

ENGAGING

All Students

Connecting With Different
Personality Types In The Studio

*By Matthew Hoch, NCTM,
and Patty Holley*



As an applied music teacher for the past 20 years, I have always found it easiest to teach the “mini me’s”—students who are of a similar personality type to the teacher. It is always a greater challenge to connect to students who are who think and behave differently. In recent years, with the assistance of self-reporting personality tests like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), I have found that a basic working knowledge of a student’s cognitive and behavioral blueprint has increased my effectiveness in one-on-one applied lessons. This article will outline strategies for assessing basic student personality types and offer specific suggestions for teaching each personality type most efficiently and effectively. The authors argue that this individualized (as opposed to “cookie-cutter”) approach to teaching will not only enhance teaching and learning effectiveness, but also foster a closer and more trusting student-to-teacher relationship.

The Importance Of Connecting With Students

In the one-on-one applied lesson, the student-to-teacher bond is essential. Trust is a key ingredient for technical and artistic progress, and teachers must make a personal connection with students if trust is to be earned. The teacher-student relationship is an investment that develops over time, and failure to connect is likely to result in the student and teacher talking past one another. This lack of communication will ultimately result in a lack of trust.

When I reflect upon my days as a much younger teacher, I feel my biggest mistake was not any sort of lack of confidence, pedagogical knowledge or musicianship, although all three of these attributes have improved over the years. Rather, the younger version of me tended to teach each student the same way. I did not stop to think about the unique personality and learning style of each individual. Over the past decade, however, my teaching has become much more thoughtful and reactive, and the number one hallmark of my maturity—and success as a teacher—has been the ability to adapt my teaching to accommodate the uniqueness of each student who walks into my studio.

In 2014, a particularly talented and bright student of mine (and the second author of this article) introduced me to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and I begin reading about this framework and having my students complete the questionnaire early in their studies with me. I have found it to be a valuable tool in effectively communicating with students in the private lesson. This article gives an overview of MBTI and insight into

the 16 personality types you may find in your studio, along with our insights and advice for connecting with students in each and every category.

The MBTI As Insight Into A Student’s Cognitive Disposition



The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was developed by American educator Katharine Cook Briggs (1875–1968) and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers (1897–1980). The two women based their personality type indicator on a conceptual theory proposed by the Swiss psychiatrist and inventor of analytical psychology Carl Jung (1875–1961). Jung hypothesized that humans experience the world using four principal psychological functions: sensation, intuition, thinking and feeling. Myers and Briggs expanded this model to consider four additional psychological functions: extraversion, introversion, and whether one tends to judge or perceive the world around her or him.¹ This results in the four dichotomies outlined below²:

Extraverted (E) versus Introverted (I)

This Myers-Briggs category asks the question, “Are you outwardly or inwardly focused?” Extraverts are described as being talkative and outgoing, like to be in a fast-paced environment, tend to “think out loud,” and enjoy being the center of attention. Introverts, on the other hand, are described as reserved and private, prefer a slower pace with time for contemplation, tend to think things through inside their head, and would rather observe than be the center of attention.

ENGAGING All Students

Sensing (S) versus Intuition (N)

