Personality and Individual Writing Processes

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Though composition theorists concur that writing should be taught as a process, they seem to agree little on the nature of that process. Pearl G. Aldrich, in a recent article in this journal, surveyed the writing habits of business executives and concluded that their writing suffered from inadequate planning: "These responses, therefore, showed that the majority of these, and presumably other, adult writers seem not to know the value of deciding in advance of writing what their purpose, audience, and point will be." Peter Elbow, on the other hand, feels that writers often become blocked by too much planning. He advises: "Write fast. Don't waste any time or energy on how to organize it, what to start with, paragraphing, wording, spelling, grammar, or any other matters of presentation. Just get things down helter-skelter." Both authors describe distinctly different writing processes that apparently work for them, but what would happen if Aldrich were a student in Elbow's class or Elbow a student in Aldrich's class? To state the question more generally, how can we teach a classroom full of individuals, each of whom needs to approach the process of writing in his or her own way?

Three possible approaches to the problem can be suggested. We can advise all students to write as we do and teach a single writing process. The process will, if we are lucky, work for some students. It will, however, not work for others, for it will force them to write in a way that will fail to draw upon their strengths. Or we can suggest that students try a variety of approaches, as W. Ross Winterowd does when discussing outlines: "Some writers prepare detailed outlines before they begin to write, but most don't. Most writers use some kind of brief outline or notes, but some writers don't. You just can't generalize. However, outlines can be useful." Winterowd's approach is preferable, but it also has limitations. If students feel confused about how to write an essay, will such open-ended advice confuse them further? If students rigidly
Jung’s Theory of Psychological Types

Teachers often hesitate to use personality theory to improve their instruction, perhaps with good reason. Armchair psychologists who use labels loosely, sometimes vengefully, are dangerous and too plentiful. We do not encourage their proliferation. However, a conceptual framework that identifies personality types or learning styles can, if used judiciously, provide teachers with valuable insight into how students differ. For this purpose, we believe that the system that C. G. Jung presented in *Psychological Types* and that Isabel Myers later refined holds promise for improving instruction and research in the field of composition.

Jung’s system is promising for several reasons. It has a solid grounding in a theory of personality and yet can be understood and used, when appropriate caution is observed, by teachers not formally trained in psychology. Second, the system humanistically appreciates differences. It does not label some people as adequate and others as inadequate. Third, when applied to education, the system can help teachers to understand why individual students are having difficulties. The theory identifies important aspects of learning style that have already been applied to reading skills, study skills, and academic motivation. It has also proven useful for increasing retention of at least one group of at-risk students. Finally, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which will be discussed later, has been found useful in other fields of research and can be easily incorporated into research on composition. Teachers and researchers should receive training before using the MBTI. Yet, even if teachers do not administer the instrument, the theoretical model presented in this article can still have a profound effect on how they teach.

The typology of personality consists of four bi-polar dimensions, each of which represents opposing psychological processes: Extraversion—Introversion (ways of focusing one’s energy), Sensing—Intuition (ways of perceiving), Thinking—Feeling (ways of making decisions), and Judging—Perceiving (ways of approaching tasks in the outer world). The theory behind the dimen-
sions can be explained with the metaphor of handedness. Though we have two hands and use each every day, we begin at an early age to use one of them more frequently. Consequently, the preferred hand develops more quickly and adequately. Similarly, we begin at an early age to prefer one psychological process of each bi-polar scale over the other, e.g., extraversion over introversion. Though we all use extraversion and introversion each day, we come to feel more comfortable with one and use it more frequently. Thus, that preferred process matures more rapidly. Since our unpreferred process matures more slowly and may even remain undeveloped, we are often less competent and feel more awkward when using it.

Our development as individuals, learners and writers comes as we gradually learn to employ both our preferred and our unpreferred processes. Myers believed that healthy personality development consists of learning to use our preferences progressively more expertly, but not rigidly or exclusively. It is important, she believed, to develop our unpreferred psychological processes as a supplement.

In a perception analogous to Myers’ statement about development of personality, we have observed that writers can perform better and with less anxiety when they employ primarily their preferred processes in early stages, while still generating ideas, and then use their unpreferred processes in later stages to round out their writing. Writers become anxious or emotionally blocked when they overuse one process to the neglect of its opposite (e.g., use feeling to the neglect of thinking), or when they fail to use the strengths of their preferences, which Myers would call their individual gifts. If teachers deliver the same advice to all students, they may, despite good intentions, render more harm than good. Then students will begin to write as the teachers wish, not necessarily as they write best.

