

INTP– Typewatching Profile

A Love of Problem-solving

If any type personifies the absentminded professor, it would likely be the INTP. Their inner reflectiveness—Introversion—enables them to explore all the imaginative possibilities their intuition preference provides. Their objectivity (Thinking) demands the analysis of all that information, and their open-ended and flexible attitude (Perceiving) prompts them to be responsive to whatever new data are presented.

Such a combination of preferences keeps the INTP caught up in the paradoxical goal of always trying to make a coherent whole out of the endlessly proliferating amount of data. Whether it's an article, drawing, a plan, scheme, thought, or theory, the INTP struggles to fit all its pieces together into a complete picture that keeps expanding with the continual discovery of new pieces. As a result, all thoughts, ideas, and plans, however final they seem, are subject to last-minute changes when “new data,” from either internal or external influences, become available. This is very exciting to INTPs and very frustrating to others, especially those with a preference for Judging.

To arrive at what seems like perfection, only to have it challenged by a new insight, is at once exciting and challenging to INTPs. As a result, they are their own greatest critics and pride themselves on being the first to knock down their own theories or correct themselves with a better word or improved idea. The quest for flawlessness, cleverness, competency, conceptual perfection, and self-mastery is a driving force for INTPs. When maximized, however, these goals can become tiresome, self-punishing liabilities.

Any project, from fixing a leaky faucet to writing a business plan to taking a vacation, presents itself as a mental challenge to the INTP, who thinks through every stage of the task at hand, from beginning to end. Such thinking may well involve computers, drawing boards, resource books, and anything else that will help the INTP focus the project and create a plan open-ended enough to allow for improvements. Once such a plan has been developed, either on paper or in the INTP's mind, a considerable amount of energy must then go into critiquing and improving the “rough draft.” This process, which may go on for hours, days, even weeks, is always more exciting, challenging, and stimulating to the INTP than actually doing whatever needs to be done. Sometimes, once an INTP thinks a project through, he or she may lose interest in it, for in the mind of the INTP that project has been completed—even if that's the only place it exists. Indeed, when INTPs are conceptualizing—and they usually are—it can be difficult to interrupt their high power of concentration.

Gender issues are especially pointed for the INTP female. While all of the internal conceptualizing, however misunderstood, may be tolerated in a male, society is less likely to tolerate the same characteristics in a female. The absentminded professor is another image more conventionally male than female. This creates at least three special problems for the INTP female: First, women historically have not been looked upon as the architects of much beyond their own homes and families. The constant desire to make life conform to a theoretical model, while true to the INTP preference, flies in the face of traditional female roles. Second, conceptual originality is similarly not a traditional female trait. Some INTPs, asked the time of day, would be tempted to expound on the philosophical meaning of time; this eccentricity in a man may be looked upon as the result of over-intelligence, in a woman it may result in her being labeled “dizzy” or even “dumb.” Finally, the Thinking preference of INTPs directly counters

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most females' scripting to be subjective, soft, and caring. Even worse, when an INTP female's feeling side does surface, it often does so with intensity, an outpouring that can be frightening to both herself and others.

In relating to an INTP, male or female, expect an intellectual challenge. Words spoken and thoughts shared with an INTP will be construed as an invitation to expand, clarify, argue, and rethink. Though less immediately reactive than their ENTP relatives, they are sure to be thinking about and rehearsing a response that will cause all involved to reevaluate the issue at hand. Such discipline and rigor brings growth and new direction to a relationship. But social deftness and poise are generally secondary to an INTP's intellectual pursuits. As a result, when INTPs are absorbed in thinking and questioning, they can often appear hard to reach, at best, or even downright rude, to those of a different type.

Parenting for the INTP is seen as an opportunity to help young minds develop and grow. Very patient and accepting of differences in children, INTP parents want their children to grow up enjoying, expressing, and living through independent thought. Clearly preferring a child to develop "mind over body," INTP parents have an amazing tolerance of and support for each child's pursuit of his or her own course. If anything, they may be too nondirective of their children's development. It is an INTP model to open new possibilities for the child by *suggesting*—not demanding and rarely imposing—alternatives to whatever thought or action the child may be pursuing; if the alternative is not adopted, the typical INTP response is simply—"At least I tried." But sometimes children, even when they seem rebellious or uninterested, welcome parent's pushing and imposing new ideas. Those who do are out of luck if they have INTP parents, for "pushing" and "imposing" are two words foreign to INTPs.

It is a live-and-let-live life-style for most INTPs. Study, follow one's inspirations, master the situation, then move on to some new "problem." At times, their love of problem-solving may overshadow their other inclinations. So, for example, while not particularly mechanically inclined, they may find the challenge of repairing a broken appliance totally consuming, and be willing to expend great bursts of energy to master the situation. Having mastered it, they will instantly move on to something else. They are the quintessential Jacks (or Janes) of all trades and masters of none.

As children, INTPs can be viewed variously as socially shy or terribly argumentative, with little in between. In school they may be seen as unfocused, pursuing too many things unrelated to the curriculum. Worse yet, they are seen as raising the wrong questions at the wrong times, although this may be more a reflection of a teacher's rigidity than a student's disorganization. Still, the INTP's behavior can be seen as disruptive, particularly in females. The result, inevitably, is that INTPs must work harder than most to tolerate and survive grade school. When they are successful, they will likely thrive in college. The inquisitiveness encouraged in higher education is the INTP's dream come true. For INTPs, whatever the subject, the joy is in learning.

Family events for INTPs are generally fun because they are opportunities to explore what makes such events and people tick. While an INTP may be remiss in remembering anniversaries and belated in honoring them, such events are considered important and the forgetfulness is inadvertent. At the very least, family occasions offer material for thought about the meaning of family and its place in the sequence of life. As an INTP grows and matures, even bedtime may seem a stepping-off place for exploration, because it opens the door to dreams, which provide more opportunities for understanding and growth.

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Work that does not involve intellect and the opportunity for mastery soon becomes drudgery for INTPs. In fact, if a job doesn't afford the INTP such challenges, he or she will be better off seeking new employment. Otherwise, on-the-job listlessness will result, over the long term, in stress, accident proneness, and overall poor performance.

Senior years for INTPs ought to afford time to theorize and dream with much less accountability. During some of that time INTPs may experience more Extraversion and subjectivity (Feeling), which may be simultaneously scary and quite exciting. As that phase passes, the INTP will settle into a senior citizenship of developing new thoughts and ideas to present to younger generations.

Famous likely INTPs include Linus of *Peanuts* comics fame (who brings rationality to the contemplation of the theological implications of absolutely everything in the world and intimidates everyone with the universal questions he ceaselessly raises); C. G. Jung (whose revolutionary and complex theories of personality were comprehended by few, although his intent was simply to raise questions for all to explore); and Albert Einstein (an intellectual Goliath who devoted his entire life to exploration and questioning, and yet was known to show up at a dinner party having forgotten to wear pants).

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