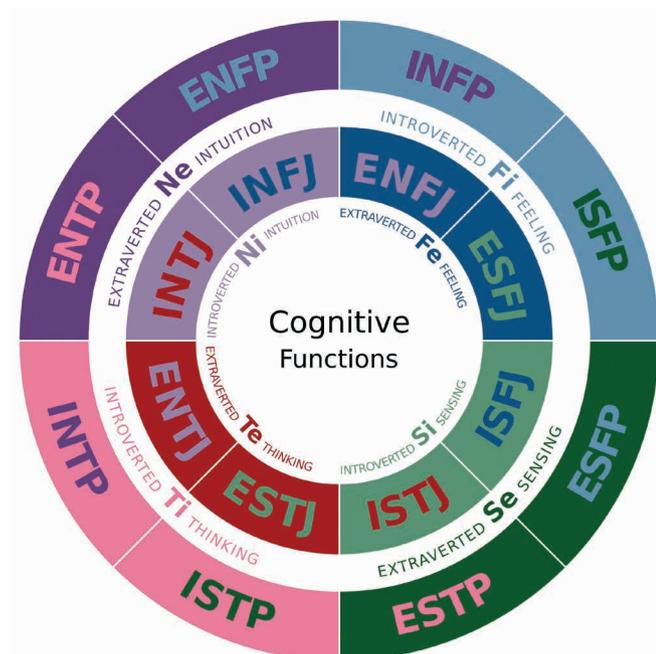
This Myers-Briggs category asks the question, “How do you prefer to take in information?” The category known as sensing individuals focus on the reality of how things are, pay attention to concrete facts and details, take step-by-step instructions and describe things in a literal way. Intuitive individuals, however, tend to focus on the bigger picture, looking to see how everything connects. They are more inventive, admire creative ideas and trust their gut instincts.

Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F)

This Myers-Briggs category asks the question, “How do you prefer to make decisions?” Thinking individuals make decisions objectively, are honest and direct, argue and debate issues for fun, are motivated by achievement, and are best convinced by rational arguments. Feelers, on the other hand, make decisions based on values and feelings. Feeling individuals are generally warm and friendly, diplomatic and tactful, and are motivated by appreciation.

Judging (J) versus Perceiving (P)

This Myers-Briggs category asks the question, “How do you prefer to live your outer life?” Judging individuals prefer structure and order, want detailed step-by-step instructions, value rules and deadlines, like planned schedules and put work before play. Perceivers, in contrast, like to keep their options open, question the need for rules, are spontaneous and put play before work.



The Sixteen Personalities

The popular website “16 personalities” (16personalities.com) takes this organization a step further by categorizing the 16 Myers-Briggs types into four “groups” of four personality types each. In your studio, you may encounter analysts, diplomats, sentinels and explorers, with four subcategories of each. Descriptions of these individuals—according to the “16 Personalities” website—appear below³:

Analysts

“Architect” (INTJ)—*Imaginative and strategic thinkers, with a plan for everything.*

“Logician” (INTP)—*Innovative inventors with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.*

“Commander” (ENTJ)—*Bold, imaginative and strong-willed leaders, always finding a way—or making one.*

“Debater” (ENTP) — *Smart and curious thinkers who cannot resist an intellectual challenge.*

Diplomats

“Advocate” (INFJ)—*Quiet and mystical, yet very inspiring and tireless idealists.*

“Mediator” (INFP)—*Poetic, kind and altruistic people, always eager to help for a good cause.*

“Protagonist” (ENFJ)—*Charismatic and inspiring leaders, able to mesmerize their listeners.*

“Campaigner” (ENFP)—*Enthusiastic, creative and sociable free spirits, who can always find a reason to smile.*

Sentinels

“Logistician” (ISTJ)—*Practical and fact-minded individuals, whose reliability cannot be doubted.*

“Defender” (ISFJ)—*Very dedicated and warm protectors, always ready to defend their loved ones.*

“Executive” (ESTJ)—*Excellent administrators, unsurpassed at managing things—or people.*

“Consul” (ESFJ)—*Extraordinarily caring, social and popular people, always eager to help.*

Explorers

“Virtuoso” (ISTP)—*Bold and practical experimenters, masters of all kinds of tools.*

“Adventurer” (ISFP)—*Flexible and charming artists, always ready to explore and experience something new.*

“Entrepreneur” (ESTP)—*Smart, energetic and very perceptive people, who truly enjoy living on the edge.*

“Entertainer” (ESFP)—*Spontaneous, energetic and enthusiastic people—life is never boring around them.*

The Sixteen MBTI Typologies: Implications For Educators

ANALYSTS

Introverted-Intuitive-Thinking-Judging (INTJ)—“Architect”

INTJ students are simultaneously “the most starry-eyed idealists and the bitterest of cynics, a seemingly impossible conflict.”⁴ They want minimal outside interference and are quite independent when accomplishing their work. Input must, of course, be given, but they need to be empowered to ultimately make their own decisions. Self-confidence is their greatest strength, but arrogance can be their weakness. They are most likely to come to new ideas via logic as opposed to mindlessly and obediently following an instruction. They loathe highly structured environments and don’t want to blindly follow rules and traditions without the element of reason.