Setting for our Observations

Our early reading of Jung and Myers suggested hypotheses about how an individual’s personality might be related to his or her writing process. Since then, we have clarified and refined these hypotheses at both the University of Illinois at Chicago and Georgia State University in the following settings:

1. A thesis support group. At a weekly meeting, graduate students discuss difficulties that they are having in writing their theses. Participants take the MBTI, and the results are used to help explain writing blocks and suggest remedies. To date, twenty-five students have participated in the group.

2. Workshops on approaches to writing, designed to develop prewriting strategies and reduce writing blocks. The participants’ personality types are used to explain the cognitive processes behind writing blocks and to
suggest methods for overcoming these blocks. To date, seventy-seven students and university staff have participated.

3. A writing clinic. Students who seek writing instruction through the Academic Skills Program, a division of the University of Illinois at Chicago Counseling Service, are administered the MBTI. The instructor uses the results to help the student to develop an effective writing process, reduce writing anxiety, and overcome writing blocks. To date, thirty-one students have taken the MBTI and discussed their writing processes and essays with a writing instructor.

4. A developmental writing program. Since beginning initial drafts of this paper, the senior author has begun teaching classes for developmental students at Georgia State University. The model has been found useful with eighty-two undergraduates to relieve writing anxiety and specific writing blocks, and to provide remedial instruction in writing.

In all of these settings, students reported that knowledge of their personality type and how it relates to writing helped to reduce writing anxiety and overcome writing blocks. However, the findings should be viewed cautiously until tested experimentally.

**Extraversion-Introversion**

The first dimension of Jung's system identifies a person's general orientation toward life. "Extraverts" (Jung's spelling is preserved here) predominantly focus their energy outward toward interacting with people and things. They tend to value outer experience (talking and acting) so highly that they often leap into tasks with little planning, then rely on trial and error to complete the task. Since they spend more time dealing with outer experience rather than inner experience (reflecting and observing), they think most clearly and develop more ideas while in action or in conversation. "Introverts" predominantly focus their energy inward through consideration and contemplation. More cautious about the outer world, they anticipate and reflect before becoming involved with it, in order to avoid errors. They think best and develop more ideas when alone, uninterrupted by people and events.

Classroom teachers who allow for discussion and activity with other students meet the extraverts' need for doing. Those that give advance notice and time for reflection ("wait time") allow introverts to consider before becoming involved in activities or discussions. Estimates of both the general American population and the average public school classroom suggest that there are between two and three extraverts for every introvert.¹² Teachers, however, are more evenly balanced between the two.¹³

As predicted by theory, the extraverts with whom we have worked write with little planning, though they often feel guilty about not writing from
outlines. They sometimes describe their writing process as "quick and dirty" or the "easy way." They tend to generate ideas best from talking about the topic, interviewing others, or presenting an extemporaneous report. Extraverts often find freewriting a good method for developing ideas, for they think better when writing quickly, impulsively, and uncritically. Their pauses while writing are more frequently instances of an inability to generate ideas rather than moments of productive planning. They also benefit from talking the subject out or, as Peter Elbow suggests, from writing about having nothing to write about. Some even "write" better by speaking their first drafts into a tape recorder.

If expected to perform traditional prewriting strategies, such as outlining or tagmemic analysis, most extraverts we have observed do so more easily after writing a first draft as a means of clarifying rather than generating ideas. Discussing drafts seems to help them both to realize the need for revision and to understand what needs to be revised. Some may not revise unless they receive oral feedback. They are blocked less frequently when they can allow their first drafts to be relatively unfocused, filled with a wide range of data or ideas. In later drafts, they can more easily bring balance to their writing by selecting the most important ideas or data from the first draft and writing about each in greater depth.

A member of our thesis support group exemplifies the difficulties that many extraverts have with writing. One of her first comments in the group was that she disliked writing because of the isolation and the lack of oral feedback. Writing seemed too isolated a process for her, and she often became blocked. Her blocks, interestingly, were usually overcome by some form of extraverted activity, not by contemplation or planning. She developed the structure for the first draft of her thesis by preparing for and presenting a talk on the topic. She overcame another block by writing an abstract for a later talk. After reading her first draft, her advisor heard her present her findings at a campus symposium. He told her that he understood the oral presentation better than the written version. The talk and her advisor's oral feedback helped her to reevaluate her first draft, focus it, and make appropriate revisions.

