

# April's Enneagram FAQ

## **1. Which test should I take to find out my Type?**

I strongly recommend *NOT* taking a test at all, or at least not until after you have thoroughly studied all nine Types. Tests are not 100% accurate, and I have seen time and again how people tend to develop “tunnel vision” once they have a test result in hand. I have watched people zone in on one or two Types given to them by a test, and have difficulty really paying attention to information about the other Types – despite their sincere intentions to be even-handed.

*To truly understand yourself and others via the Enneagram requires extensive observation as well as an understanding of the Types.* In my experience, people who start with a test often come away with neither self-observation nor understanding of Type – they substitute their test results for self-observation, and they limit their study of the Types to the one or two Types suggested by their test result. Because of this human tendency toward “confirmation bias” around test results, I recommend that people first learn about all the Types, then bring their own observational skills to discover which set of patterns run most strongly in their own day-to-day living. After all of this, if a person decides to use a test for additional confirmation, they will have a more full context in which to interpret their results.

## **2. What makes you think you can narrow a person down into a Type? Isn't that pigeonholing?**

This question reflects the “usual” way most typologies are presented. The Enneagram is much richer than this. It's imminently important to understand that the purpose of the Enneagram is NOT to “sum you up” but rather to provide pointers for self-knowledge. As many Enneagram teachers and students like to say, “The map is not the territory.” Can you imagine looking at a map of Malibu and saying “Well, no need to go there. I've seen the map, I know what Malibu is like.” The map is just a tool for helping you find your way around. It can never express warm breezes, clear water, swaying palm trees. The Enneagram is a map, a model. No map or model will ever fully reflect the astonishing complexity and mystery that is a human being. It so happens that the Enneagram is a strikingly rich and useful model. I invite you to explore it for yourself and see if worthwhile insights come to light.

## **3. Can a person be more than one Type?**

You can view the points on the Enneagram as representing clusters of traits that, taken together, comprise specific ways of experiencing and interacting with the world. From this view, we all have all these potentials within us, so in a sense everyone is all nine “Types.” **However**, it's also true that each person has one Enneagram point in which they “specialize” more than all other points. For some people that specialty outstrips the other points by a wide margin, while for other people the margin may be smaller. But it seems we are wired to have one that is most “in charge” the largest amount of the time. *(continued next page)*

When we say someone “is” a particular Type, this is shorthand for saying it is their main or dominant Type, the point in which they specialize the most. It’s like saying “I’m a southpaw” – it doesn’t mean the person doesn’t *have* a right hand, just that their left hand is *dominant*.

#### **4. Are you born your Type? Nature, nurture, or both?**

Different experts have different opinions on this. Since we have (currently)\* no way to test infants for Type, all we can do for the nature/nurture question is to make our best guess based on observation. What the experts do agree on – regardless of whether Type is inborn, environment-induced, or some combination – is that our EnneaType forms very early in life.

\*To my knowledge, the medical research community has not yet studied biological markers for Enneagram Type. If at some point in the future there are reliable physical correlates found, such as body chemistry or genetic markers, then perhaps it would become possible to test infants for Type. Whether this would be a good idea would be a matter of significant philosophical and ethical debate.

#### **5. Can a person’s Type change over their lifetime?**

All the major teachers and schools are in agreement that a person’s main/dominant Type, once established (see #4), does not change. What *can* happen through intentional growth work or accumulated life experience or both, is that aspects of your non-dominant points on the Enneagram can become *easier for you to access* than they were before. For example, someone whose main Type avoids self-assertion might become more able to self-assert, or someone whose main Type is emotionally oriented might develop a capacity for non-attachment. In addition, certain compulsive behaviors associated with a particular Type might become less compulsive, less prominent. Thus a person’s Type can sometimes become *less obvious* to others. However, those who study themselves and the Enneagram in depth can still see subtle aspects of the dominant Type at work within their own self-experience.