Introverted-Intuitive-Thinking-Perceiving (INTP)—“Logician”

INTP students pride themselves on inventiveness and tend to be loners. Opposite of the ESFJ, they are the least gregarious and outgoing members of your studio. They have the tendency to neglect their own health and wellbeing, so they must be reminded of good lifestyle choices, including healthy eating and sleeping habits. Once they become excited about something, they become extremely dedicated to that task or goal. Honesty and truthfulness are held in high regard. Like INTJs, they are open-minded to alternate strategies and new ideas as long as those suggestions are supported by logic. There is a danger INTPs will “quit before they begin” because they have the tendency to second guess their abilities.

Extroverted-Intuitive-Thinking-Judging (ENTJ)—“Commander”

ENTJ students are efficient, energetic, charismatic and strong willed. They are natural born leaders but can be a tour-de-force and overwhelming to a teacher with more introverted tendencies. They often hold firm convictions and can distance themselves from emotional expression. They can be a joy to teach in that they are persistent and efficient in their working methods but can also be impatient. There can also be a power struggle with the instructor over dominance. Finding the right balance of power is essential for a productive teaching and learning relationship. They appreciate objective and rational criticism.

Extroverted-Intuitive-Thinking-Perceiving (ENTP)—“Debater”

The ENTP student will often learn through debate. Their argumentative tendency can be off-putting to the less patient teacher, but their feisty nature should not be interpreted as a lack of respect for authority. They sometimes engage in arguments not because they believe in their side of the argument, but because they believe that the truth is best revealed through engaging in debate. They are very comfortable in challenging authority and learn through active discussion. They are eager to receive criticism as long as it is rooted in logic and directly relates to their technique and performance.

ENGAGING All Students

DIPLOMATS

Introverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Judging (INFJ)—“Advocate”

The INFJ student is the rarest Myers-Briggs personality type, comprising less than 1 percent of the population. INFJs are determined and passionate but can burn out easily. INFJs need to feel as if their actions, activities or goals are geared toward a greater purpose. Therefore, frequently reminding the student of ultimate goals could be productive. INFJs tend to be perfectionists, so lots of positive reinforcement recognition of successful baby steps is important to deter discouragement. Thankfully, INFJs are decisive and determined when it comes to achieving goals. In their teachers, they value a personal and democratic style, so allowing them to have sufficient input in decision making is very important.

Introverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Perceiving (INFP)—“Mediator”

The INFP student does not like to be overly criticized. The teacher should be sure to state things in a gentler way than with other personality types. The INFP student needs clear deadlines and expectations. A teacher who is organized will likely have a productive relationship with an INFP student. Give an INFP an opportunity to speak first, giving them an opportunity to express their thoughts, opinions and values regarding the music. Ask lots of open-ended questions. An INFP will want to please, so be careful not to exert too much control over an INFP. INFPs have a gift for self-expression and creativity, and this will likely be a tremendous asset to them as dynamic performers.

Extroverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Judging (ENFJ)—“Protagonist”

The ENFJ student will often be the natural leaders of your studio. They have trouble living up to their own standards and can be extremely hard on themselves. Therefore, they can also be extremely emotional individuals with fluctuating self-esteem. They are one of the rarer Myers-Briggs personality types, only comprising around 2 percent of the population. ENFJ musicians are talented imitators and can easily adapt their technique to various styles and respond to different audience expectations. They logically see criticism as a tool for improvement but can also be emotionally sensitive to it.

Extroverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Perceiving (ENFP)—“Campaigner”

ENFPs are enthusiastic and excellent communicators. They are open minded and love exploring new ideas and new possibilities. ENFPs need freedom to accomplish their tasks, so micromanaging is not effective. Strive to make lessons innovative and interesting, because ENFPs can easily lose patience if they become bored. They are less adept at practical matters, so they may need help with starting projects or may need to be given concrete steps for completing a task. ENFPs can overthink matters or get stressed easily, so they need to avoid taking on too many commitments. They can be independent to a fault, so don't be afraid to reach out and offer help to an ENFP.