In our experience, introverts generally have less difficulty with writing than extraverts, perhaps because they tend to follow the composing process as it is traditionally taught. Their basic writing process often follows the prewriting-writing-rewriting pattern. They generally want most of their ideas clarified before writing. They can and should be encouraged to develop ideas while writing, but they tend to find writing easier when much of the essay is written mentally before they put pen to paper. After they start to write, they pause frequently to plan further or to anticipate the direction of the essay. They may become dissatisfied with a first sentence or transition not because it is poorly written but because they are unsure about where it is leading. They tend to write alone, asking for advice reluctantly and then perhaps only from close friends or during private sessions with a teacher. Because introverts usu-
ally generate their ideas in isolation, we have found that their essays can be improved if they revise to connect their ideas with lived experience, perhaps by adding descriptions of experiences, as an extravert would tend to do naturally.

The introvert’s writing difficulties, though seemingly less frequent, can be equally frustrating. After six years of research and planning, an introvert in our thesis support group still had difficulty writing his thesis because he wanted to have practically every word thought out before putting anything on paper. He had, with only moderate difficulty, written many graduate school papers in this way. With the longer and more complex Ph.D. thesis, however, he became locked into his introversion and did little but plan. Introverts blocked by too much reflection can be encouraged to write, at least temporarily, in a more extraverted way, to leap into writing even without planning and discover their meaning as they write. They may, thus, achieve a more productive balance between introverted planning and extraverted activity.

Sensing—Intuition

“Sensing” and “intuition” represent alternative ways of perceiving or taking in information. Sensing involves the direct and conscious use of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, or touching to record carefully the particulars of one's environment. Intuition involves the use of impressions, hunches, and the imagination to perceive patterns, relationships, and configurations. Sensing types are often described as concrete, detail-oriented, practical and matter-of-fact, while intuitives are seen as abstract, idea-oriented, and imaginative. But the distinction between the two is clearer when we focus less on the behaviors and character traits and more on the perceptual processes underlying them.

Both factual data and theoretical concepts may be employed by each type, but with different emphasis. In telling a story, the starting point for sensing types is a solid grounding in reality: they begin with what happened, when, to whom, and, in sequence, how it occurred. In contrast, intuitives are likely to report first what the sensing type saves for last (or neglects): the meaning behind the event in the context of other similar events. For them, details and examples are mundane unless fitted into a conceptual scheme. At times, they may overlook them entirely, caught up in the inspiration of their idea.

In school work, detailed and factual material that is concretely verifiable suits sensing types; abstractions and conceptual complexities stimulate intuitives. Sensing types enjoy putting to use what they have learned; intuitive types like new learning just because it is different. Soundness of understanding is a value to the sensing; quickness of understanding and originality are sought by intuitives. Sensors re-check data to insure certainty. Intuitives trust first impressions and hunches. Because of these differences, Myers discovered
that sensing types experience more difficulty in learning to read, taking tests (especially standardized, timed tests), and meeting other traditional standards of academic achievement. But it is important to note that Myers believes this difficulty is not related to their competence as much as it is to how they are taught.\textsuperscript{14} For example, intuitive teachers often fail to provide sensing types with the concrete examples that they need in order to understand concepts.

As with extraverts, sensing types have been estimated to outnumber intuitives at least two to one in the general American population and in public school classrooms. Teachers are more evenly balanced between the two, but more intuitive teachers are found in higher education.\textsuperscript{15}

In our experience, sensing types write to the best of their ability when given explicit, detailed, and specific instructions. General directions may lead them to become blocked unless they ask the instructor for clarification or in some way translate the directions into a precise and complete set of expectations. One sensing type who was receiving help from an intuitive instructor in our writing clinic complained: “When I came in here, I thought that you were going to tell me exactly how to improve my writing.” He wanted the instructor to give him a clear, step-by-step procedure for improving his writing. Certainly, this sensing student needs to learn that writing is more than following rules and that good writing cannot be programmed. On the other hand, the intuitive instructor would probably have been more effective with this student if he had given detailed instructions and concrete advice on how to generate and organize ideas. Our experience has shown that clear and specific expectations in the early stages of instruction provide sensing students a sound base from which they are more likely, in later contacts, to respond imaginatively to open-ended assignments. Conversely, intuitives pay more careful attention to regulations if they know their original ideas do have an outlet for expression.

