**Big Five Personality Traits: The OCEAN Model Explained**

Personality is an easy concept for most of us to grasp. It’s what makes you, you. It encompasses all the traits, characteristics and quirks that set you apart from everyone else. In the world of psychology research, the definition of personality can be complex, and the way it is defined can influence how it is understood and measured. According to the researchers at the Personality Project, personality is “the coherent pattern of affect, cognition, and desires (goals) as they lead to behavior” while the American Psychological Association (APA) defines personality as “individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving” (2017). However you define personality, it’s an important part of who you are and there needs to be a reliable way to conceptualize and measure it. One such reliable assessment scale is the prevalent personality framework of the Big Five, also known as the five-factor model of personality.

In the 1940s, German-born psychologist Hans Eysenck built off of Jung’s dichotomy of introversion versus extroversion, hypothesizing that there were only two defining personality traits: extroversion and neuroticism. Individuals could be high or low on each of these traits leading to four key types of personalities. Eysenck also connected personality to the physical body in a greater way than most earlier psychology researchers and philosophers. He posited that differences in the limbic system resulted in varying hormones and hormonal activation. Those who were already highly stimulated (introverts) would naturally seek out less stimulation while those who were naturally less stimulated (extroverts) would search for greater stimulation.

Eysenck’s thoroughness in connecting the body to the mind and personality pushed the field toward a more scientific exploration of personality based on objective evidence rather than solely philosophical musings. American psychologist Lewis Goldberg may be the most prominent researcher in the field of personality psychology. His groundbreaking work whittled down Raymond Cattell’s 16 “fundamental factors” of personality into five primary factors similar to the five factors found by fellow psychology researchers in the 1960s. The five factors Goldberg identified as primary factors of personality are:

1. **Extroversion**: This factor has two familiar ends of its spectrum: extroversion and introversion and it concerns where an individual draws their energy from and how they interact with others. In general, extroverts draw energy from or recharge by interacting with others while introverts get tired from interacting with others and replenish their energy with solitude. The traits associated with extroversion are: sociableness, assertiveness, merriness, outgoing nature, energy, talkativeness, ability to be articulate, fun-loving nature, tendency for affection, friendliness, social confidence. People high in extroversion tend to seek out opportunities for social interaction where they are often the “life of the party.” They are comfortable with others, are gregarious, and are prone to action rather than contemplation. People low in extroversion are more likely to be people “of few words who are quiet, introspective, reserved, and thoughtful. Those high in extroversion are likely to value achievement and stimulation and unlikely to value tradition or conformity.

Considering these findings, it follows that high extroversion is a strong predictor of [leadership](https://positivepsychology.com/positive-leadership/), and contributes to the success of managers and salespeople as well as the success of all job levels in training proficiency. Long-term studies found that high extroversion correlates positively with a high income, conservative political attitudes, early life adjustment to challenges, and social relationships and that it remained fairly stable across the years indicating that extroverts and introverts do not often shift into the opposite state. In summary, those who score high in extroversion are likely to make friends easily and enjoy interacting with others, but they may want to pay extra attention to making well-thought-out decisions and considering the needs and sensitivities of others.

2. **Agreeableness**: This factor concerns how well people get along with others and rests on how an individual generally interacts with others. The following traits fall under the umbrella of agreeableness: altruism, trust, modesty, humbleness, patience, moderation, tact, politeness, kindness, loyalty, unselfishness, helpfulness, sensitivity, amiability, cheerfulness, consideration. People high in agreeableness tend to be well-liked, respected, and sensitive to the needs of others. They likely have few enemies and are affectionate to their friends and loved ones as well as sympathetic to the plights of strangers. People on the low end of the agreeableness spectrum are less likely to be trusted and liked by others. They tend to be callous, blunt, rude, ill-tempered, antagonistic, and sarcastic. Although not all people who are low in agreeableness are cruel or abrasive, they are not likely to leave others with a warm fuzzy feeling.

Agreeable individuals tend to value benevolence, tradition, and conformity while avoiding placing too much importance on power, achievement, or the pursuit of selfish pleasures. Agreeableness may be motivated by the desire to fulfill social obligations or follow established norms, or it may spring from a genuine concern for the welfare of others. Whatever the motivation, it is rarely accompanied by cruelty, ruthlessness, or selfishness. Those high in agreeableness are also more likely to have positive peer and family relationships, model [gratitude](https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-appreciation/) and [forgiveness](https://positivepsychology.com/forgiveness-benefits/), attain desired jobs, live long lives, experience relationship satisfaction, and volunteer in their communities. Agreeableness affects many life outcomes because it influences any arena in which interactions with others are important—and that includes almost everything. In the long-term, high agreeableness is related to strong social support and healthy midlife adjustment but is slightly negatively correlated to creativity.

3. **Conscientiousness** is a trait that can be described as the tendency to control impulses and act in socially acceptable ways, behaviors that facilitate goal-directed behavior. Conscientious people excel in their ability to delay gratification, work within the rules, and plan and organize effectively. Traits within the conscientiousness factor include: persistence, ambition, thoroughness, [self-discipline](https://positivepsychology.com/self-discipline-exercises/), consistency, predictability, control, reliability, resourcefulness, hard work, energy, perseverance, planning. People high in conscientiousness are likely to be successful in school and in their careers, to excel in leadership positions, and to doggedly pursue their goals with determination and forethought. People low in conscientiousness are much more likely to procrastinate and to be flighty, impetuous, and impulsive.