SENTINELS

Introverted-Sensing-Thinking-Judging (ISTJ)—“Logistician”

The ISTJ student is the most abundant Myers-Briggs type (an estimated 13 percent of the population), so it is highly likely that you will have an ISTJ in your studio. ISTJs work best with clearly defined rules. Establishing practical weekly goals is an effective way to teach an ISTJ student. Since ISTJs learn in an analytical, fact-based way, a verbally descriptive, anatomical approach to pedagogy might be effective in refining technique. Honesty is far more important than emotional considerations. ISTJ weaknesses include stubbornness, insensitivity and the tendency to be judgmental (of themselves and others).

Introverted-Sensing-Feeling-Judging (ISFJ)—“Defender”

The ISFJ are extremely humble and have the tendency to underplay their accomplishments. They are also extremely loyal to people that they respect, so earning the trust of an ISFJ is extremely important. Although they are perfectly capable of accepting change, they must feel it is for the right reasons. An ISFJ may be reluctant to pursue opportunities on their own out of humility, so they must be encouraged to pursue certain endeavors. They may tend to suppress their feelings and take things too personally. They take criticisms to heart.

ENGAGING All Students

Extroverted-Sensing-Thinking-Judging (ESTJ)—“Executive”

The ESTJ student will likely come to a lesson organized, prepared and with a plan. These are all good qualities, but there is a danger that the ESTJ will “take over” the lesson and forget that he is the subordinate of the teacher. The ESTJ is highly productive but can be a micromanager and stubborn. Teachers should encourage ESTJs not to micromanage to a fault, and they must be reminded to stay spontaneous and expressive. The danger of an ESTJ’s performance is that it can come off as too studied or preplanned. In music, spontaneity and thinking outside the box must be encouraged.

Extroverted-Sensing-Feeling-Judging (ESFJ)—“Consul”

ESFJs are usually popular folks. In high school, they are the cheerleaders and quarterbacks. They are practical and loyal, but they are often worried about their image, which affects many of the decisions that they make. They must be nudged to find value in their work as opposed to extramusical and extracurricular factors, such as friendships, appearance, and social issues. ESFJs struggle with too much freedom, so helping them with structure and balance is important to their success. ESFJs are patient, efficient and hardworking, three values which will set them up for great success as musicians and performers. They are the most common Myers-Briggs personality type in the United States.

EXPLORERS

Introverted-Sensing-Thinking-Perceiving (ISTP)—“Virtuoso”

The ISTP student is optimistic and energetic and has a good balance between being spontaneous and rational. ISTPs are likely to have a good balance between intellectual and expressive tendencies in music. An ISTP student may be less likely to take care of their health or prioritize a rigid practice routine. Clear rules and several good options from which to choose may be the productive way to teach an ISTP student. Give these students the power of choice. Extremely curious but unable to stay focused on formal studies.

Introverted-Sensing-Feeling-Perceiving (ISFP)—“Adventurer”

The ISFP student can be characterized by the phrase “don’t box me in.” ISFPs are extremely creative, passionate and eager to learn. An ISFP can be easily stressed, overly competitive and have fluctuating self-esteem. They are often fiercely independent. Music teachers should make sure to give ISFPs wiggle room to do their own thing—rigid paradigms or strictly enforced procedure will not be effective. ISFPs loathe being micromanaged or controlled. ISFPs need clearly set goals with room to explore their own interests and way of doing things to achieve success.

Extroverted-Sensing-Thinking-Perceiving (ESTP)—“Entrepreneur”

The ESTP student tends to be bold, rational, original, perceptive, direct and sociable. ESTPs love to be the center of attention. Theory and abstract concepts do not hold their interest. ESTPs are the likeliest personality types to adopt a lifestyle of risky behavior. They tend to struggle with impatience and may miss the bigger picture at times. ESTPs are likely to become frustrated if they can’t fix something immediately. They frequently need to be reminded of the process and the journey. ESTPs must be action oriented and hands on at all times. Avoid lectures or long verbal descriptions with these students.

