints: You're a natural leader and feel comfortable being in control of a project. Being organized is very important to you and you know it helps you to get the job done. You might sometimes appear more knowledgeable or confident than what is actually true. You are usually confident that you have the right knowledge.

Revising: Focus on expanding ideas that may not have been fully developed in the first draft. Make sure that your tone is appropriate to your audience and that you're not so focused on the message that you lose sight of how best to communicate the message to your reader.

Needs: If you are collaborating with other authors, you will probably feel comfortable taking the lead. You're naturally driven to high standards of success, but make sure that you don't put too much pressure on other people and expect them to meet your standards for yourself.

What works:

Strengths and limitations: You're well-organized and focused, and you like to analyze complex issues to get to the main point. You may need to elaborate on your points to provide a full description or demonstration of your understanding of the issue. Avoid rushing to judgement about your topic, and be patient with your team members/instructors who might not address questions or provide feedback as quickly as you'd like.

Natural style: Your language is clear and concise. Since you focus on how the message sounds as well as how it reads, your writing probably has a natural rhythm and cadence to it.

Contexts: You prefer to be in control of your writing process. You enjoy bringing clarity to complex theories.

Outlines: You prefer a brief outline that is formed by using post-it notes that you can move around and group as necessary. You probably prefer a linear approach to planning, in which $a+b=c$.

Writing blocks: You may lose interest in your topic if you feel that it doesn't serve a purpose. Self-reflective writing is particularly challenging for you in that it doesn't add to the learning of others. You may decide upon your topic before fully exploring the subject – make sure that you give full consideration to all sides of the topic. Finally, give yourself a break! You probably tend to be highly self-critical and only expect the highest level of performance from yourself.