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# Educating Online Writing Instructors Using the Jungian Personality Types

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## Abstract

While the field of composition studies has recognized that online writing instructors need professional development, less is known about what to educate teachers and administrators to do or how to do so. To better understand both who online writing instructors are and what they need, this study investigated to what extent the Jungian personality types might reveal what online writing instructors need and want in training and professional development. To research these questions, we developed a mixed-methods study using a nationwide survey of online instructor and administrator preferences and professional development needs, searching for potential patterns among participants; we requested that participants take and self-report data from the Jungian Typology Test (JTT), a variant of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Our findings indicated significantly high percentages of Introverted types, iNtuitive types, and iNtuitive-Feeling types compared with the general population. Further, we found that Introversion and Extraversion may make a difference between enjoying and disliking online writing instruction (OWI), being an iNtuitive-Thinker and an iNtuitive Feeler may lead to preferring different OWI teaching strategies, and that educating OWI teachers and WPAs by harnessing their Jungian personality preferences may help with developing targeted, practical professional development.
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In 2013, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction (OWI) published a position statement with 15 principles and example effective practices. OWI Principle 7 established that both OWI writing program administrators (WPAs) and online writing teachers "should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes"[1] (p. 17), while OWI Principle 14 indicated the same need for online writing tutors and administrators. OWI Principle 12 indicated that OWI teacher satisfaction must be as "rigorously" sought as are "student and programmatic success" (p. 24). All three of these principles fall under OWI Principle 1's overarching standard of access for both

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[1] Although unstated in *A Position Statement of Principles and Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)*, as co-author of that document, Hewett reveals that tenured; tenure-line; full-time, non-tenure-line; part-time (adjuncts); teaching assistants; and concurrent enrollment instructors all were included in its intentions.

teachers and tutors (collectively called instructors herein) and their students. To achieve the best possible OWI results, professional development training is crucial. Such education allows both full- and part-time educators to develop their skills, thus advancing online writing program and writing center work by stressing appropriate theory and practice and by norming individuals into educator teams that can meet the institutional and programmatic goals. Training is especially critical in online environments because they add different modalities (i.e., asynchronous and synchronous), media (e.g., text, voice, video, and images), and course/tutoring settings (i.e., hybrid or traditional plus online or fully online) to typical instructional requirements. As the OWI Principles (CCCC, 2013) attested, the need for OWI professional development is a virtual given (Breuch, 2015; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Rice, 2015), but *what* to prepare educators to do and *how* to do so are less intuitively understood. This training dilemma likely occurs because, more often than not, only a portion of instructors at any given institution are expected to work online, despite the fact that computer-enhanced, hybrid, and fully online composition courses are common.

## 1. Jungian Personality Types and Online Writing Instruction

In light of the OWI Principles, we were discussing specific training needs for OWI teachers at a 2014 professional development session at the University of Houston, where Rebecca Hallman Martini was a teacher and Beth L. Hewett was a consulting trainer. Finding insufficient research to understand precisely what the teachers wanted and needed for ongoing OWI education, Hewett suggested that such tools as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) might prove helpful. She revealed that she had completed the instrument five times across 30 years, consistently scoring as an Introverted, iNtuitive, Feeling, Judging (INFJ) type. Hallman Martini expressed that she also had scored as an INFJ. Hewett then noted that when she used the MBTI in 2011 as a training tool for online tutor training, she had found that a majority—10 of 16—scored as INFJ. Whereas in the general population[2], the INFJ personality type is the least common (1.5%), it was the most common among the OWI tutors in that training exercise (62.5%). In light of our shared Jungian personality type and the 2011 training finding, we wondered:

(1) Is this occurrence of INFJ prevalence repeated more broadly in the OWI instructor population?
(2) How might such personality preferences influence who teaches or tutors OWI?
(3) How, if at all, might the Jungian typology inform both OWI teacher or tutor trainers and trainees regarding topics and strategies for educating OWI instructors and administrators?

To research these questions, we developed a mixed-methods study using a nationwide survey of online instructor and administrator preferences and professional development needs, searching for potential patterns among participant responses. We requested that participants take and self-report the results from the HumanMetrics (1998-2017) Jungian Typology Test (JTT), a no-cost, online inventory based on the MBTI that also provides useful interpretive materials. Specifically, this study considered whether the Jungian personality types might reveal useful information about what online writing instructors and administrators need and want in training and professional development. Our findings indicated that (1) introversion and extroversion may make a difference between enjoying and disliking OWI, (2) being an intuitive thinker and an intuitive feeler may lead to preferring different OWI teaching strategies, and (3) educating OWI instructors and administrators by harnessing their Jungian personality preferences may help with developing targeted, practical professional development regarding effective teaching and positive instructor and student experiences in online settings.

## 2. Background

The MBTI survey of Jungian personality types, a psychological, forced-choice instrument, was developed by Katherine Cook Briggs and Isabel Meyers in the mid-twentieth century. They greatly relied on Carl Jung's (1921) theory of personality types regarding preferences for basic attitudes toward life as outward or inward (Extraversion

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