English Learning for Curious Minds

Episode #112
Personality Tests
4th Dec, 2020

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Personality Tests, the idea that our personality and **character**[1] can be neatly **categorised**[2] to help other people understand us better, and to help us better understand ourselves.

[00:00:42] Before we get right into that though, let me quickly remind you that you can follow along to this episode with the subtitles, the transcript and its key vocabulary, so you don't miss any of the harder words and phrases, and you can build up your vocabulary as you go, over on our website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

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[1] the combination of qualities that form your personality

[2] put into categories

[00:01:04] The website is also home to all of our bonus episodes, plus guides on how to improve your English in a more interesting way.

[00:01:13] So if you haven't checked that out yet then I'd definitely recommend doing so. The place to go to for that is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:23] OK then, let's talk about personality tests.

[00:01:28] The idea of personality, of each human being different, is of course nothing new.

[00:01:35] We are all different, we have different hopes, dreams, strengths and weaknesses, different things we like doing and different things we don't like doing.

[00:01:46] Throughout history there have been various ways of **categorising**[3] these differences, of trying to understand how we are different.

[00:01:56] But this really came to its **apex**[4], to its highest point, in the 20th century with the **mass**[5] **adoption**[6] of personality tests.

[00:02:07] If you have ever worked in an office environment, or applied for an office job, you will probably have taken one of these kinds of tests.

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[3] putting into categories

[4] highest point

[5] in large amounts

[6] the act of starting to use something

[00:02:17] You answer a series of questions, and then you are presented with your personality type, a clean, neat **summary**[7] of your character, of your personality.

[00:02:29] We are going to go into detail about how these became so popular, but it's first useful to understand a bit more about some historical ideas of '**character**' and of 'personality'.

[00:02:43] Going all the way back to the Hippocratic tradition, in the 5th century BC, over 2,500 years ago, Hippocrates proposed the idea that people's characters fell into 4 different categories, or **humours**[8].

[00:03:02] **Sanguine**[9], **choleric**[10], **melancholic**[11], or **phlegmatic**[12].

[00:03:07] The idea here was that these four bodily liquids control your character, and having more or less of one of them can have an effect on your personality.

[00:03:20] Hippocrates proposed that you could correct these **imbalances**[13] through medicine.

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[7] a short, clear description

[8] categories of detailing the makeup of the human body

[9] happy and hopeful about the future

[10] angry

[11] very sad

[12] calm

[13] a situation when two or more things are unequal

[00:03:27] This idea **persisted**[14] in different forms right through until the 18th century.

[00:03:34] The belief, in Western medicine at least, was that your physical condition had an effect on your **character**, on your personality, and that people's personalities could be explained and understood through a better understanding of their physical condition.

[00:03:53] You might have heard this being referred to as the idea of the **Humours**.

[00:03:59] As this idea started to become less popular, new ideas about personality and about how our minds work **emerged**[15] from people like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

[00:04:13] They tried to apply scientific thinking to psychology, with Freud creating the modern idea of **psychoanalysis**[16], and Jung developing his idea of Analytical Psychology.

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[14] continued

[15] came out

[16] the treatment of talking to someone about their feelings in order to find out the cause of their problems

[00:04:27] Jung in particular did a lot of work on personality, researching how to put humans into different buckets of personality, **extroverts**[17] vs. **introverts**[18], **openness**[19] vs. **closeness**[20] and so on.

[00:04:44] In 1921 Jung published a book called Psychological Types which proposed ideas on how to **categorise**[21] people's personalities.

[00:04:56] This wasn't an **empirical**[22] study, it wasn't real science, but rather just based on differences in people that he had observed in his work.

[00:05:08] This book caught the attention of a mother and daughter from Michigan, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs-Myers.

[00:05:19] Neither were professional psychologists, or had any kind of psychological training, but they were **keen**[23] students of Jung, and **devoured**[24] his book on Psychological Types.

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[17] energetic people who enjoy being with other people

[18] people who are shy and do not enjoy being with other people

[19] being open to new experiences

[20] not being open to new experiences

[21] put into categories

[22] based on scientific experience and proof

[23] very interested

[24] ate or consumed something quickly and in large amounts

[00:05:32] They adapted this to form their own system of **categorising** people,

eventually creating their own personality test based on 93 questions that puts people

into one of 16 different **categories**[25] of personality.

