

1 Introduction

Mike, GP “Recognise where your personality is and try to understand what you are like and how you get job satisfaction; in the end work in that area . . . you’ll feel like you’re under far less pressure if you do that”

This book lends insight into the kinds of scenario that a foundation doctor encounters. However, before we dive in to discuss life on the wards, let’s take some time to consider your unique approach to the role of an FY1. SJT questions require you to think about what you **should** do, i.e. how to handle a situation most appropriately. First though, consider what you most likely **would** do. Gaining insight into this discrepancy will be helpful in approaching the SJT and, more importantly, in continuing your professional development.

Considering what you most likely **would** do requires an understanding of your own characteristics and behaviour. This helps you to:

- Work with colleagues who might behave differently to you.
- Communicate effectively with team members, patients and their families.
- Evaluate your response to working under pressure.
- Work out how to best define your priorities.
- Interpret feedback in relation to your performance.
- Monitor your well-being at work.
- Perform your best in selection processes: from the SJT through to specialty training.

Personality

People behave in different ways, depending on the circumstances or the people they are with. However, it is widely accepted that some aspects of personality stay stable and, over the years, personality testing has evolved to measure these domains. You do not have to take a formal personality test, but understanding a little about personality theory can help you to understand yourself in relation to the role of an FY1. There are five widely recognised domains along which personality is measured, known as “the Big Five”. These are shown in Figure 1.1.

It is helpful to see each of the “big five” as a continuum, with most people coming out somewhere in the middle rather than being able to be labelled as one thing or another. Research has shown that domains are relevant across cultural boundaries (McCrae et al. 2005).

Openness and neuroticism can be used as examples to show how people respond differently to taking a test like the SJT. If you think you are on the high side of the neurotic scale, and the thought of the SJT stresses you out, you may find the wealth of practice material in this book invaluable in calming your nerves. If you are more of a conformist on the openness scale, you might find the checklists of good practice and procedures to your liking.

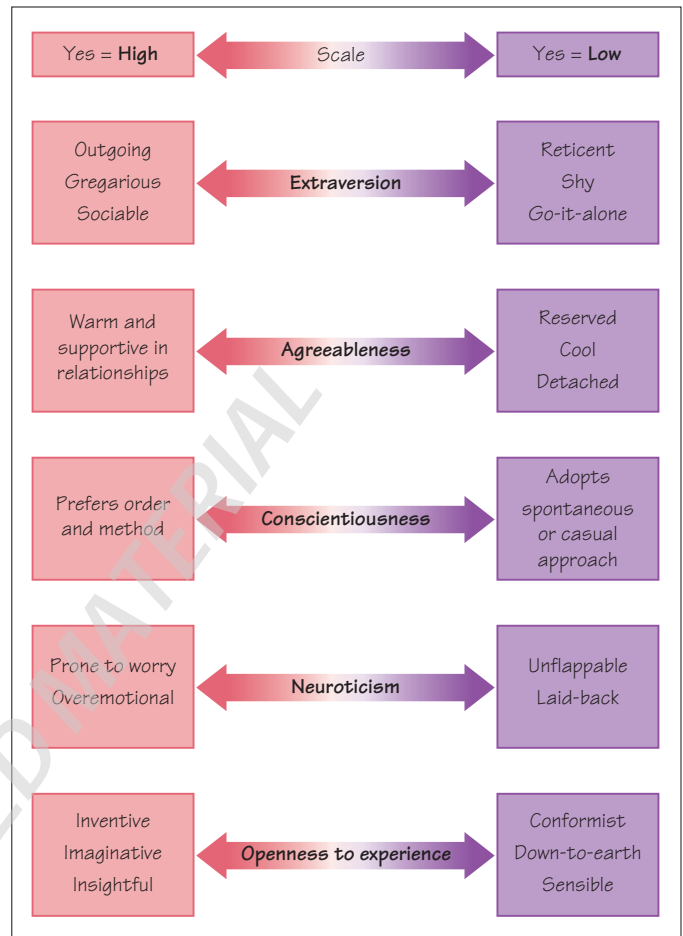


Figure 1.1 The “Big Five”

Different personality types can do the same job equally well. They just bring their own unique stamp to the way they do it. However, different personality traits can result in different individual experiences and challenges in relation to the same job. Here are some examples with respect to the domains covered by the SJT.

Professionalism

- If you are high on the extraversion scale, you might find it more difficult to rein yourself in on social networking sites and resist talking in an unguarded way.
- Conversely, if you are low on this scale, you might find it harder to challenge the actions of others and speak out when you see bad practice.
- If you are highly conscientious, you might find it easier to maintain punctuality.
- If you are highly neurotic, you might find it particularly hard to switch off from stressful days.

Pressures and prioritisation

- Being highly conscientious and only mildly neurotic will make it easier to work under pressure and remain calm and in control.
- If you are highly open to new experiences, you will have an advantage when it comes to managing rapidly changing situations.
- Conversely, when following protocols, being low on openness may stand you in good stead.
- If you are high in agreeableness you may tend to seek help from others naturally; a key factor in some of the SJT questions.

Effective communication and patient focus

- Introverts may find relating to patients' concerns a more difficult aspect of the FY1 role.
- If you are highly neurotic you must remember not to relay your anxieties to the patient; having confidence in your skills as a doctor is an important aspect of the doctor-patient relationship.
- Being highly agreeable lends itself to good communication with relatives; if you are at the other end of the scale, you may have to work harder to empathise with others.