Extroverted-Sensing-Feeling-Perceiving (ESFP)—“Entertainer”

The ESFP student loves the spotlight. They are the “party people” of your studio, eager to be the center of attention and break into song and dance. They are usually great showmen and the first to volunteer to stand up in front of their peers and perform. They are vulnerable to criticism and want to avoid conflict at all costs. In spite of their gregarious personality, they can be extremely sensitive to criticism. A teacher must be careful to give criticism and input to an ESFP in a way that will retain their passion and energy won’t take the wind out of their sails. They can become unfocused, easily bored and can be poor long-term planners. They must be reminded of long-term goals and standards. Coaching ESFPs on how to practice with short-term goals in mind is important. Teachers should consistently point new and exciting layers and aspects of a given piece of music to hold and facilitate their interest.

WHAT'S YOUR

Use the questions on the outside of the chart to determine the four letters of your Myers-Briggs type.

For each pair of letters, choose the side that seems most natural to you, even if you don't agree with every description.

1. Are you outwardly or inwardly focused? If you:

- Could be described as talkative, outgoing
- Like to be in a fast-paced environment
- Tend to work out ideas with others, think out loud
- Enjoy being the center of attention

then you prefer

E

Extraversion

- Could be described as reserved, private
- Prefer a slower pace with time for contemplation
- Tend to think things through inside your head
- Would rather observe than be the center of attention

then you prefer

I

Introversion

ISTJ

Responsible, sincere, analytical, reserved, realistic, systematic. Hardworking and trustworthy with sound practical judgment.

ISFJ

Warm, considerate, gentle, responsible, pragmatic, thorough. Devoted caretakers who enjoy being helpful to others.

ISTP

Action-oriented, logical, analytical, spontaneous, reserved, independent. Enjoy adventure, skilled at understanding how mechanical things work.

ISFP

Gentle, sensitive, nurturing, helpful, flexible, realistic. Seek to create a personal environment that is both beautiful and practical.

2. How do you prefer to take in information? If you:

- Focus on the reality of how things are
- Pay attention to concrete facts and details
- Prefer ideas that have practical applications
- Like to describe things in a specific, literal way

then you prefer

S

Sensing

- Imagine the possibilities of how things could be
- Notice the big picture, see how everything connects
- Enjoy ideas and concepts for their own sake
- Like to describe things in a figurative, poetic way

then you prefer

N

Intuition

ESTP

Outgoing, realistic, action-oriented, curious, versatile, spontaneous. Pragmatic problem solvers and skillful negotiators.

ESFP

Playful, enthusiastic, friendly, spontaneous, tactful, flexible. Have strong common sense, enjoy helping people in tangible ways.

ESTJ

Efficient, outgoing, analytical, systematic, dependable, realistic. Like to run the show and get things done in an orderly fashion.

ESFJ

Friendly, outgoing, reliable, conscientious, organized, practical. Seek to be helpful and please others, enjoy being active and productive.

PERSONALITY TYPE?

INFJ

Idealistic, organized, insightful, dependable, compassionate, gentle. Seek harmony and cooperation, enjoy intellectual stimulation.

INTJ

Innovative, independent, strategic, logical, reserved, insightful. Driven by their own original ideas to achieve improvements.

INFP

Sensitive, creative, idealistic, perceptive, caring, loyal. Value inner harmony and personal growth, focus on dreams and possibilities.

INTP

Intellectual, logical, precise, reserved, flexible, imaginative. Original thinkers who enjoy speculation and creative problem solving.

ENFP

Enthusiastic, creative, spontaneous, optimistic, supportive, playful. Value inspiration, enjoy starting new projects, see potential in others.

ENTP

Inventive, enthusiastic, strategic, enterprising, inquisitive, versatile. Enjoy new ideas and challenges, value inspiration.