#### **6. I seem to relate to all (or a lot) of the Types. Why is this, and where do I go from here?**

There can be several reasons for difficulty narrowing down your Type, ranging from childhood influences, to an insufficient understanding of the Enneagram Types, to personal bias (some people have difficulty typing themselves because they are actually prejudiced against their own Type). In addition, some people have an especially easy time seeing things from many points of view – and this can make it hard to nail down which one is “my own”/default versus which ones are simply a matter of being very good at seeing other angles. For individuals with considerable life experience and/or personal growth work, it can be helpful to think back to how you were in your twenties.

The most important elements for narrowing down your main/core Type are time and understanding. As you learn more and the information has time to seep from your intellect into your lived experience, you will begin to see which elements of your personality “feel the most like yourself.” You’ll be able to sort out surface appearances from the deeper drives. Some individuals can type themselves almost instantly; for others it can take years. I invite you to

learn, observe yourself, and trust the process of self-discovery. Patience and humor are great allies in this process.

**7. Can you determine Enneagram Type by knowing a person's Myers-Briggs type?**

There is no exact correlation between the Enneagram and MBTI types, but there are trends which you can use with reasonable reliability to narrow it down. For example, most individuals of Types 4 and 5 are introverted; most individuals of Types 2 and 4 are feelers, most individuals of Types 3 and 5 are thinkers, and so on. You can find a chapter on this topic in *The Enneagram Made Easy* by Renee Baron and Elizabeth Wagele.

**8. What do the arrows mean?**

As you may recall, each person contains all the potentialities of the nine Types (see #3). The arrows represent specific ways these potentialities and patterns relate to each other within an individual's experience. These dynamics can be very useful in personal growth work. For more information, choose a growth-oriented Enneagram book such as *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, *The Modern Enneagram*, or *Deep Living*.

**9. What are "wings"?**

Usually, once a person has identified their dominant Type, it begins to become apparent that their main Type has a certain degree of "flavoring" or influence from one of the immediately adjacent Types. For example, a person doing the life patterns of Two might do so with more of a Oneish style and emphasis, or might do so with more of a Threeish style and emphasis. The wing is always immediately adjacent to the main Type. A very few individuals have approximately equal flavoring from both wings, but the vast majority have one wing noticeably more pronounced than the other.

**10. Are certain Types more mature/aware/awake or competent than others? Is there a progression we should aspire to?**

No. Maturity, awareness, etc. are independent of Type and are addressed in large part in Riso and Hudson's "Levels of Development." Persons of any Type can be intelligent or not, caring or not, brave, loyal, productive, etc. Every Type can be psychologically and spiritually healthy and balanced, or immature (even pathological), or somewhere in between. Our aspirations, if we aspire to grow with the Enneagram, are twofold: to become as psychologically and spiritually healthy as we can, using the Enneagram to help us locate the crux of our recurring pitfalls; and to develop as much balance and skill as we can in befriending and employing the strengths of all nine Enneagram points as they exist within us. Startlingly, it is actually by bringing *balance* to our dominant Type that its gifts begin to shine most beautifully in the world.

**11. Are certain Type combinations more compatible? (Or, whom should I/my child/my friend marry?)**

On first acquaintance, some Types may have a more immediate affinity than others. However, this is usually skin-deep. Over time, every combination (including those where both people have the same Type!) will have both strengths and weaknesses surfacing. Rather than trying to

think in terms of good or bad combinations, or even harder/easier, it is helpful to be aware of where the likely pitfalls are (to mitigate them) and where the likely strengths are (to build on them). The most important building blocks for relationship are the same as always: understanding yourself and the other; respect, kindness, shared values, and so on. I recommend focusing on these and using Type simply as a tool in the “understanding” piece.

