



Cambridge Assessment  
Admissions Testing



CPSQ

Cambridge  
Personal Styles Questionnaire

CPSQ for schools

User guide

# CPSQ for schools guide

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This guide is for head teachers, teachers, mentors, coaching organisations, SENCOs and other educators interested in a holistic approach to supporting learner academic and personal potential.

## Introduction to the Cambridge Personal Styles Questionnaire

The Cambridge Personal Styles Questionnaire (CPSQ) is a personal styles assessment based on a well-researched model of personality and rigorously developed in collaboration with education. Its purpose is to survey attitudes, beliefs, emotions and behaviours that can make a difference to learner progress and participation in education.

The questionnaire is suitable for ages 15 years and above, and takes on average 30 minutes to answer. Completing it produces personalised feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. It can be completed online using a PC, tablet or mobile, with whole classes, small groups or individuals.

Use it:

- for a holistic or whole education approach to academic development
- to monitor attitudes and behaviours that promote learning progress
- as a starting point for planning programmes and lessons
- to understand learner behaviour and hidden barriers to achievement
- to match students to programmes or mentors that will work best for them
- as a way to open up development conversations
- to motivate interest in personal development and guide action planning.

## Evidence base supporting the use of 'personal styles' in education

Research studies have highlighted the role personality, or tendencies in thought, emotion and behaviour ('personal styles'), play in educational progress. In particular, whether personality traits and their associated behaviours are predictive of success in education above and beyond general mental abilities and subject knowledge (e.g. Duckworth & Seligman 2005, Nofle & Robins 2007), and how they might influence approach to learning (e.g. Credé & Cuncel 2008, Duff, Boyle, Dunleavy & Ferguson 2004). Many researchers have looked at this question in relation to the five-factor model of personality or Big Five: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotion (Costa & McCrae 1992). Conscientiousness stands out in research as one of the strongest predictors of occupational success (e.g. Barrick & Mount 1991, Robertson & Smith 2001). CPSQ sits within this model but based on research with education, it uses a series of more specific scales to measure each of the five factors.

## How it works

The questionnaire asks learners to answer a large number of questions about how they typically think, feel and behave in common situations. They rate to what extent behavioural statements reflect how they typically act from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree':

Question 10 of 41

	Strongly agree	Agree	In-between	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I finish what I start even if a task is boring	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident when meeting new people	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am patient even in annoying situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know what I would like to achieve in the future	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next

This learner has rated three statements the same using the 'Strongly agree' response option, and before they move to the next set they are asked to rank their choices.

**Question 10a** - Because you rated two or more statements the same, you must now rank them.

	1 - More like me	2	3 - Less like me
I finish what I start even if a task is boring	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident when meeting new people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I know what I would like to achieve in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next

The rate and rank method encourages honest reflection of behavioural preferences and increases feedback report accuracy. It is possible to complete the questionnaire without ranking but most learners will rate and rank at some point. It is not advisable to try to avoid ranking as this might affect the usefulness of the feedback report.

The questionnaire is untimed, but most learners will take around 20 to 40 minutes to finish it. After completing it, feedback is received as a learner competency report, which is available immediately to view online and for downloading as a pdf.



## Learner competency report

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To understand how learners' personal styles of behaving might influence their participation in education, their questionnaire responses are interpreted against five student competencies: **Thinking, Study, Coping, Communication** and **Collaboration**.

Responses to Thinking, Study and Coping behavioural themed statements produce a score on a one to five scale, to highlight the importance of these particular competencies. There is good research evidence that links higher scores to academic success (e.g. O'Connor & Paunonen 2007, Poropat 2009), critical thinking (Clifford, Boufal & Kurtz 2004) and academic resilience (Martin & Marsh 2006).