[00:05:50] If the names of these women **rang a bell**[26], that's because they gave birth to

the most popular personality test in history, the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator.

[00:06:04] It wasn't an immediate success though, it wasn't an immediate hit.

[00:06:09] It took almost 80 years to become **mainstream**[27], with the mother,

Katharine, starting to take an interest in psychology when the daughter was only 4

years old.

[00:06:21] This mother and daughter pair observed what we all see every day.

[00:06:27] That people are different.

[00:06:30] Within a family setting, these differences are **exacerbated**[28], they are made

greater.

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[25] systems for dividing things

[26] sounded familiar

[27] accepted or used by a large number of people

[28] made greater

[00:06:36] Not only do you normally know your family members better than anyone, because you are with them all the time, but you live with them, so you need to be more **aware**[29] of their differences in order to **get along**[30], in order to survive living together.

[00:06:54] This mother and daughter pair wanted a way to explain and **categorise** these differences, to help people understand how they were different.

[00:07:06] There's no evidence that they were interested in making a **quick buck**[31], making quick money, and indeed neither of them lived long enough to see their invention turn into the multi-million dollar **enterprise**[32] that it has now become.

[00:07:21] They were just **genuinely**[33] interested in how personality works, and were **avid**[34] fans of Carl Jung.

[00:07:31] They **honed**[35] their test at their kitchen table, practising on family members and friends.

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[29] if you are aware of something, you notice that it exists

[30] if you get along with someone, you have a friendly relationship

[31] (colloquial) quick money

[32] business

[33] truly

[34] very keen and enthusiastic

[35] practised

[00:07:38] If you have ever taken a Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator you will be familiar with some of the questions.

[00:07:47] There are 93 questions, you choose either A or B.

[00:07:51] The test will indicate what your personality is, based on four different categories.

[00:07:59] Firstly, **Extraversion**[36] or **Introversion**[37], so are you an **outgoing**[38] type of person or do you prefer to be on your own?

[00:08:09] Secondly, are you a **Sensing**[39] or an **Intuitive**[40] type of person. Do you prefer to look at the basic information you see, or do you want to wait for more information?

[00:08:21] Thirdly, are you a Thinking or Feeling type of person? Are you **logical**[41] or are you **sensitive**[42]?

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[36] the quality of being an extrovert (enjoying the company of other people)

[37] the quality of being an introvert (not enjoying the company of other people)

[38] enjoying meeting new people and having new experiences

[39] the ability to understand something

[40] understanding something immediately

[41] using reason and logic

[42] easily upset

[00:08:31] And finally, are you a **Judging**[43] or a **Perceiving**[44] type of person. Do you prefer just to decide things, or would you prefer to stay open minded?

[00:08:43] You answer these 93 questions and **ta-da**[45], you get a four letter code at the end of it that tells you what personality type you are.

[00:08:55] Everyone in the world, everyone who takes this test, fits into one of these 16 **categories**.

[00:09:03] Each of these 16 personality types is different, but they are all positive in their different ways.

[00:09:11] So the idea is that it isn't a test, as such, but rather an indicator. You should see your results and think, ok, great, that's me.

[00:09:23] Myers and Briggs, the mother and daughter pair, continued working on their system, eventually publishing it in 1962.

[00:09:33] It wasn't until 1968 that it **caught the eye**[46] of a professor of psychology at the University of Florida, Mary McCaulley.

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[43] wanting something to be neat and organised

[44] wants things to be flexible and spontaneous

[45] used to suggest that something has just arrived

[46] attracted the attention of

[00:09:43] She saw its potential and really started to push it forward, and businesses started to use it to try to understand their employees.

[00:09:56] The post-war period was when people started to research management techniques, and **Human Resources**[47], the managing of your workforce became a **standalone**[48] **discipline**[49].

[00:10:11] An increasing number of people were starting to work in offices, and having to do work that required **interacting**[50] with other people, work where your ability to **get on with**[51] others was actually important.

[00:10:26] In agricultural or industrial societies, this didn't really matter so much.

