The Four Temperaments

Traits, Strengths & Weaknesses

By Prosper Yole Ukiri

The four temperaments are a traditional way to describe patterns in how people behave and respond. You may recognise traits from several types.

Compare the four types

Temperament	Common traits	Strength	Potential weakness
Sanguine	Outgoing, expressive, enthusiastic	Connects easily with people	May lose focus or leave tasks unfinished
Choleric	Assertive, decisive, goal-oriented	Takes initiative and gives direction	May grow impatient or rush decisions
Melancholic	Reflective, analytical, detail-oriented	Plans carefully and spots problems early	May overthink decisions
Phlegmatic	Calm, patient, cooperative	Listens well and eases tension	May put off difficult conversations

As you compare the types, think of a recent situation where one of these tendencies helped you or made things harder.

Temperament profiles

Sanguine

Outgoing, expressive, enthusiastic

Sanguines are described as sociable and expressive. They often enjoy meeting new people and can bring energy to a group through conversation, humour, and storytelling.

Strengths

- Builds rapport quickly
- Communicates with enthusiasm
- Encourages others when morale dips

Potential weaknesses

- May lose interest in routine tasks
- May take on too much in the moment
- Can lose track of time

In everyday life

At a gathering where few people know each other, they may start a conversation that draws others in, then get so caught up talking that they lose track of time.

Choleric

Assertive, decisive, goal-oriented

Cholerics are described as direct and focused on results. They often step in when a group needs direction and look for another way forward when a plan stalls.

Strengths

- Makes timely decisions
- Turns goals into practical steps
- Persists through setbacks

Potential weaknesses

- May get impatient with delays
- Can sound harsh when giving feedback
- May dismiss objections too quickly

In everyday life

With a deadline approaching, they may divide up the work and help the team get started, but move ahead before a teammate has had a chance to raise a concern.

Temperament profiles

Melancholic

Reflective, analytical, detail-oriented

Melancholics are described as thoughtful and thorough. They often ask specific questions, look closely at the details, and take time to consider their options.

Strengths

- Asks thoughtful questions
- Plans ahead and catches details
- Takes commitments seriously

Potential weaknesses

- May overthink workable choices
- Can spend too long refining a task
- May dwell on mistakes or criticism

In everyday life

While reviewing a schedule, they may spot that two meetings the same teammate must attend are booked at the same time and suggest moving one.

Phlegmatic

Calm, patient, cooperative

Phlegmatics are described as steady and cooperative. They often help quietly, value familiar routines and close friendships, and give others time to explain themselves.

Strengths

- Stays composed when tensions rise
- Listens patiently and finds common ground
- Follows through on commitments

Potential weaknesses

- May avoid raising difficult issues
- Can find it hard to say no
- May need time to adjust to change

In everyday life

If two teammates disagree about how to divide the work, they may hear both out and suggest a compromise while keeping their own preference to themselves.

Reflect on your own traits

Can you relate to more than one type?

You might recognise the sanguine's enthusiasm in social settings and the melancholic's attention to detail at work. The profiles can help you put words to tendencies you notice in different situations.

Build on your strengths

A reflection from the author: you can build on strengths that already serve you and practise habits you admire in others. Think of a recent situation as you answer these questions.

Which strength helps me most in everyday life?

Which habit from another profile would I like to practise?

Explore more on Knowseeker

Read the full four temperaments article

Take the free temperament test