

# Psy-Q

## Test Your Psychological Intelligence

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# Contents

Acknowledgements viii

Preface: Psychology Is Everything 1

The Raw Shark Test 3

A Dirty Joke 7

Your Personality Profile 8

It's All Chinese to Me 14

Spot the Deference 20

How Many Clinical Psychologists Does It Take To Change  
a Light Bulb? 23

Professional Psychopaths 24

I Just Can't Wait 27

Take It or Leave It? 31

Are You Stupider than a Monkey? 34

A Straightforward Question 38

The Tragic Tale of Kitty Genovese 39

The Necker Cube 41

Anchors Away 43

A Shocking Experiment 45

Mission to Mars 50

Carrot or Stick? 53

Liar, Liar 56

Lyer, Lyer 60

The Line-Length Illusion 65

A Barking-Mad Test? 69

Your Perfect Partner 73

Digital Love 79

St Valentine's Day: Massacred? 81

The Tea Test 84

Reading and Righting 88

Prelude or Requiem? 91

The Patient	101
The Radiologist	105
The Surgeon	109
The Doctor	112
The Health Minister	114
Red or Black?	118
Track the Attacker	123
Morality Play	126
The Arts Critic	131
Card Trick 1	135
Morality Play: Agree/Strongly Agree	138
Card Trick 2	139
'All I Have To Do Is Dream'	141
The Interpretation of Dreams	144
Morality Play: Disagree/Strongly Disagree	150
The March of Time	151
It Feels So Right	157
Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus	160
Focus on Your Knitting	165
The pSHEchologist	170
Quoth the Raven's 'What's My Score?'	171
The Fool Hath Said in His Heart, 'There Is No God'	183
Idiocracy?	187
Stereo Types	190
Horoscope Horror Show?	195
Are You a Conspiracy Theorist?	198
What a Shape Sounds Like	201
What a Shape Tastes Like	204
What's in a Face? #1	207
Tips for Dancers?	211
What's in a Name?	214
Hitler's Sweater	217
Getting All Emotional	219
Be on Your Guard	224
What's in a Face? #2: The Talking Dog	228
Literacy Test	233

Roll Play	241
A Trivial Pursuit	243
What's in a Face? #3: Brown-Eyed Girl	252
At My Wick's End	255
Under Pressure	256
Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child?	259
Video Gains?	261
Shut Your Face(book)?	263
Cake Addicts	265
The Vanishing Ghost	269
That Sinking Feeling	271
Can't Stand Losing You	275
Stick or Switch?	278
Mind over Matter	280
Your Memory Is Limitless	282
Do Humans Dream of Electric Sheep?	286
Can Psychology Save the World?	288
Prescient Palmistry?	293
Can Psychology Save the World?: You Chose Split	296
What's in a Face? #4: Face-Off	297
The Psychology of Pain	300
A Sinister Questionnaire	304
The 'Ts Have It	308
Write Stuff or Write-Off?	311
Can Psychology Save the World?: You Chose Steal	314
YOU Are the Psychologist	315
Continuing Your Psych-Odyssey	320
References	321
Credits	345

# Preface: Psychology Is Everything

You've heard of your IQ; your general intelligence. But what's your 'Psy-Q'? How much do you know and understand about what makes you tick? And how good are you at predicting other people's behaviour . . . or even your own?

The aim of this book is to share the answers that psychology has come up with to explain how and why humans do all the things we do. But it is not some dry, dusty psychology textbook, filled – as most are – with details of long, boring experiments and byzantine theories. What you want to know is what psychology can tell you about you and your life. Well, I'm not going to *tell* you. Instead, I'm going to *show* you, via a series of interactive tests, quizzes, puzzles, games and illusions. Of course, we don't have everything figured out right now. But by the time you reach the end of this book, you will not only have the very best answers that science can offer, but will also have gained a powerful insight into your own psychology.