[00:10:33] You cut the corn or you worked in a factory, it didn't really matter whether you preferred to learn on your own or be taught by someone else, you could do your job perfectly well without anyone knowing anything about the real you.

[00:10:49] In an office situation where employees had to work with each other, understanding other types of people was important.

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[47] the department of a company that manages the employees

[48] unique, single

[49] subject area

[50] dealing with

[51] if you get along with someone, you have a friendly relationship

[00:10:59] As anyone who has ever worked in an office will know, in most cases the hardest part of your job is normally **getting on with**[52] other people.

[00:11:09] The Myers-Briggs personality indicator provided an excellent way for companies to 'understand' their employees.

[00:11:19] If employees just did this test then managers would be able to understand them by looking at their result.

[00:11:28] They would know that a particular type of personality would be good at certain tasks, other types of personalities might be put forward for management positions, and so on.

[00:11:42] It was very **neat**[53], it soon became adopted by **corporate**[54] America, and it has continued to this day to be a favourite of **Human Resource**[55] departments all over the world.

[00:11:55] The company that bought the **rights**[56] to the test makes about $20 million a year from these tests, from these simple 93 questions, and the personality test industry is a $2 billion industry.

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[52] if you get along with someone, you have a friendly relationship

[53] tidy and clear

[54] relating to a large company

[55] the department of a company that manages the employees

[56] the license to distribute and use something

[00:12:12] So, the question you might be asking yourselves is, does it actually work, is it actually **effective**[57] at telling us what our personalities are?

[00:12:23] Although there are thousands of companies that still use it, there really isn't much evidence to suggest that it is nearly as **effective** as it claims to be.

[00:12:34] Firstly, our **character**, our personality is complicated.

[00:12:40] If you've ever done one of these personality tests you will probably remember that the answers to the questions aren't always obvious to you, you probably need to spend a while thinking about what your answer should be.

[00:12:55] With a question that is trying to figure out whether someone is an **extrovert**[58] or an **introvert**[59], the reality is that most people are somewhere in between.

[00:13:06] Not every **extrovert** wants to always be the centre of attention at a party all night long, and not every **introvert** wants to be at home every night under their **duvet cover**[60].

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[57] successful and good at achieving what you want it to

[58] energetic people who enjoy being with other people

[59] people who are shy and do not enjoy being with other people

[60] a cover under which you sleep

[00:13:19] Trying to place everyone in one of two **categories** for every question is a

gross[61] **oversimplification**[62] of how complicated we all actually are.

[00:13:30] Plus, the fact that we find it so hard to actually choose the answer to many of

the questions means that people often get different results when they do the same test

multiple times.

[00:13:44] How we answer might depend on how we're feeling that day, and indeed

there have been studies that have shown that the number of people who got the same

result when they did the test again **varied**[63] between 24 and 61 percent.

[00:14:00] Not great, right?

[00:14:03] The other main criticism of this kind of test is that it's completely

self-reported[64], you say what you believe, there are no right or wrong answers.

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[61] very large

[62] when something is more complicated than it has been presented as being

[63] different

[64] reported by an individual

[00:14:15] Companies often use these tests for things like **recruiting**[65], for hiring new

staff, and for understanding which employees might be **suitable**[66] for new roles or

promotions[67].

[00:14:28] If I know that my company is looking for management-type people, I can just

answer the questions in a way that it's likely I'll be given a personality type that is more

likely to suggest I'm **suitable** for a management role.

[00:14:44] So it's very, very easy to **fake**[68].

[00:14:48] **Furthermore**[69], these tests are also very **self-reinforcing**[70], they make

people believe that certain things are just 'parts of their personality', so they are less

likely to adapt their behaviour.

[00:15:04] If you see that you are the type of person that enjoys **confrontation**[71], or the

type of person that **struggles**[72] to manage their time, then you will just think 'well, it's

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[65] hiring of staff, finding new employees

[66] acceptable or correct for the purpose

[67] moving to a more important job in a company

[68] if you fake something, you pretend to be something that you are not

[69] in addition

[70] if something is self-reinforcing, it makes you believe what you already think is true

[71] fights and aggressive situations

[72] has difficulty with

my personality type', instead of trying to do something to make yourself less

confrontational[73] or get better at managing your time.