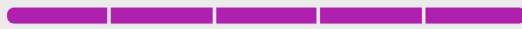
When reviewing these competency areas, the higher a score the more likely it is that current behaviours are effective and support progress. Within each competency, learners may have stronger and weaker areas, which are signposted in three possible feedback categories: Positive, Neutral and Improvement points. Examples of Thinking, Study and Coping report feedback are shown on page 5.





## Thinking

Intellectual curiosity and open thinking



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### Positive Points

- Typically question and analyse information.
- Need to find things out for yourself and like to be thorough with your research.
- Think of yourself as highly imaginative and as someone who can come up with lots of creative ideas.
- Probably explore problems from many different perspectives and are open to multiple possible solutions.

## Study

Motivation to achieve and self-management



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### Positive Points

- Describe yourself as ambitious and as someone who wants to achieve high standards.
- Have a clear idea of what you want to do and usually set yourself challenging goals to reach.

### Neutral Points

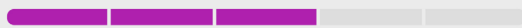
- Usually get on with your work but occasionally you might put off starting some routine or boring tasks.
- Similar to most students in your capacity to focus on your work and persevere until it is finished.

### Points to improve

- Rarely plan and prioritise your activities.
- Typically like to work in an unstructured way and at times can be disorganised.

## Coping

Resilience and adaptability to demands



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### Neutral Points

- Tend not to worry too much and cope as well as most students with new and unexpected challenges.
- Feel reasonably confident about your ability to cope with problems and recover from setbacks in a normal period of time.
- React mostly positively to change and probably take as long as most students to adapt to new learning environments.
- Remain reasonably patient and calm when tasks or situations are frustrating.

# Develop Thinking, Study and Coping competencies

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All learners can be taught to act in ways that are more effective for academic and career success. This section provides a description of each competency with a few ideas for possible interventions.



## Thinking competency

This competency includes thinking styles and behaviours that facilitate learning such as intellectual curiosity, critical evaluation of information and imagination. CPSQ questions for this competency assess intellectual curiosity, critical, creative, inventive and flexible thinking.

Possible interventions: critical thinking training, research projects, metacognitive learning such as mindset and reflective practice, mind mapping, creative activities, analytic and problem-solving tasks, problem-solving and decision-making techniques e.g. SWOT analysis, costs–benefits analysis, force-field analysis.



## Study competency

This competency focuses on motivation to achieve and ability to self-manage goals and tasks, in other words conscientiousness, a trait that underpins academic and career success. CPSQ questions for this competency tap achievement focus, goal setting, task initiation, sustained attention, goal-directed persistence, time management, planning and organisation.

Learners who score at the lower end of the scale are less likely to naturally develop productive study habits and skills, and therefore direct instruction is likely to be beneficial to these individuals.

Possible interventions: goal setting for long and short term, study skills training, project management, time management, studying for tests and revision planning, checklists and to-do lists, note-taking strategies, essay writing plans and templates, proofreading instruction.



## Coping competency

This competency covers adapting to stressful demands and resilience towards challenges, change and setbacks. It also includes emotional control (patience) for when situations are frustrating or provoking. CPSQ questions for this competency capture beliefs, feelings and reactions to stressors, difficulties, change, uncertainty, setbacks and frustrations.

A low score for this competency means that compared to peers a learner might tend to feel more anxious about taking a test or more disappointed about a setback – common negative emotions we all experience at some point – but no serious problems are meant to be implied as the questionnaire assesses typical personality traits and behaviours.

Possible interventions: resilience training, cognitive behavioural coaching (challenging negative and self-limiting beliefs), mindfulness and emotion surfing, growth mindset training, journaling to identify triggers, stress response plan, obstacle management plan, reframing (perspective change) difficulties and setbacks to find silver linings and solutions, emotional intelligence training, anger management, social support plan.

# Communication and Collaboration

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Communication and Collaboration are two competencies that establish and maintain relationships. These competency areas are not scored because all interpersonal styles have strengths and downsides and therefore, a higher score would not necessarily indicate better behaviour.