When preparing to write, sensing types collect large amounts of data, for each fact seems equally important. Their first drafts similarly tend to be a recording of facts not always clearly related to a central theme or idea. They may find writing easier when given a specific framework to follow, such as the five-paragraph essay. If over-anxious, they may try to apply such patterns too rigidly. They may become blocked when they can only think of four paragraphs, or when they have six and cannot make them fit the pattern. Even during a first draft, sensing types attend closely to mechanics and often view revising as merely “correcting” or proofreading. When revising, they may need to be encouraged to explain, as an intuitive would naturally, the implications of their data or ideas by adding or rewriting topic sentences, thesis statements, or summaries.

Sensing types are usually at their best dealing with concrete information, but preferably in sequential step-by-step fashion. They therefore can become overwhelmed by too large a set of data. A sensing type in our thesis support group found it difficult to know which facts to include in his initial draft. In
part because of his anxiety about the "correct" way to prepare a thesis, each piece of collected data held an importance of its own simply because it was factual. The criteria that he had initially developed for inclusion or exclusion of such data struck him as arbitrary. Exasperated, he settled on the only solution that seemed reasonable: he would include as many details as possible and let his advisor decide what to cut. We suggested that he include only the details needed to replicate the study and talked about how to apply this criterion. He then felt that he better understood what his committee was likely to expect.

Intuitive types, on the other hand, write best when given general instructions from which they can create their own goals. Developing a unique approach to the topic seems to be an important part of their prewriting, but they can become blocked by their need for originality. Several intuitives with whom we have worked become blocked while struggling to find an original way to write a commonplace memorandum. At their best, intuitives generate ideas almost unconsciously and write quickly, letting one idea trigger another with little attention to mechanics. Their first drafts may contain only ideas and generalities unsupported by concrete examples, which are left for later drafts or neglected entirely. When revising, they need to resolve unnecessary complexities, check their facts, correct mechanical errors, and clarify their ideas by supplying concrete examples.

One intuitive member of our thesis support group said that the more she reads, the more complex her topic becomes and the more she is confused. She explained the escalating complexity of her ideas by saying, "Things can become fuzzy very quickly." Unless these complexities are resolved, usually by verifying the theories with illustrations (i.e., applying them to a concrete situation), the writing of intuitive types may be confusing and difficult to read, as in the treatises of many brilliant but obscure philosophers.

As with introverts, intuitives with whom we have worked in general have less difficulty with writing than sensing types. Because words and phrases are abstract representations of reality, they are more naturally interesting to intuitives, who become intrigued by symbolic and often subtle meanings implied but not always explicitly stated. Sensing types' difficulties with writing often emerge from a lack of development of what for them is a less preferred process: the quick intuitive grasp of the possible, recognition of the intangible, and adept "reading between the lines." In contrast, writing difficulties for intuitives frequently relate to their tendency to define unclearly the problem they are discussing, and to neglect illustrative examples of the perspective they are describing.

**Thinking—Feeling**

"Thinking" and "feeling" describe how one makes evaluations, judgments, and decisions. Thinking types prefer to make decisions on the basis of objec-
tive criteria. They want to do what is right, even if feelings are hurt or group harmony is disrupted. They excel at the process of categorizing, whether facts and details or ideas. Feeling types prefer to make decisions on the basis of subjective factors, such as their personal values, the values of others involved, and the effect of the decision on group harmony. They excel at the process of facilitating interpersonal relationships.

In schools, thinking types tend to be particularly motivated when an assignment engages their mind analytically and is presented with a clear and logical rationale, and when they are treated fairly. Feeling types tend to be particularly motivated when given special encouragement and when projects relate to what they care most about. Certainly all students will be inclined to perform better when invited both to achieve an objective understanding of the material and to become personally invested in its application. The balance needed varies according to the type of student. An absence of the former invitation would most seriously hinder thinking types, and of the latter invitation, feeling types.

In general public school classrooms, thinking and feeling types appear in roughly equal numbers, with percentages among males tending slightly toward thinking and among females toward feeling. In part because there are more females among school teachers, feeling types tend to predominate in this group. McCaulley found that academic GPA's were higher among high school students whose preference on this dimension was clear and unambivalent, whether toward thinking or feeling.