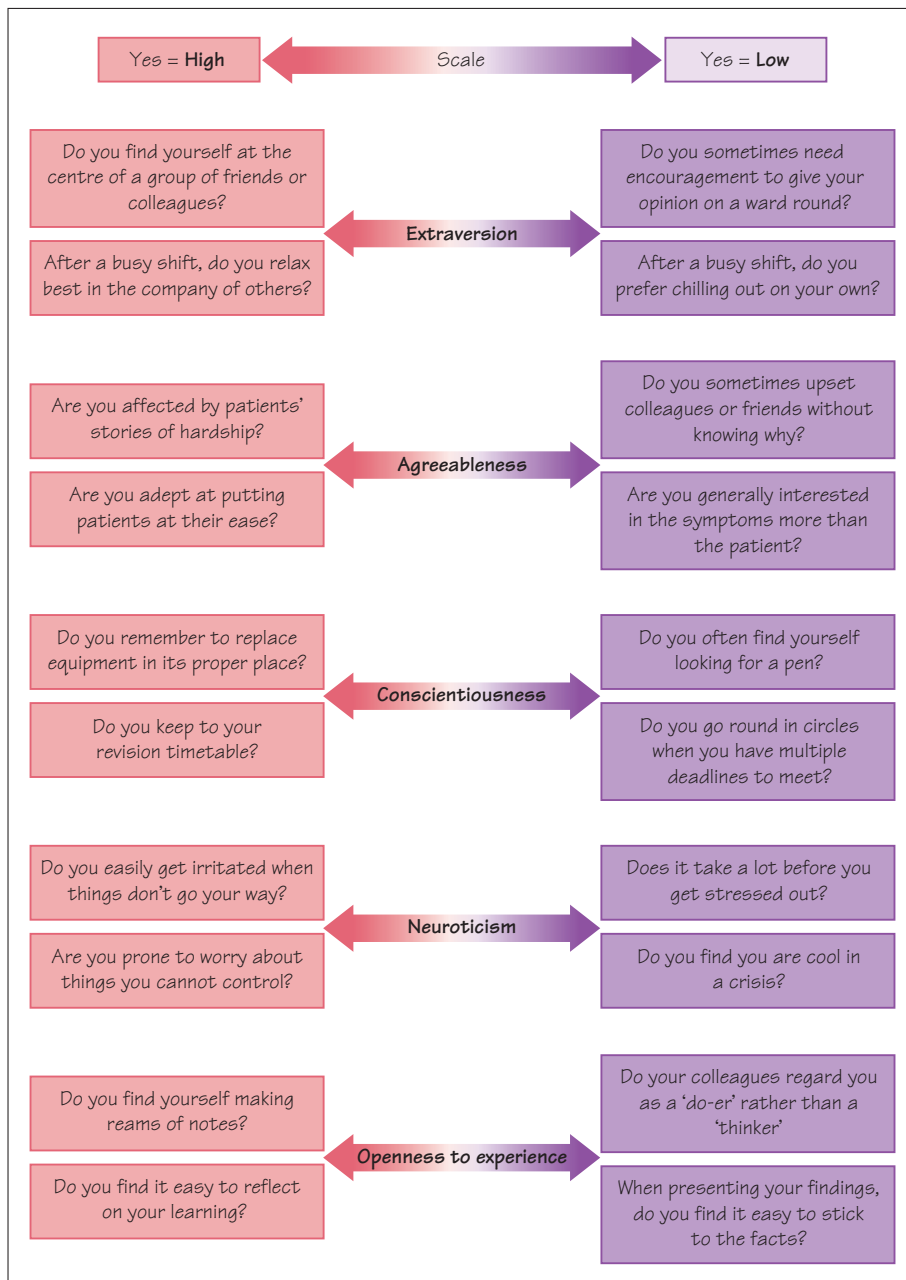


Figure 1.2 Understanding yourself

Teamwork

- If you tend to “think outside the box” when problems occur, your openness to experience may puzzle or even frustrate your more cautious colleagues.
- If you are high in agreeableness, you may find your priority is to promote harmony within your team. This may also mean that you find it more difficult to challenge colleagues who do not pull their weight.
- Being high in conscientiousness will be appreciated by your colleagues

Teamwork is so fundamental to the FY1 role; it is examined in more depth in Chapter 6.

How is this relevant?

Bear in mind the different personality traits when you test yourself during the course of this book, especially when you compare what you **would** do to what you **should** do (i.e. the right answer). When there are discrepancies, ask yourself why

they exist. Is it, for example, because you don't like asking for help? Reflect on your personality and behaviour and consider how you could improve your performance. This is an important skill which will prove fruitful to your future development as a doctor. Finally, it is important that you seek out feedback on your non-technical skills in addition to your clinical competencies throughout your clinical attachments. This is part and parcel of continuing professional growth.

The questions in Figure 1.2 will help to guide you towards one side of a particular trait or the other. Although Figure 1.2 does not constitute a formal personality test, if you answer “yes” easily to one set of prompts, it will give you an indication of which end of the scale you gravitate towards. If you wish for a more formal assessment, most commercially available personality tests include some measurement of these domains. Consequently, you may find it useful to complete an online personality questionnaire such as the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (Myers and Briggs Foundation n.d.).