Notice that I used the word 'science'. As a psychology researcher, I'm first and foremost a scientist. Psychology derives its value from following the scientific method: we come up with theories and test them, using the most controlled experiments possible. Every study that we meet over the course of this book is drawn from the peer-reviewed scientific literature. And while scientists rarely reach a consensus on anything, the explanations and conclusions I give are based on my reading of the best evidence that is currently available, with no wild conjecture, no pseudo-science and absolutely no pop-psychology pap. So, while you'll encounter both cutting-edge studies and plenty of classics, there are very few from the period before psychology established itself as an experimental science, somewhere in the 1950s.

But *Psy-Q* doesn't just *describe* these studies; it *is* these studies. You'll measure your personality, intelligence, moral values,

thinking style, impulsivity, skill at drawing, capacity for logical reasoning, musical taste, multitasking ability, susceptibility to illusions (both visual and mental) and preferences in a romantic partner. You'll learn how we as a species think, feel, see and respond to others. You'll be surprised, delighted, amazed, amused, frustrated, horrified and downright baffled. You'll turn psychologist and ask friends and family to complete the studies in order to compare your results. You'll run to your computer to complete online versions of the studies, many at the companion website ([www.Psy-Qbook.com](http://www.Psy-Qbook.com)). And by the end of your journey, I hope you'll have begun to see that *psychology is everything*: there is literally no aspect of the human experience that cannot be investigated, in some way or other, using the methods of experimental psychology.

As for the route that you take through the book, well, it's up to you. Although I've tried to put these studies in some kind of logical order, mixing up sections of different types to keep things lively, feel free to navigate your own path between cross-referenced studies or to float around at random as the mood takes you; it's your book, your brain and your voyage of discovery. So, anchors away, let's set sail on your very own psych-odyssey.

# The Raw Shark Test

Let's start with what is almost certainly the most famous psychological test ever: the *Rorschach Test*. To complete the test, simply write what you see in the space below each image, then turn the page to find out what your answers say about you.

1.



.....

2.



.....

3.



.....

4.



.....

5.



.....

6.



.....

7.



8.



9.



10.



## ANSWERS

1. The first card is really just a warm-up, and has fairly obvious responses that don't actually say anything much about you. Is it a bat, a butterfly or a moth? It doesn't matter.
2. Now we're getting into it. Most people will say that this looks like two humans, or animals such as bears or elephants. But do you think they're fighting, holding hands or simply saying hello? If you said the former, this may indicate that you have angry or aggressive tendencies.
3. This one definitely looks like two humans, right (perhaps with love hearts or butterflies in between them)? If you didn't spot them, or took a long time to do so, this suggests that you may struggle with social interactions.
4. This card is often referred to as the 'father card', because whatever you say about it reflects your attitude towards your father. For example, if you saw a bear coming to devour you,

you're probably a bit afraid of your father (or all men, or authority figures more generally).

5. This is another 'easy' card, designed to give you a break, and to check that you're paying attention and not giving completely off-the-wall answers. If you didn't say something like *moth*, *butterfly* or *bat* (or the *Donnie Darko* rabbit), you've got issues.
6. Number six is a sex card. Oh, come on, use your imagination! If you said *animal skin* or *rug*, you might be trying to repress your sexuality.
7. The companion to number 4, this card is often called the 'mother card'. So what did you see? Two angels? Good. Two witches? Not so good. If you didn't see women at all, this may reflect some difficulty in getting close to the women in your life.
8. The last three cards are all full-colour in the original version, so you can be forgiven for struggling a little. Most people see some kind of four-legged animal. If you didn't, it may reflect a difficulty in coping with complex situations or emotions in which – as in this card – there is a lot going on.
9. Most people struggle to come up with anything much here (perhaps a person?), though if you drew a complete blank, it may reflect difficulties in dealing with situations where you have to think for yourself.
10. Again, there's quite a lot going on here, and no single 'typical' response. People sometimes see crabs, lobsters, spiders, snakes or insects. If you brought these parts together as one – for example, answering *an underwater scene* – this suggests excellent organisational skills. However, since test-takers know that this is the last card, psychologists are often on the look-out for conscious or unconscious attempts to send a 'take-home' message about one's current situation or mental state.