Unless assigned topics for writing are presented with clear objective performance standards, thinking types may view the writing project as a meaningless academic exercise and become blocked. They usually organize their ideas or findings into categories or clearly formulated organizational structures. They also tend to focus on the clarity of content rather than on whether or not the audience will find it interesting. As a result, their first drafts may read as dry academic treatises or outlines in which key points are numbered. To achieve a balance, they may need to enliven their writing with vivid, personal examples when revising.

If feeling types do not select a topic that they can relate to their personal values, they may become blocked. What is most important to them in writing is to connect with another human being through their communication. When writing, they tend to focus more on how their audience may react to their writing than on content and organization. At times, therefore, they may be excessively concerned that their audience may be bored or that their ideas are inadequate. They may likewise become stalled by searching for just the right phrase or wording to capture the reader's attention. We have found that, because their concern for impact is often greater than their concern for content, feeling types may need, when revising, to clarify their thoughts or improve their organization.

Thinking and feeling types differ most strikingly as writers in how they ap-
approach organization. Thinking types usually follow an outline or an organizational pattern. They will then use the outline to make decisions, including material specified in the outline and excluding material not in the outline. Without this structure, they lack the objective criteria so important to them for making organizational decisions as they write. As an example, one thinking type wrote the following in response to a comment that her essay was unorganized: "I found it hard to write this paper. I would not think of any pattern that I [could] do. I believe I could have developed my paper more. I realize I put certain sentences out of order."

Feeling types, who base decisions more on personal values, may develop outlines or search for organizational patterns, but are less likely to follow them closely. One feeling type said that she makes outlines but uses them for only a paragraph or two. Then, once she begins to discover what she really wants to say, she ignores the outline and follows the flow of her own personal thought process. In addition to following the "flow" of their thoughts, organically developing structure from their own reactions to the subject matter, many feeling types may also make organizational decisions by trying to anticipate the audience's reaction to what they are writing. For example, if they feel that the audience needs more examples at a particular point, they will include them. If they feel that the audience will be bored by too many examples, they will exclude them. Outlines can seem too constraining to these writers. Another feeling type described her writing process with the following analogy: "Writing is like a summer breeze in that it cools your senses by releasing your thoughts and feelings. It allows a person to 'let themselves go' and let the pen and paper take total control of mind and hand. Writing is freedom and freedom is beautiful."

The strengths of "thinking" writers tend to include a natural gift for incisive critical analysis, logical organization of content, and brevity of expression. At times, however, they may dogmatically state beliefs as if universally held, and may fail to provide warmth or human interest in their writing.

"Feeling" writers, in contrast, are more inclined to write from the heart, giving a personal flavor to their essays. Since they prefer subjective to objective processes in organizing their writing, they may at times understate a point of controversy affecting someone they care about, or overstate a message of personal conviction.

Judging—Perceiving

"Judging" and "perceiving" describe how individuals approach tasks in the outer world. Judging types tend to structure the outer world in a way that will lead them to get things done. They select projects that can be completed, formulate problems in a way that will enable them to be solved, and work on tasks, usually only one at a time, until finished. They tend to be decisive. Per-
ceiving types are willing to leave the outer world unstructured, or tasks unfinished, so that they might better understand those tasks and the world around them. They are more inquisitive than decisive. Quickly made decisions narrow their field of vision, so they attempt to maintain a flexible perspective to be open to new information or ideas.

In schools, unexpected emergencies and last-minute information on a research project can disturb the judging types' need for order unless they allow time in their schedules to deal with the unexpected. Flexibility and spontaneity are the way of life for perceiving types, who need to be given deadlines to nudge them toward closure. Judging and perceiving types appear in roughly equal numbers in the general population, but classroom teaching and especially school administration attract more of the planful judging types.18 Likewise, most health professions involving delivery of service include larger numbers of judging types; investigative research fields instead draw more inquisitive perceiving types.19 School GPA's in subjects where productivity is important often are found to be higher among judging types.20

In our experience with writers, judging types tend to limit their topics quickly and set goals that are manageable. Before writing, they usually devote time to what Flower and Hayes call process goals (how to get things done),21 which ideally include plans to stop at key intervals to analyze and revise objectives. Much of their writing process reflects their need to complete the first draft expeditiously. They tend to make stylistic and organizational decisions quickly, sometimes arbitrarily. Their quickly written first drafts are often shorter than later ones. When revising, they need to reevaluate decisions that have been made hastily or arbitrarily, to consider more thoroughly the implications of their data or ideas, and to expand their writing to clarify or qualify bluntly worded statements.

