

Who we are is how we write

a presentation on Type and Writing by **Julia McGuinness**,
Midlands practitioners group, Birmingham, 20/10/15

'I'm not a writer so I'm not sure this is for me,' was the cautious way at least one member of the group approached Julia McGuinness's workshop for Midlands MBTI practitioners. By the end of the morning we realised that of course we are all writers: we may not be poets or novelists but we are writing reports, emails and letters all the time.

Julia plunged us into a writing exercise straight away, the first of four based on the four functions (though she didn't reveal that until the end, of course)

1. **Intuitive** writing. This is what she described as a 'writing sprint' where we had to keep writing whatever came into our heads (or through our hands) for five minutes starting with the words 'I wonder'. While we wrote she asked us at one point to change our writing hand and later to close our eyes, both as brief interventions. Afterwards we reflected on what we noticed and made a 'note to self' on this.
2. **Sensing** writing. Five minutes describing our childhood kitchen focused us on recalling sensing details. It was interesting to experience the way details came through once you started to remember being there, and most of us could have kept writing for much longer. It didn't stop one SF from writing about a major incident with a sibling that happened in the kitchen. For me, I was soon standing on a chair, sleeves rolled up, and hands sticky with flour in the middle of cake-making.
3. **Feeling** writing. Choose a feeling and write using a repeated phrase, like My is. 'But I can't think of a feeling just like that,' said one NT. 'Well, what about someone or something that *annoys* you?' Julia offered. 'Oh, no problem!' And she was off. Sometimes you can reflect on a 'captured moment' from the previous day, and this usually taps into feeling.
4. **Thinking** writing. The task was to think of an issue you have with someone. How do you see that? What's your side of the story, the way you see it? This was followed by taking the same issue and writing as the other person. There were a few sharp intakes of breath here: some found this distancing process hard while others got into it easily. I enjoyed writing exactly what I thought of the insensitive, disrespectful, blinkered, self-righteous person I lost patience with recently – standing back and viewing myself through his eyes wasn't comfortable, but was illuminating.

Interspersed between these exercises we looked at different approaches and added our own experiences:

- ST as technical (pragmatic, facts/data, including local history and historical fiction based on research)
- NF creative (empathic, audience-related, speculative, wondering)
- NT analytical (reports, connections, intuitive)
- SF as correspondents (factual, audience-related, Facebook!)

We considered handouts on each of the function pairs as well as E – I and J – P:

- Introverted writers are Thinking it Over, while Extraverted writers Talk it Out.
- Sensing writers get Down to the Details, and for Intuitive writers it's What a Concept!
- Thinking writers value Logical Conclusions – Feeling writers are People who Need People
- Perceiving writers Push the Limits, and Judging writers Get it Done, with a balance of process and product

Julia brought the morning together with a chart balancing the four functions in their different styles and contributions to the writing task:

N is intuitive – free, spontaneous, uncensored;

S is descriptive – observing, noting down, preserving, recording;

F is about emotions and feelings – expressive, cathartic, subjective, maybe contradictory, can be celebratory;

T is reflective and analytical – detached, problem-solving, full of ideas.

We write best in a relaxed frame of mind and probably begin in our own preference, then moving into others.

We all left with fresh insights for our own work and writing, fascinated once again at the richness of this model of personality type with its wisdom and application for previously unexplored areas.

-- Charles Worth