[00:15:25] The reality is that the more we believe that we can't change these parts of

our personality, the less likely we are to actually do anything to try to change them.

[00:15:37] So, if that is all true, why do companies still use them, why do 2 million

people take them every year, and why is the Internet full of articles like 'How your

Myers-Briggs personality type can affect your **salary**[74]'?

[00:15:53] There is an interesting **phenomenon**[75] in psychology called the Forer effect,

or the Barnum effect.

[00:16:01] In short, this is a **phenomenon** in which people say that they believe

something if they think it has been **tailored**[76] just for them, even if it is completely

generic[77] and it could be applied to almost anyone.

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[73] behaving in an angry and unfriendly way

[74] the amount of money you are paid by a company

[75] something that exists and can be seen

[76] made specific and unique to you

[77] shared by many people, or typical of many

[00:16:16] This is one of the theories about why things like the messages in **fortune cookies**[78], the fortunes told by **fortune tellers**[79], and the messages in **astrology**[80] are so widely accepted, because, although completely **generic**, people believe that they are specific to them.

[00:16:36] If I tell you that I think:

[00:16:38] You have a great need for other people to like and admire you.

[00:16:43] You have a **tendency**[81] to be critical of yourself.

[00:16:46] You have a great deal of **unused**[82] **capacity**[83] which you have not turned to your advantage.

[00:16:52] And while you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to **compensate**[84] for them.

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[78] biscuits often provided after a Chinese meal in Western restaurants, which provide a prediction of your future

[79] someone who tells your fortune

[80] the study of the movements of the sun

[81] a likelihood to do something

[82] not used

[83] ability to do something

[84] make up for

[00:16:59] If you hear these statements, do you think I've done a pretty good job at

summarising[85] parts of your **character**?

[00:17:07] I haven't, I've just read out a series of relatively **generic statements**[86], but if

you think that these apply to you, then that is the Forer effect in practice.

[00:17:20] With the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator this is **exacerbated** because

there is the whole huge industry of personality tests, plus because most people are

taking it in a **corporate setting**[87], they think it must work, it must be accurate.

[00:17:39] Much more so than reading your star sign or reading a **fortune cookie**[88],

which you might think could be true, but isn't provided by a nice man or woman in a

suit who has come to your office.

[00:17:53] Indeed, these kinds of personality tests, or personality assessments, have

been **disregarded**[89] by **the vast majority**[90] of professional psychologists, who tend to

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[85] describing (in a short space of time)

[86] facts

[87] environment

[88] a biscuit often provided after a Chinese meal in Western restaurants, which provide a prediction of your future

[89] not considered important

[90] most people

agree that they are very problematic, and a **gross simplification**[91] of the complexity of our characters.

[00:18:13] And it's not just that they are imperfect, using these kinds of tests can actually be harmful because they are considered correct, and therefore people are put into boxes, and treated in a different way, just because of 4 letters that were **spat out**[92] by a personality test.

[00:18:34] Now, this is in no way to try to **belittle**[93] the work of Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers, the mother and daughter pair who created this personality test.

[00:18:45] From their kitchen table, without any real academic experience of psychology, and in an **era**[94] when women weren't really allowed to be independent thinkers, they managed to come up with a system that has been used by hundreds of millions of people, by some of the world's biggest companies, all over the world.

[00:19:08] It's certainly an impressive **achievement**[95], but the reality is that it just doesn't work particularly well.

[00:19:16] Maybe you're left thinking, well, are there any personality tests that do work?

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[91] the act of making something too simple

[92] said, provided

[93] say something is unimportant

[94] period of time

[95] something that is good and worthy of praise

[00:19:23] The Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator isn't the only test, and there are hundreds of others that have **cropped up[96]**.

[00:19:31] None have got anywhere near the Myers-Briggs one though.

[00:19:35] The reality is that our personalities are very **complex[97]**, there aren't only 16 types of people, and that we probably aren't very good at describing our own personalities, our strengths and weaknesses, what we like and we don't like.

[00:19:51] So where this leaves the personality test industry is anyone's guess.

[00:19:56] But it certainly doesn't seem like Myers-Briggs is going anywhere anytime soon.

[00:20:04] OK, on that note that is it for today's episode on Personality Tests.