Judging types' need to complete tasks helps them to finish writing projects, but it may also create blocks. Several judging types with whom we have worked said that they frequently begin to write before they have finished their research. If they have not gathered enough information to generate adequate ideas, the draft proceeds slowly and painfully. And even though they are blocked, they may force themselves to stare at a blank sheet of paper. Writing becomes easier for them when they learn to put a stalled project aside to finish the research or generate more ideas.

Judging types may also adhere to their plans too rigidly. A judging type with whom we worked developed, early in the process, a schedule for writing a graduate research paper. He then followed his plan without evaluating or revising it. He realized only a few days before the assignment was due that the topic he had selected was simply unworkable. To avoid being locked into unproductive plans, judging types need to allow time in their plans so that they can be spontaneous. They need to stop writing at key intervals, and reevaluate and perhaps revise their process goals.

Perceiving types, in our experience, tend to select broad topics and dive
into reading without narrowing their focus. They discover a multitude of interesting possibly-related studies in a literature search, without knowing clearly what they will do with the information they gather. Because they are curious and inquisitive, their topics may be limited only as the deadline approaches. How effectively they limit their topic will determine whether they finish the assignment at the last minute, late, or at all. Even if the subject is appropriately focused, they may delay writing because there is always one more paper or book to read. They become blocked when trying to decide between one of two approaches or if they feel that they do not know enough to begin writing. As a perceiving type in our thesis support group said: “Data collection is easy; writing about it is hard.”

Perceiving types may also have difficulty dividing the essay into sections, and may thus believe they need a large block of time before they can begin to write. When writing, they pause more frequently than judging types, not to reflect or anticipate as an introvert does, but to take in numerous alternatives. Their first drafts tend to be long and thorough but also too inclusive. When revising, they usually need to cut down the length of the paper or to refocus its direction.

When at their best, perceiving types write essays that are comprehensive and well thought out. They may, however, not believe their work to be adequately thorough. They tend to be perfectionistic, not about mechanics as a sensing type might, but about wanting to include enough background or related material. They often feel that, even in a short paper, they must write everything that could possibly be written about the topic. A perceiving type in our thesis support group, who was also an introvert, feared that his committee would criticize his thesis for being too short, that they would ask for more information or explanations. Not surprisingly, once he finally submitted a rough draft of the introduction, his advisor’s only suggestion was that he cut the length.

**Interaction of the Dimensions**

On its simplest level, Jung’s typology consists of the four bi-polar dimensions just described. The second layer of complexity arises when the preferences combine to create sixteen possible types as illustrated below on Figure 1.

The sixteen types represent an interaction—rather than a simple combination—of the dimensions. If the dimensions were merely combined, one would expect an introverted-intuitive-thinking-judging type (INTJ) to be very similar to an introverted-sensing-thinking-judging type (ISTJ). But although the two differ on only one descriptor out of four, the one on which they differ is the decisive (in the words of Jung and Myers the “dominant”) dimension. The difference is more influential in producing contrasting behavior than the similarities are in producing similar behavior. The greatest strength of the one is
the most visible weakness of the other, and vice versa. The limited scope of this article permits neither a description of all sixteen types nor an explanation of how a given type’s preferences interact. Though an understanding of the separate dimensions as described here can broaden teachers’ understanding of how individual writers differ, it is important to acknowledge that the personality constructs have more complexity than we were able to describe.22

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can help researchers to identify a writer’s personality type. It is a measure of one’s expressed preferences on each of the four dimensions discussed above. It is not, however, a performance test and does not measure how well people use their preferred processes. Form G of the MBTI (emerging from forty years of development through earlier forms) is a 126-item pencil-and-paper inventory. Its reliability and validity compare favorably to those of other such instruments.23

All pencil-and-paper inventories, however, have shortcomings and can be easily misused. The MBTI is one of the most benign of psychological instruments, since it was designed to identify the strengths and gifts of each type. Nevertheless, results from the MBTI can be misused if those administering and interpreting them attach primarily negative connotations to certain types. It is difficult for some to accept that all types have different but equally valid ways of dealing with the world. Training in the uses of psychological tests and the
MBTI in particular is important if teachers, researchers, and clinicians are to appreciate the subtleties of the instrument. The Center for Applications of Psychological Type offers training workshops for administering and interpreting the MBTI.24

Though results from the MBTI may eventually provide valuable information for composition teachers, we are not suggesting that teachers should test or label students wholesale. The MBTI should first be used in research to validate the observational findings presented in this article and to explore other related topics.

