Carl Jung identified four basic mental functions (sensation, intuition, thinking, and feeling) each of which can be used in the extraverted (outer) world and the introverted (inner) world. A mental function used in a particular attitude (the outer or inner world) is what is referred to as a function-attitude. Thus, there are eight basic mental tools, or function-attitudes, that people can use to understand and approach the world and themselves. This handout describes the characteristics and qualities of the function-attitudes (using the Myers-Briggs Types Indicator® terminology of Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling).

Regardless of whether they are used in an extraverted or introverted way, bear in mind that Sensing and Intuition are perceiving mental functions, and thus are used to take in information. Thinking and Feeling are judging mental functions and are used to weigh information and to decide.

Everyone uses all eight of these function-attitudes. However, in each of the sixteen types one of the function-attitudes is dominant (the characteristics of that function show significantly in that person’s life) and one is auxiliary (supports and balances the dominant function). The purpose of this handout is to give suggestions for exploring and developing the potentials of the eight function-attitudes and to offer some issues for consideration as you explore and develop those potentials.

For further information on how each of the sixteen types gives priority to the function-attitudes, see the handout The Eight Function-Attitudes or the other materials listed in the resources.
Why Develop These Potentials?

Individuals may wish to explore and/or develop the potentials of the eight function-attitudes for a variety of personal or professional reasons. Some might explore them for curiosity—to see how the other half lives. Some might want to “get into” the shoes of some significant other person. Others might want to develop the skills and qualities of particular function-attitudes for the sake of personal growth—to explore and expand their sense of self. Still others will want to develop the potentials as a way of increasing their effectiveness in the workplace.

The Eight Function-Attitudes

- **Extraverted Sensing** (Experiencing/Fact-Seeking): Outward and active focus on the objective world and on gathering factual data and sensual experiences.

- **Introverted Sensing** (Recalling/Clarifying): Inward and reflective focus on subjective sensual experiences and on the storing of factual historical data.

- **Extraverted Intuition** (Brainstorming/Patterning): Outward and active focus on the new, the possibilities, and meanings/patterns in the objective world.

- **Introverted Intuition** (Visioning/Symbolizing): Inward and reflective focus on the subjective world of symbols, meanings, insight, and patterns that come from the unconscious.

- **Extraverted Thinking** (Systematizing/Objectifying): Outward and active focus on applying logical order to the objective world through building structure, organizing, and making decisions.

- **Introverted Thinking** (Analyzing/Problem-Solving): Inward and reflective focus on the subjective world of reason that seeks understanding through finding the logical principles behind phenomena.

- **Extraverted Feeling** (Harmonizing/Expressing): Outward and active focus on bringing order to the objective world through building and seeking harmony with others and alignment with openly expressed values.

- **Introverted Feeling** (Valuing/Idealizing): Inward and reflective focus on the subjective world of deeply felt values that seeks harmony through alignment of personal behavior with those values and evaluation of phenomena in light of those values.
How to Develop the Skills and Qualities of the Eight Function-Attitudes

**Extraverted Sensing**

- Talk with people only about the things you have literally seen, heard, done or that have happened to you today or in the recent past.

- At a meal, focus on the sensations, sight, smell, taste, and sound of the food, and actively move from one flavor to the next. Don’t evaluate or interpret your experience—simply stay with the sensations as they emerge.

- Seek out physical/sensual stimuli and be willing to try out increasingly strong ones: turn the stereo on if it’s not, turn the stereo up if it’s on, choose strong flavored meals, touch clothing in stores. Be willing to try out sensations that you might even typically interpret as unpleasant. Don’t evaluate—simply experience.

- If anyone brings up an idea, continually ask yourself and that person, “and what will we do to make this happen in the real world?”

**Introverted Sensing**

- Look at your environment or at a picture. Close your eyes or turn away and recall as much detail as you can about what you just saw, felt, and heard. For example, can you remember where items were on a grocery store aisle?

- Recall in some detail a past event (e.g., a birthday party, or any other event that had impact on you). What were you doing? What were people around you doing? Wearing? Saying? What were the sounds? What were physical sensations from your environment (e.g., wind, temperature, textures)? Recreate the event as vividly as you can, as if you were actually there again.

- In an area of interest of yours, find out how something has been done before and do it that way. Stick with the way it was done before without recreating it in a different way.

- When you have some task to do, spend time alone making a detailed list of all the steps you would need to take, and in what order, to do the task.
Extraverted Intuition

- Pick an idea and begin brainstorming out loud (ideally with someone else)—making all the possible associations to that idea that you can imagine—what other ideas does it make you think of? Keep going for as long as you can. Don’t worry about evaluating how to apply the ideas. Alternatively, pick a simple object and brainstorm all the ways it might be used.

- Talk with someone about an event in your life by using only impressionistic language, without using any specific physical details (e.g., “the meeting seemed very stormy. Everyone seemed to be struggling just to keep from going under. It did settle down after a while and everybody got their bearings.”).

- When someone brings up, or you notice, some event in your personal life or in the workplace (e.g., a debate about when to have a meeting or party), look for how that event could be one example of a larger pattern/theme. What would that pattern be? Talk it out with the person who brought it up.

- Try out some new activity—the first one that comes into your mind. Don’t evaluate the idea/activity. Just go try it out, and invite a friend to do it with you.

Introverted Intuition

- Imagine, without censoring, where your field of work might be in ten or twenty years, and all the ways it might be different. Write for as long as you can on this.

- Try out various thought experiments and let yourself get carried away with the process without concern for how ideas would be applied (e.g., how would the world be different if everyone had twelve fingers instead of ten? What if the color orange suddenly disappeared from our world?)