The benefits of developing one interpersonal style over another will depend on educational context and future career interests (e.g. team working or independent freelance careers). The report provides personal feedback using pairs of bullet points balanced for the advantages and disadvantages of each behaviour (examples shown here).

## Communication

Your responses suggest your potential strengths and areas for improvement...



- You often start conversations with new people and tend to be talkative.
- You tend to be uncomfortable with silence and might talk before others have had time to think.
- You typically take the lead in discussions and like to persuade others round to your point of view. You usually enjoy delivering presentations.
- You might sometimes dominate group discussions and interrupt others.
- You show a balance between functional task-focused and warm relationship communication styles.
- In times of stress, you may find it challenging to maintain a balance and communicate in an empathetic and supportive way.

## Collaboration

Your responses suggest your potential strengths and areas for improvement...



- You work well in both team and independent settings.
- You might find it difficult to keep motivated when working alone for long periods.
- You take others' ideas into account and will usually support a compromise to avoid conflict.
- You may sometimes need to challenge group decision-making to help everyone get a better result.
- You usually follow group rules and norms of behaviour.
- Be aware that your standards of behaviour may be influenced by those around you.
- You take responsibility for ensuring your share of the work is done and will admit to any mistakes.
- You may wait for others to take full responsibility for ensuring all work is delivered.
- You are willing to take a risk and try new things, as long as you have had a reasonable amount of time to think things through.
- Depending on the situation, you might overthink or spend too long thinking about risk and find it difficult to make a decision.



## Coaching Communication competency

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The best approach for working with CPSQ feedback is a coaching conversation that puts the emphasis on the learner to explore if change is desirable. The suggested questions can open up a conversation and guide action planning; select what will work best for you.

### Explore

What are you thinking about your report feedback?

What have people you know noticed about how you communicate?

When do you communicate at your best?

When do you find it challenging to communicate as well as you would like?

How well do you think your communication style and skills match your career goals?

Tell me about a time you communicated well:

- What was happening?
- What did you do?
- How did the person/others react?
- What did you think and feel at the time?
- What was the result?
- Which strengths did you use from your Communication feedback?
- What other strengths did you use?
- What did you learn about good communication from this experience?
- How could you do more of that in the future?

Tell me about a time your communication did not help:

- What was happening?
- What did you do?
- How did the person/others react?
- Why do you think they responded that way?
- What did you feel at the time?
- What was the result?
- Is there anything in your Communication feedback that you could use for things to go better?

### Action planning

How interested are you in developing your communication skills on a scale of 0 to 10?

Where would you like to start?

What is your goal?

What support will help you?

What obstacles might you have to overcome?

What is the first small step you could take?

# Coaching Collaboration competency

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The best approach for working with CPSQ feedback is a coaching conversation that puts the emphasis on the learner to explore if change is desirable. The suggested questions can open up a conversation and guide action planning; select what will work best for you.

## Explore

What are you thinking about your report feedback?

When do you work at your best with others or independently? Tell me what is behind your reply.

What do you find enjoyable when working with others?

What do you find challenging about working with others?

How well do you think your team working interest and skills match your career goals?

Tell me about a time you worked well with someone or a group:

- What was the team goal?
- How did you support the team effort?
- What did you notice that told you the team was working well together?
- How did you contribute to good team working?
- Which strengths did you use from your Collaboration feedback?
- What was the result of working together?
- What did you learn about working with others from this experience?

Tell me about a time working with someone/a group did not go as well as you would have liked:

- What was the team goal?
- What happened?
- What did you notice that told you the team was not working as well as it might do?
- How were different ideas, points of view and disagreements handled?
- What did you learn about working with others for things to go better next time?
- What would you do differently?
- Is there anything in your Collaboration feedback that you could use?

## Action planning

How interested are you in developing your collaboration skills on a scale of 0 to 10?

Where would you like to start?

What is your goal?

What support will help you?

What obstacles might you have to overcome?

What is the first small step you could take?

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