### **12. What is the scientific backing for the Enneagram?**

The Enneagram as we have it today has evolved over an extended period of time, with numerous individuals adding or fine-tuning elements of the theory. In the past, most of its development occurred through astute but informal observations by “students of humanity” such as philosophical thinkers, spiritual teachers, psychologists and psychiatrists. More recently, as the Enneagram continues to gain traction with a wider audience and in a broader range of applications, interest in more standardized studies is beginning to grow. At this time, validation by formal studies has made a small beginning but there is much left to do. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the Enneagram model is meant to be of practical use, and its usefulness for *you* can be ascertained through your own experimentation: if you find the information useful, use it; if not, don’t. The Enneagram is a practical tool, not a philosophy. As such the ultimate test is whether *you* find it useful in your own life. Numerous individuals around the world *have* found it highly useful, and that is why its popularity continues to grow.

### **13. Who invented the Enneagram, or how was it developed?**

What we know today as “the Enneagram” is more properly called “the Enneagram of Personality” and combines elements from numerous sources. Strictly speaking, the term “Enneagram” refers to the geometric figure itself and over time has been used to map various phenomena, not only personality. The Enneagram of Personality is the most widely known and most extensively explicated application of the Enneagram geometry. The figure’s earliest underpinnings date back at least to ancient Greece and possibly even further back to ancient Egypt. These days, we usually use “Enneagram” as shorthand for “Enneagram of Personality,” a system developed by a combination of first spiritual, later psychological, and eventually business-oriented practitioners.

An *extremely* brief history: Some important forerunners of the Enneagram of Personality were Enneagram applications used by spiritual practitioners including Jesuits (Christian mystics), Sufis (Islamic mystics), and G.I. Gurdjieff, a famous spiritual teacher in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These applications described discernible patterns relevant to personality, but none of them comprised a fully developed, well-rounded, systematic personality theory.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oscar Ichazo began using the Enneagram symbol to systematize personality types with characteristic passions and virtues, and psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo brought his clinical expertise to bear in further explicating the nine Types. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the Enneagram began being taught to a wider, more public audience, and continued being developed by some of these same teachers, notably Helen Palmer and Don Riso. Helen Palmer continued to develop Naranjo’s method of

interviewing panels to deepen understanding of self and others. These panels have formed a centerpiece of the Enneagram school she founded, called the Narrative Tradition. Don Riso, having encountered an early version of the Enneagram of Personality while attending a Jesuit seminary, also began working to further develop the theory. Palmer was joined by psychiatrist David Daniels, and Riso was joined by Russ Hudson. Riso and Hudson founded The Enneagram Institute and extended the level of detail in the theory via many useful conceptual structures including the Hornevian Triads, Harmonic Groups, and Levels of Development.

In the last several decades, two major schools (The Narrative Tradition and The Enneagram Institute) have continued to develop and hone Enneagram theory and methods. Several notable individuals including Tom Condon, Beatrice Chestnut, Mario Sikora, Ginger Lapid-Bogda, and Roxanne Howe-Murphy have focused on specific applications such as business and coaching. Well-known teachers of the Enneagram in a spiritual context include Richard Rohr and Jessica Dobb. The Narrative Tradition as well as Russ Hudson continue to address all major realms of Enneagram application, including business, psychology, personal growth, and spirituality.

Due to the depth and breadth of the Enneagram's descriptions of how personality functions internally, externally, and interpersonally, it is a robust source of information for specialists to apply in a variety of fields including corporate teamwork, psychotherapy, spirituality, career counseling, and relationship optimization.

*About April:*

*April Austin is a native of North Carolina, a member at the Kirk of Kildaire, and a two-time alumna of Meredith College. She became enthralled with the Enneagram around 2002 after reading The Wisdom of the Enneagram by Don Riso and Russ Hudson. Through continued study, her fascination grew into an abiding appreciation for the deep well of psychological understanding and spiritual wisdom available, especially through advanced study. Since 2009 April has completed more than 700 contact hours in Enneagram training, much of it through the Enneagram Institute, including spiritual topics and teacher trainings. In sharing her Enneagram knowledge with others, April's top priority is to help people put self-understanding to real use in their spiritual development, psychological health, and relationships.*

*April lives in Cary with Mark, her husband of 26 years. They love to talk, take walks, and watch a variety of movies (comedy, romance, and sci-fi/fantasy with philosophical undertones). April also enjoys reading and writing when her schedule allows.*