The *Rorschach test* – of which you have just taken a version – was published by the Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach in 1921. Rorschach may have taken his inspiration from *Gobolinks*, a nineteenth-century book of children's poetry based around ink-

blot people, animals and monsters (see Web Links and Further Reading to download this book for free). The theory behind the test is that, by asking patients to describe pictures rather than to talk about themselves directly, we can tap into subconscious thoughts and emotions that the patients may be unaware of, or even deliberately trying to hide (something we'll learn more about later in the section *The Interpretation of Dreams*).

Now, if you thought that the 'answers' above were a little flip-pant, you're right. Although these interpretations are based loosely on the conventional wisdom regarding this test, psychologists are divided as to whether or not the conventional wisdom is right, or whether or not the test tells us anything of value at all. So I figured I could say pretty much whatever I liked. I call the version with my interpretation scheme the *Raw Shark Test*.

This is not to say that today's clinical psychologists have abandoned the Rorschach test. Many still swear by it, and there exist detailed scoring manuals designed to overcome the apparent subjectivity regarding the interpretation of particular responses. Even the test's harshest critics concede that it can be useful for diagnosing schizophrenia (although one study found that it also diagnosed the disorder in almost one-sixth of apparently normal participants). Certainly the usefulness of the Rorschach test for the purposes I have used it here – assessing personality in (hopefully!) normal readers – is debatable, to say the least.

However, there is one pattern of responses that is particularly illuminating . . .

### Web Links and Further Reading

Download *Gobolinks, or Shadow-Pictures for Young and Old* from: <http://www.read.gov/books/young.html>

## A Dirty Joke

A patient visits a clinical psychologist who administers the Rorschach ink-blot test. 'Now tell me what you see,' says the psychologist, showing the patient the first card. 'A naked woman,' replies the patient. 'OK,' says the psychologist, 'let's try another one.' 'A couple having sex,' the patient responds instantly. 'Hmm,' says the psychologist, arching his eyebrows. 'Let's try the next one . . .'

This carries on through the whole set of ten cards, with the patient giving increasingly filthy answers. 'Mr Jones,' announces the psychologist, 'I'm afraid to have to tell you that you have an unhealthy obsession with sex.' The patient looks shocked. 'Me?! You're the one with all the dirty pictures.'

# Your Personality Profile

While the Rorschach test is of questionable value as a measure of personality, psychologists have developed a number of tests and questionnaires that are much more useful. Although there are many different ways to describe personality, perhaps the most widely accepted is the *Big Five* model, which attempts to capture personality in just five traits. Before we find out what these are, why not measure your own personality by taking the test below?

Below are phrases which describe people’s behaviour. Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes *you*. Describe yourself as you generally are now, in relation to other people you know who are the same sex as and roughly the same age as you, not as you wish to be in the future. Please read each statement carefully and then tick the corresponding box (ignoring the numbers for now). It is important to be as honest as possible; remember there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers.

In general, I . . .	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate
1. Pay attention to details.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Have little to say.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Feel comfortable with myself.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Tend to vote for liberal political candidates.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Get chores done right away.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Dislike myself.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Procrastinate and waste time.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Respect others.	1	2	3	4	5

In general, I . . .	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate
9. Feel comfortable around people.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Am very pleased with myself.	5	4	3	2	1
11. Make friends easily.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Don't like to draw attention to myself.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Believe in the importance of art.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Avoid philosophical discussions.	5	4	3	2	1
15. Accept people as they are.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Don't see things through to the end.	5	4	3	2	1
17. Have frequent mood swings.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Do just enough work to get by.	5	4	3	2	1
19. Am often down in the dumps.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Enjoy hearing new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Am the life of the party.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Would describe my experiences as somewhat dull.	5	4	3	2	1
23. Try to get back at others who have hurt me.	5	4	3	2	1
24. Tend to vote for conservative political candidates.	5	4	3	2	1
25. Carry the conversation to a higher level.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Keep in the background.	5	4	3	2	1
27. Rarely get irritated.	5	4	3	2	1
28. Don't talk a lot.	5	4	3	2	1
29. Panic easily.	1	2	3	4	5