ENFJ

Caring, enthusiastic, idealistic, organized, diplomatic, responsible. Skilled communicators who value connection with people.

ENTJ

Strategic, logical, efficient, outgoing, ambitious, independent. Effective organizers of people and long-range planners.

3. How do you prefer to make decisions? If you:

- Make decisions in an impersonal way, using logical reasoning
- Value justice, fairness
- Enjoy finding the flaws in an argument
- Could be described as reasonable, level-headed

then you prefer

T
Thinking

- Base your decisions on personal values and how your actions affect others
- Value harmony, forgiveness
- Like to please others and point out the best in people
- Could be described as warm, empathetic

then you prefer

F
Feeling

4. How do you prefer to live your outer life? If you:

- Prefer to have matters settled
- Think rules and deadlines should be respected
- Prefer to have detailed, step-by-step instructions
- Make plans, want to know what you're getting into

then you prefer

J
Judging

- Prefer to leave your options open
- See rules and deadlines as flexible
- Like to improvise and make things up as you go
- Are spontaneous, enjoy surprises and new situations

then you prefer

P
Perceiving

ENGAGING All Students

Other Considerations

MBTI is of course not a “one size fits all” instruction booklet for how to teach a student. Sometimes, even students with the same Myers-Briggs type must be approached and taught very differently. Sometimes within a dichotomy a student can be either “borderline” or “extreme.” For example, a person can be 98 percent introverted and 2 percent extroverted, and that student is likely to behave very different than a student who is 52 percent introverted and 48 percent extroverted.

There are also aspects of cognitive disposition and background that are not addressed by the MBTI model. For example, some students are “assertive” whereas others are “turbulent.” The framework also does not consider issues important to music educators, such as different levels of musical experience and aptitude or religious and social background. Other unanswered questions include the following: How emotionally sensitive is the student? Are they stubborn or open minded? And what is their work ethic like?

The MBTI has also faced certain criticisms by psychologists, as the data is collected entirely via self-reporting. Therefore, it is impossible to take Myers-Briggs without there being some degree of bias inherent in the process. Nevertheless, the framework is a way to acknowledge something that is inarguable: different personality types exist, and as teachers we should strive to connect with every student that walks into our studio.

Conclusion

As my teaching has matured over the years, I have keenly realized the importance of connecting with each and every student as an individual. The MBTI is a useful tool that could prove helpful as you seek to communicate effectively with students in your studio. ☺

Notes

1. Isabel Briggs Meyers and Peter B. Myers *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (CPP Reprint Edition, 1995): xi–xvi.
2. This information can be found on the Myers & Briggs Foundation website: <https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/>.
3. <https://www.16personalities.com/intj-personality>.
4. Ibid.

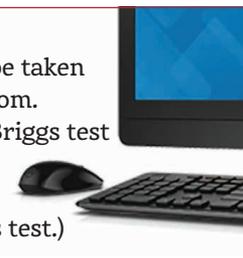
FURTHER RESOURCES

- Kroeger, Otto and Janet M. Thuesen. *Type Talk: The 16 Personality Types That Determine How We Live, Love, and Work*. Dell 10th Anniversary Edition, 1989.
- Myers, Isabel Briggs and Peter B. Myers. *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type*. CPP Reprint Edition, 1995.
- Quenk, Naomi L. *Essentials of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Assessment*. 2nd ed. Wiley, 2009.

What Type Are You?

The “16 Personalities” test can be taken free of charge at [16.personalities.com](https://www.16personalities.com).

Register for the official Myers-Briggs test through the Myers and Briggs Foundation at [myersbriggs.org](https://www.myersbriggs.org). (There is a fee associated with this test.)



Matthew Hoch, NCTM, is associate professor of voice and coordinator of voice studies at Auburn University, where he teaches applied voice, lyric diction and women in music. He is the author of several books. He is an ESTJ.



Patty Holley is a senior at Auburn University pursuing a BM degree in vocal performance and a BME degree in music education. She is an INFP, the exact opposite personality type of her teacher, Matthew Hoch.



AMT