- Take an idea or theme (e.g., balance), hold it as an idea, let a symbol that could represent it emerge, and then draw it. Ask yourself throughout the day how that idea relates to what you are doing or experiencing at any given moment.

- Look at a piece of art and ask what does it mean? What are all the different ways of interpreting it? How might different people see it differently depending on their points of view?
**Extraverted Thinking**

- Pick something in your life that seems to be in chaos. Figure out a logical series of steps that could organize that area of your life (e.g., flow of mail in your office) and then take action on the steps. Choose something that requires the involvement of others—and organize how they take action with you.

- When you have an opportunity at work, take responsibility for a meeting, set an agenda, move decidedly through it, bring decisions to closure, and ensure everyone leaves with a clear sense of their responsibilities.

- Practice making a decision quickly, and operate on the assumption that a decision needs to be made now. Take action on the decision. Then move on to another decision without revisiting the previous one.

- Pick some ruling principle (e.g., people need to show up for work on time), and as you go through your day or week, weigh how well people seem to adhere to that standard.

**Introverted Thinking**

- Practice insisting on precision in your own and others’ use of words. Ask yourself and others, “What do I or they mean by that word or concept?” (e.g., caring or effectiveness). Consider the accuracy or inaccuracy of what others are saying.

- Pick some subject or idea that could be an unpopular topic of conversation (and which might be uncomfortable for you). Try arguing both sides of an issue; play devil’s advocate. Be sure you can make an effective argument for both sides, not just the side you care about. Write down your arguments.

- Take up a game that involves and allows time for a thoughtful approach to strategy (e.g., chess). Practice thinking several steps ahead in the game, considering what might happen if you make alternative moves.

- Look at the pros and cons of a course of action you want to take, even (especially) if it is something you care about. For example, “If I go to New York this weekend, the advantages and disadvantages are . . .” Look at the consequences of the various courses of action.
Extraverted Feeling

- Look for areas of agreement in discussions with others. Work your way up to more difficult arenas, and especially practice this if it is normally an arena where you might disagree with someone. Look for areas where you can come to agreement if you don’t initially agree.

- Practice being tactful and concerned in your communication. When talking to someone, ask yourself “what’s important to him or her?” Say and do things that will help the other people feel good about who they are and what they are doing. Soften feedback when you give it.

- When you have a decision to make, ask what impact the decision will have on others and how they feel. Consider all the people it might impact. Ask people involved how they feel the decision might affect them—take their responses into consideration in your decision.

- Pick something important in your life and involve others in making it a reality. Get them interested, and organized, and tell them how important this is to you.

Introverted Feeling

- Take time to thoroughly explore the questions “What are my values? What is important to me, regardless of what others might feel or believe?” Pay attention to how well you are living out and living up to your values at any given point in your day or week.

- Consider what it means to you to be ethical and to have integrity. Watch your behavior for a specified time (e.g., a week), and ask yourself in an ongoing way, did my behavior show integrity? Was it ethical?

- Consider someone who is important to you in your life. What do you value about them? What leads you to care about them? Tell them in a note or a card.

- Next time you face a conflict with someone or a disagreement in a group, take time to reflect on what is important to them and what is important to you, and any other parties involved. Are there issues that are important to everyone involved? Are there common values? Consider how to find ways to accommodate what is important to everyone involved.
Working with the Function-Attitudes

When working with the function-attitudes (whether simply to have the experience, or for the purpose of development), here are some general issues to consider:

1. Begin using the functions in non- or low-stress situations and work your way up. For example, work on your extraverted Sensing by working in your garden, or your introverted Sensing by closing your eyes and remembering what was literally in a room. As you try out some of the exercises in this handout, consult with others who have that preference to see how your experience is like or different from theirs (e.g., consult with an introverted Sensing type to determine how your memory of historical events is like or different from theirs).

2. Try developing the skills associated with your nonpreferred function-attitudes through hobbies or recreational activities. For example, to experience your introverted Thinking function, take up a game that emphasizes strategy (e.g., chess) or to experience extraverted Thinking, try an athletic or other activity where achievement can be seen and measured.

3. Use your developing function-attitude with issues of developmentally greater difficulty. Don’t start with high-risk issues or practices. For example, don’t decide, “I’m going to start working on my extraverted Feeling function” and then talk with your partner about the longest-standing issue in your relationship. Rather, start with “I’m going to stop and ask myself how the other person might feel about what I’m going to say. What’s important to that person?”

4. Remember that as you develop skills associated with your least-preferred functions, you may temporarily feel some loss of confidence or competence. Since you haven’t been consciously working on those functions as long, you will often feel less confidence in using them. This is one of the reasons why it is often important to practice your skill development in domains that are not high risk or high stress. From a typological perspective, self-esteem is built in part through developing comfort and skill in one’s natural preferences. This esteem then provides the basis for developing skills in one’s nonpreferred function-attitudes.

5. You might also feel energized and excited when you work with your nonpreferred function-attitudes, because using them is like exploring new territory. You may well begin to connect with and recognize the unknown larger parts of your self.

6. As you explore the function-attitudes, recognize that whatever happens provides you with good feedback about who you are, where you are, what your potentials are, and what you might care to develop. For example, you may decide that a particular function-attitude was interesting to explore but not worth “working on” at this point in your life.

7. Remember that from a depth psychology perspective, when we work with our least-preferred functions, we may potentially face issues that crop up from our unconscious as they manifest through those functions. Go easy with your lesser-preferred functions, and treat the exploration of them with curiosity, care and respect.
Resources

Lawrence, G. D. and C. R. Martin. 2001. Building people, building programs: A practitioner's guide for introducing the MBTI® to individuals and organizations. Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

Martin, C. R. 2001. The eight function-attitudes. (Handout.) Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

