

The Big Five Personality Traits

5 Major Factors of Personality

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Many contemporary personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions of personality, often referred to as the "Big 5" personality traits. The five broad personality traits described by the theory are extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.

[Trait theories of personality](#) have long attempted to pin down exactly how

many personality traits exist. Earlier theories have suggested a various number of possible traits, including [Gordon Allport's](#) list of 4,000 personality traits, [Raymond Cattell's](#) 16 personality factors, and Hans Eysenck's three-factor theory.

However, many researchers felt that Cattell's theory was too complicated and Eysenck's was too limited in scope. As a result, the five-factor theory emerged to describe the essential traits that serve as the building blocks of personality.

What Are the Big Five Dimensions of Personality?

Today, many researchers believe that they are five core personality traits. Evidence of this theory has been growing for many years, beginning with the research of D. W. Fiske (1949) and later expanded upon by other researchers including Norman (1967), Smith (1967), Goldberg (1981), and McCrae & Costa (1987).

The "big five" are broad categories of personality traits. While there is a significant body of literature supporting this five-factor model of personality, researchers don't always agree on the exact labels for each dimension.

You might find it helpful to use the acronym OCEAN (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) when trying to remember the big five traits.

It is important to note that each of the five personality factors represents a range between two extremes. For example, extraversion represents a continuum between extreme extraversion and extreme [introversion](#). In the real world, most people lie somewhere in between the two polar ends of each dimension.

These five categories are usually described as follows.

Openness

This trait features characteristics such as imagination and insight, and those high in this trait also tend to have a broad range of interests. People who are high in this trait tend to be more adventurous and [creative](#). People low in this trait are often much more traditional and may struggle with abstract thinking.

People who are high on the openness continuum are typically:

[Very creative](#)

Open to trying new things

Focused on tackling new challenges

Happy to think about abstract concepts

Those who are low on this trait:

Dislike change

Do not enjoy new things

Resist new ideas

Not very imaginative

Dislikes abstract or theoretical concepts

Conscientiousness

Standard features of this dimension include high levels of thoughtfulness, with good impulse control and goal-directed behaviors.

Highly conscientiousness tend to be organized and mindful of details.

Those who are high on the conscientiousness continuum also tend to:

Spend time preparing

Finish important tasks right away

Pay attention to details

Enjoy having a set schedule

People who are low in this trait tend to:

Dislike structure and schedules

Make messes and not take care of things

Fail to return things or put them back where they belong

Procrastinate important tasks

Fail to complete the things they are supposed to do

Extraversion

Extraversion is characterized by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness. People who are high in extraversion are outgoing and tend to gain energy in social situations. People who are low in extraversion (or introverted) tend to be more reserved and have to expend energy in social settings.

People who rate high on extraversion tend to:

Enjoy being the center of attention

Like to start conversations

Enjoy meeting new people

Have a wide social circle of friends and acquaintances

Find it easy to make new friends

Feel energized when they are around other people

Say things before they think about them

People who rate low on extraversion tend to:

Prefer solitude

Feel exhausted when they have to socialize a lot

Find it difficult to start conversations

Dislike making small talk

Carefully think things through before they speak

Dislike being the center of attention

Agreeableness

This personality dimension includes attributes such as trust, [altruism](#), kindness, affection, and other [prosocial behaviors](#). People who are high in agreeableness tend to be more cooperative while those low in this trait tend to be more competitive and even manipulative.

People who are high in the trait of agreeableness tend to:

Have a great deal of interest in other people

Care about others

Feel [empathy](#) and concern for other people

Enjoy helping and contributing to the happiness of other people

Those who are low in this trait tend to:

Take little interest in others

Don't care about how other people feel

Have little interest in other people's problems

Insult and belittle others

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is a trait characterized by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability. Individuals who are high in this trait tend to experience mood

swings, anxiety, irritability and sadness. Those low in this trait tend to be more stable and emotionally [resilient](#).

Individuals who are high in neuroticism tend to:

Experience a lot of stress

Worry about many different things

Get upset easily

Experience dramatic shifts in mood

Feel anxious

Those who are low in this trait are typically:

Emotionally stable

Deal well with stress

Rarely feel sad or depressed

Don't worry much

Very relaxed

Are the Big Five Traits Universal?

McCrae and his colleagues have also found that the big five traits are also remarkably universal. One study that looked at people from more than 50 different cultures found that the five dimensions could be accurately used to describe personality.

Based on this research, many psychologists now believe that the five personality dimensions are not only universal; they also have biological origins. Psychologist David Buss has proposed that an evolutionary explanation for these five core personality traits, suggesting that these personality traits represent the most important qualities that shape our social landscape.

What Factors Influence the Big Five Traits?

Research suggests that both biological and environmental influences play a role in shaping our personalities. Twin studies suggest that both [nature and nurture](#) play a role in the development of each of the five personality factors.

One study of the genetic and environmental underpinnings of the five traits looked at 123 pairs of identical twins and 127 pairs of fraternal twins. The findings suggested that the heritability of each trait was 53 percent for extraversion, 41 percent for agreeableness, 44 percent for conscientiousness, 41 percent for neuroticism, and 61 for openness.

Longitudinal studies also suggest that these big five personality traits tend to be relatively stable over the course of adulthood. One study of working-age adults found that personality tended to be stable over a four-year period and displayed little change as a result of adverse life events.

Studies have shown that maturation may have an impact on the five traits. As people age, they tend to become less extraverted, less neurotic, and less open to experience. Agreeableness and conscientiousness, on the other hand, tend to increase as people grow older.

A Word From Verywell

Always remember that behavior involves an interaction between a person's underlying personality and situational variables. The situation that a person finds himself or herself in plays a major role in how the person reacts. However, in most cases, people offer responses that are consistent with their underlying personality traits.

These dimensions represent broad areas of personality. Research has demonstrated that these groupings of characteristics tend to occur together in

many people. For example, individuals who are sociable tend to be talkative. However, these traits do not always occur together. [Personality](#) is a complex and varied and each person may display behaviors across several of these dimensions.

Sources

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