[00:20:09] I hope it's been an interesting one, and at least if someone asks you to do a personality test then you'll know a little bit more about where they come from.

[00:20:19] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:20:23] Have you had much experience with personality tests? If so, how did it go?

[00:20:28] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

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[96] appeared

[97] complicated

[00:20:38] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, to unlock the transcripts, subtitles, and key vocabulary, and to support a more interesting way of improving your English then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com

[00:21:00] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:21:05] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Character	the combination of qualities that form your personality
Categorised	put into categories
Categorising	putting into categories
Apex	highest point
Mass	in large amounts
Adoption	the act of starting to use something
Summary	a short, clear description
Humours	categories of detailing the makeup of the human body
Sanguine	happy and hopeful about the future
Choleric	angry
Melancholic	very sad
Phlegmatic	calm
Imbalances	a situation when two or more things are unequal

Persisted	continued
Emerged	came out
Psychoanalysis	the treatment of talking to someone about their feelings in order to find out the cause of their problems
Extroverts	energetic people who enjoy being with other people
Introverts	people who are shy and do not enjoy being with other people
Openness	being open to new experiences
Closeness	not being open to new experiences
Categorise	put into categories
Empirical	based on scientific experience and proof
Keen	very interested
Devoured	ate or consumed something quickly and in large amounts
Categories	systems for dividing things
Rang a bell	sounded familiar
Mainstream	accepted or used by a large number of people
Exacerbated	made greater

Aware	if you are aware of something, you notice that it exists
Get along	if you get along with someone, you have a friendly relationship
Quick buck	(colloquial) quick money
Enterprise	business
Genuinely	truly
Avid	very keen and enthusiastic
Honed	practised
Extraversion	the quality of being an extrovert (enjoying the company of other people)
Introversion	the quality of being an introvert (not enjoying the company of other people)
Outgoing	enjoying meeting new people and having new experiences
Sensing	the ability to understand something
Intuitive	understanding something immediately
Logical	using reason and logic
Sensitive	easily upset
Judging	wanting something to be neat and organised

Perceiving   wants things to be flexible and spontaneous

Ta-da   used to suggest that something has just arrived

Caught the eye   attracted the attention of

Human resources   the department of a company that manages the employees

Standalone   unique, single

Discipline   subject area

Interacting   dealing with

Get on with   if you get along with someone, you have a friendly relationship

Getting on with   if you get along with someone, you have a friendly relationship

Neat   tidy and clear

Corporate   relating to a large company

Human resource   the department of a company that manages the employees

Rights   the license to distribute and use something

Effective   successful and good at achieving what you want it to

Extrovert   energetic people who enjoy being with other people

Introvert	people who are shy and do not enjoy being with other people
Duvet cover	a cover under which you sleep
Gross	very large
Oversimplification	when something is more complicated than it has been presented as being
Varied	different
Self-reported	reported by an individual
Recruiting	hiring of staff, finding new employees
Suitable	acceptable or correct for the purpose
Promotions	moving to a more important job in a company
Fake	if you fake something, you pretend to be something that you are not
Furthermore	in addition
Self-reinforcing	if something is self-reinforcing, it makes you believe what you already think is true
Confrontation	fights and aggressive situations
Struggles	has difficulty with

Confrontational	behaving in an angry and unfriendly way
Salary	the amount of money you are paid by a company
Phenomenon	something that exists and can be seen
Tailored	made specific and unique to you
Generic	shared by many people, or typical of many
Fortune cookies	biscuits often provided after a Chinese meal in Western restaurants, which provide a prediction of your future
Fortune tellers	someone who tells your fortune
Astrology	the study of the movements of the sun
Tendency	a likelihood to do something
Unused	not used
Capacity	ability to do something
Compensate	make up for
Summarising	describing (in a short space of time)
Statements	facts
Setting	environment

Fortune cookie   a biscuit often provided after a Chinese meal in Western restaurants,

which provide a prediction of your future

Disregarded   not considered important

The vast majority   most people

Simplification   the act of making something too simple

Spat out   said, provided

Belittle   say something is unimportant

Era   period of time

Achievement   something that is good and worthy of praise

Cropped up   appeared

Complex   complicated

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com