Implications for Research

The MBTI needs to be used to investigate the relationship between personality and writing in at least five areas:

1. We need hard data on how each MBTI dimension affects writing. The findings reported in this article only begin to show the effects of each dimension. Our work reported here, as noted, is basically an observational study. It needs to be replicated and the results analyzed systematically. The interaction of the four bi-polar scales of the MBTI also needs to be studied, for the sixteen personality types can potentially identify sixteen different writing processes.

2. The effect of teaching styles on writing instruction can be researched using the MBTI. DeNovellis and Lawrence have reported that MBTI preferences relate to teaching style,25 but we do not yet understand how they specifically affect the teaching of composition. We have observed that writers function best when early drafts draw upon their preferred MBTI processes and later drafts draw upon unpreferred modes to round out the writing. If this finding is supported by research, then it can provide the writing teacher with a system for delivering the appropriate intervention for an individual writer at a particular point in his or her writing process. We suspect that teachers in general may tend to advise students to write as they (the teachers) do, instead of adapting their advice to the needs of different students. We further suspect that a lack of match between writing teachers' preferences and those of their students is not the most critical variable; lack of understanding of the richness and usefulness of individual differences is, we believe, of more profound importance regardless of one's type. Research is needed to confirm or disconfirm these hypotheses.

3. Writers of different ages and writers with varying levels of writing experience should be studied to see if the MBTI can help to explain some features of the development of writing ability. Our experience suggests that all types can and do write well. We suspect that writers become more
skillful when they develop and mature both their preferred and unpreferred processes. Young writers, who may still be developing the preferred processes of their personality, may find it difficult to write in a way that requires them to use their unpreferred processes. We believe that writers should not be encouraged to develop their unpreferred processes until they have first developed the preferred. Pending further research, this must remain tentative advice.

4. The conceptual system of Jung and Myers can probably tell us a great deal about how teachers evaluate writing. According to theory, sensory teachers would tend to focus on facts, mechanics, and how well the student followed directions. Intuitive teachers are likely to focus on ideas and creativity. Schiff's initial examination of the MBTI and teachers' assessment of students' writing confirms the theory, but needs to be replicated and extended.26

5. We also need to re-evaluate current research methodology. In research on pausing, for example,27 measuring the length and frequency of pauses may have more meaning if the effect of personality type on frequency of pauses is considered. Introverts naturally pause more than extraverts; perceiving types do so more than judging types. An extraverted-judging type who pauses frequently may very well be blocked, but an introverted-perceiving type, with the same number of pauses, may be productively planning or considering options. Other applications of the theory of personality types to research on composing processes might prove fruitful.

Conclusion

Whether or not teachers have results of the MBTI for their students, the theoretical model described in this article can have a profound effect on how they think about and teach writing. If they know this model, teachers of composition can, at the very least, look for and be more accepting of legitimate differences in how students write, and can recognize how their own personality type may differ from those of their students. They should also begin to realize that a weakness in a student's writing is often associated with a contrasting strength. Though a student may sometimes neglect topic sentences and summaries, he or she may be observant of details and write excellent descriptive prose. Though another student may neglect mechanics, his or her writing may contain very fresh and new ideas. With or without MBTI results, an understanding of sensing and intuition as different ways of perceiving can help teachers to deal with such diversity. They can then, in an accepting and supportive way, help students move first from their strengths as writers to develop the skills that they need to improve.
Notes


7. Mary H. McCaulley, *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Teaching-Learning Process* (Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 1974).

8. Isabel B. Myers, *Relation of Psychological Type to Dropout in Nursing* (Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 1964).


17. Mary H. McCaulley, "Type and Education," unpublished manuscript.


19. Mary H. McCaulley, *Application of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to Medicine and Other Health Professions* (Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 1978).

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22. For more information on how the dimensions interact see Myers, *Gifts Differing*, pp. 17-25 and 83-116.


24. The Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc. is a nonprofit organization providing training, research consultation, scoring services and publications pertaining to the MBTI, located at 2720 N.W. 6th Street, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32601.