In general, I . . .	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate
30. Am always prepared.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Find it difficult to get down to work.	5	4	3	2	1
32. Have a vivid imagination.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Suspect hidden motives in others.	5	4	3	2	1
34. Have a good word for everyone.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Am not interested in abstract ideas.	5	4	3	2	1
36. Seldom feel blue.	5	4	3	2	1
37. Have a sharp tongue.	5	4	3	2	1
38. Do not enjoy going to art museums.	5	4	3	2	1
39. Often feel blue.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Shirk my duties.	5	4	3	2	1
41. Do not like art.	5	4	3	2	1
42. Am skilled in handling social situations.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Believe that others have good intentions.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Make plans and stick to them.	1	2	3	4	5
45. Know how to captivate people.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Am not easily bothered by things.	5	4	3	2	1
47. Insult people.	5	4	3	2	1
48. Make people feel at ease.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Carry out my plans.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Put other people down.	5	4	3	2	1

ANSWERS

The five personality traits are **Openness to experience**, **Conscientiousness**, **Extraversion**, **Agreeableness** and **Neuroticism** (referred to as a group by the acronym OCEAN). Before we find out your score for each of these traits, a quick health warning is in order. Psychologists are not in the business of categorising people as ‘extroverts’ versus ‘introverts’, ‘agreeable’ versus ‘disagreeable’ and so on. Since each of these traits forms a continuum, all we can meaningfully ask is whether an individual scores higher or lower than average for his or her particular age group, occupation, geographical region etc. That said, we can get a rough-and-ready rule of thumb simply by transposing the five scoring bands of the original questionnaire on to the possible range of scores for each trait: 10–17 = Low; 18–25 = Medium Low; 26–33 = Medium; 34–41 = Medium High; 42–50 = High.

To find your score for **Openness to experience**, add together your scores for

4	13	20	25	32	14	24	35	38	41

People who score highly for openness to experience appreciate adventure, novelty and variety. They are curious and creative, and enjoy the arts. They are more also likely to engage in risky sexual and drug-taking behaviour. Celebrities who might be expected to score highly on this measure include Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain.

To find your score for **Conscientiousness**, add together your scores for

1	5	30	44	49	7	16	18	31	40

People who score highly for conscientiousness are organised and dependable. They tend not to act spontaneously, but make detailed plans and have the self-discipline to stick to them. Celebrities who might be expected to score highly on this measure include Stephen Hawking and Barack Obama (and, indeed, most scientists and politicians).

To find your score for **Extraversion**, add together your scores for

9	11	21	42	45	2	12	22	26	28

People who score highly for extraversion are the life and soul of the party. They are talkative, positive, assertive and full of energy. Celebrities who might be expected to score highly on this measure include Madonna and Oprah Winfrey (though some celebrities – think Michael Jackson and Lady Gaga – seem to adopt a flamboyant public persona to mask a more introverted personality).

To find your score for **Agreeableness**, add together your scores for

8	15	34	43	48	22	33	37	47	50

People who score highly for agreeableness are, quite simply, those people who everybody loves. They tend to be kind and co-operative rather than hostile and suspicious towards others. Women consistently score more highly on agreeableness than men. There are a great many websites discussing which celebrities are genuinely agreeable in person. Johnny Depp seems to have a good reputation, while the consensus is that Jennifer Lopez would probably score rather low for this trait.

To find your score for **Neuroticism**, add together your scores for

6	17	19	29	39	3	10	27	36	46

People who score highly for neuroticism are anxious worriers, who are likely to experience negative emotions such as depression and anger. Woody Allen has based his entire career on being a self-confessed neurotic.

But the point of this test isn't simply to discover which celebrity you most resemble. As we will see in later chapters, your scores for *openness to experience*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness* and *neuroticism* predict a great deal about you, including what music you like (Stereo Types), whether you prefer to multitask or deal with things one at a time (Focus on Your Knitting), the types of words you use in your writing (I'll keep this one a surprise), your susceptibility – perhaps – to certain visual illusions (The Necker Cube) and even the levels of testosterone and oestrogen (sex hormones) that you were exposed to while in your mother's womb (Prescient Palmistry). Not bad for a two-minute checklist.