This factor has been linked to achievement, conformity, and seeking out security, as well as being negatively correlated to placing a premium on stimulation and excitement. Those high in conscientiousness are also likely to value order, duty, achievement, and self-discipline, and they consciously practice deliberation and work toward increased competence. In light of these correlations, it’s not surprising that conscientiousness is also strongly related to post-training learning, effective job performance, and intrinsic and extrinsic career success. A long-term study by Soldz and Vaillant (1999) found that conscientiousness was positively correlated with adjustment to life’s challenges and mature defensive responses, indicating that those high in conscientiousness are often well-prepared to tackle any obstacles that come their way. From these results, it’s clear that those gifted with high conscientiousness have a distinct advantage over those who are not. As long as the highly conscientious do not fall prey to exaggerated perfectionism, they are likely to achieve many of the traditional markers of success.

4. **Neuroticism** is not a factor of meanness or incompetence, but one of confidence and being comfortable in one’s own skin. It encompasses one’s [emotional stability](https://positivepsychology.com/emotional-intelligence-eq/) and general temper. The traits that are commonly associated with neuroticism are: awkwardness, pessimism, moodiness jealousy, testiness, fear, nervousness, anxiety, timidness, wariness, self-criticism, lack of [confidence](https://positivepsychology.com/self-confidence/), insecurity, instability, oversensitivity. Those high in neuroticism are generally prone to anxiety, sadness, worry, and low self-esteem. They may be temperamental or easily angered, and they tend to be self-conscious and unsure of themselves. Individuals who score on the low end of neuroticism are more likely to feel confident, sure of themselves, and adventurous. They may also be brave and unencumbered by worry or self-doubt.

Neuroticism has been found to correlate negatively with self-esteem and general [self-efficacy](https://positivepsychology.com/3-ways-build-self-efficacy/), as well as with an internal locus of control (feeling like one has control over his or her own life). In fact, these four traits are so closely related that they may fall under one umbrella construct. In addition, neuroticism has been linked to poorer job performance and lower motivation, including motivation related to goal-setting and self-efficacy. It likely comes as no surprise that instability and vulnerability to stress and anxiety do not support one’s best work. The anxiety and self-consciousness components of neuroticism are also positively linked to more traditional values and are negatively correlated with achievement values. The hostility and impulsiveness components of neuroticism relate positively to [hedonism](https://positivepsychology.com/hedonism/) (or seeking pleasure without regards to the long-term and a disregard for right and wrong) and negatively relate to benevolence, tradition, and conformity. The 45-year-long study from researchers Soldz and Vaillant showed that neuroticism, over the course of the study, was negatively correlated with smoking cessation and healthy adjustment to life and correlated positively with drug usage, alcohol abuse, and [mental health](https://positivepsychology.com/positive-psychology-and-mental-health/) issues. Overall, scoring high on neuroticism is not an immediate sentence to a miserable life, but those in this group would benefit from investing in improvements to their self-confidence, building resources to draw on in times of difficulty, and avoiding any substances with addictive properties.

5. **Openness to experience** has been described as the depth and complexity of an individual’s mental life and experiences and it is sometimes called intellect or imagination. Openness to experience concerns people’s willingness to try to new things, their ability to be vulnerable, and their capability to think outside the box. Common traits related to openness to experience include: imagination, insightfulness, varied interests, originality, daringness, preference for variety, cleverness, creativity, curiosity, perceptiveness, intellect, complexity/depth. An individual who is high in openness to experience is likely someone who has a love of learning, enjoys the arts, engages in a creative career or hobby, and likes meeting new people. An individual who is low in openness to experience probably prefers routine over variety, sticks to what he or she knows, and prefers less abstract arts and entertainment.

Openness to experience has been found to contribute to one’s likelihood of obtaining a [leadership position](https://positivepsychology.com/positive-leadership/), likely due to the ability to entertain new ideas. It is also connected to universalism values, which include promoting peace and tolerance and seeing all people as equally deserving of justice and equality. Further, research has linked openness to experience with broad intellectual skills and knowledge, and it may increase with age. This indicates that openness to experience leads to gains in knowledge and skills and it naturally increases as a person ages and has more experiences to learn from. It was also found to correlate positively with creativity, originality, and a tendency to explore their inner selves with a therapist or psychiatrist and to correlate negatively with conservative political attitudes. Openness to experience is perhaps the trait that is least likely to change over time, and perhaps most likely to help an individual [grow](https://positivepsychology.com/5-ways-develop-grit-resilience/). Those high in openness to experience should capitalize on their advantage and explore the world, themselves, and their passions. These individuals make strong and creative leaders and are most likely to come up with the next big innovation.

Personality is a complex topic of research in psychology and it has a long history of shifting philosophies and theories. While it’s easy to conceptualize personality on a day-to-day level, conducting valid scientific research on personality can be much more complex. The Big Five brings us right up to the current era in personality research helping you at the same time to learn more about your own personality and where to focus your energy and attention.

(Source: positivepsychology.com/big-five-personality-theory/)