

**THE “SO SIMPLE YOU CAN’T MAKE A MISTAKE AND IF YOU DO IT’S NO BIG DEAL”  
GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER IN ALL SORTS OF SITUATIONS.**

**Developed by:** Dr. David Patrick Ryan  
Director of Education  
Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto  
University of Toronto  
Tel.: 416.480.6100 Ext. 3369  
Email: david.ryan@sunnybrook.ca  
Web: <http://www.rgp.toronto.on.ca>

Individual differences in our behaviour, thinking, emotional life and relationships moderate our reactions to life experiences. These experiences might be teaching and learning experiences, coping with illness experiences, managing life's inevitable transitions, or managerial and leadership experiences.

To better understand individual differences, there are many validated and reliable measures of personal style including the Kolb Learning Style Inventory or the Myers-Briggs Inventory. Like these devices, most validated inventories are quite lengthy and take at least a moderate amount of time to complete and score. The "So Simple" Guide that I have adapted and developed is a very simple tool. It has but two items and is useful in time-limited workshop settings. And, while without extensive psychometric validation, when combined with a contextually appropriate process of inquiry, the "So Simple" Guide helps users to think systematically about individual difference in a wide variety of settings and facilitate learning.

The "So Simple" Guide is based on two dimensions of temperament and individual differences emerging from several decades of research: 1) Style of expressing emotion and 2) Response to Novel Stimuli. The guide has two items. The first item asks participants to rate whether they “let their emotions show easily and often” or “stay cool, calm and collected no matter what the situation”. The second item asks participants to rate whether they like to “jump into new things quickly and are impatient waiting” or whether they “like to wait watch and listen to all sides before jumping into new things”. The items were written so that the poles of each rating scale are value-free (i.e. it's not better to be “emotional” versus “cool”, “jumping in” versus “waiting, seeing all sides”).

## **Where Can The Guide Be Used?**

The Guide has been used by opinion leaders to think about reaching "hard to reach docs", clinical supervisors to understand difficult interns, by teachers to understand "students from hell", by managers to facilitate managerial problem solving, and by all of the above to understand themselves.

The "So Simple" Guide has been used by health care teams to explore patient learning styles in teaching programs on osteoporosis, diabetes, disability and learning about having dementia.

The Guide has been used with individuals in performance appraisal situations, in small groups during workshops and for as many as 250 people in a conference setting.

Because it is an active process it is often helpful right after a lunch when people might otherwise feel inclined to snooze.

## **How To Administer The Guide**

The "So Short" guide is easy to use. First, each user is given the "so short" rating sheet and are asked to rate themselves on the two dimensions: handling emotion and reacting to change. Typically they are then asked to rate someone else. Usually someone they "have difficulty with" find "frustrating to teach or show anything" etc depending upon the situation. It is usually helpful to focus the rating to specific situations such as "when you are at work", "when you are teaching", "when you go to the doctor" and etc.

Most often the exercise is implemented by marking out the two scales with masking tape on a large table top, on the classroom floor, large conference hall. When participants have finished rating themselves on the rating sheet everyone gets up and "lines themselves" up along one of the marked scales, then along the second so that everyone finds themselves more or less in one of four quadrants. If there is enough room, participants can then get chairs and sit in the quadrant in which they find themselves.

If the grid is marked out on a floor, each quadrant can have a flip chart. If the grid is marked on a table, each quadrant has a page facing down at the intersection of the two ratings. When everyone is seated in their quadrant the pages of the flip chart or the face down pages are flipped over to reveal capsule summaries of each of the four "personal styles" as indicated in the figure below: "Drivers", "Enthusiasts", "Analysts", and "Harmonists".

Each of the four styles are reviewed and discussed and extra effort is given to explaining that one style is not better than another, and that a team needs people in every quadrant. The analogy of a raft is often used. "If everyone is on one side, the raft will sink"). After reviewing each style people are asked if they think they belong in another quadrant and if they do they are encouraged to move there.

Inevitably someone says "this isn't scientific" or "I'm different in different situations" and of course this is true. Amusingly, it is usually Analysts" who raise this point.

Usually users are encouraged not to take their ratings too seriously. That is why the exercise has the silly title.

If, once the ratings are completed and described, people would like to change their rating they are encouraged to do so. Interestingly though, Figure 1 most people say that the styles describe them fairly well. And, usually people seem to feel pretty comfortable with their self-description.

Once everyone is settled in their quadrant the ratings of someone you don't get along with are reviewed. This is usually done by having people think about their rating of the other person and where they would be placed on the grid. Inevitably, someone says that they couldn't think of anyone they didn't get along with. Interestingly, these people have usually described themselves as "Harmonists".

Then a show of hands is requested. First ask how many placed the person "who is frustrating to teach" (or whatever the question was) across the diagonal from them. Usually, 60 to 70% of participants do this. So that "Harmonists" are less likely to get along with "Drivers", while "Analysts" are less likely to get along with "Enthusiasts" (both vice versas obtain). This makes sense when you think about it. People across the diagonal share neither of the rated dimensions

The facilitator can then review the fact that though we generally tend to think that people we don't get along with are unpleasant people who don't do things right, the exercise lends itself to the realisation that individual difference can be the basis of disharmony.

A second small group of users will have rated someone in the adjacent square. Then discussion might focus on whether the similar or dissimilar dimension is the focus of disagreement. The smallest group are those who rate someone as being the same as them. This is usually not a focus of discussion but typically handled with a passing "tongue in cheek" comment, though the possibility of rich learning is evident in this situation it might not be comfortable in a group situation.

### **The Query Process**

Then the groups get down to business asking questions about the topic at hand. This can be done with the group as a whole or in four groups comprising those participants in each quadrant of the grid. The latter would require a report back to the group as a whole and is often very amusing and insightful.

**Suppose, for example, that the group has formed to discuss an educational initiative, then the questions might be:**

How would people in each quadrant differ in their preferred teaching style?

How would people in each quadrant differ in the way they like to learn?

What might the special needs be of learners in each quadrant?

Think about resistant learners what might people in each quadrant resist and

How might they do it?

**In discussing coping with giving or receiving a palliative diagnosis or a dementia diagnosis, participants might be asked:**

- How might individuals in each quadrant react to this diagnosis?
- How might physicians with each style prefer to give the bad news?
- How might differences in physician/patient style best be managed?

**The query process can be adapted to the learning situation. For example, a series of workshops for nursing unit managers who were preparing their staff for impending mergers and re-engineering were asked:**

- How might people in each quadrant react to news of downsizing?
- Are there special needs unique to each style?
- How would you like others to behave if you were told you were laid off?
- If you were a manager and the next day had to tell your unit it was closing what would you do the night before?
- Who would you like to have with you?
- What would be your biggest fear?

**In workshops during organizational mergers and reconstruction, questions might include:**

- What do you think about the changes and how are you coping with them?
- Would the people in each quadrant feel differently about having to bump someone?
- How are managers with each style likely to be perceived by receiving team members?
- What are each styles special needs?
- How can we refine the orientation of new staff to meet their special needs?
- If teams need people with all styles can the grid help to guide recruiting?
- Think about the organizations executive team allocate the executive to the grid?

**We have had many rich experiences using this exercise.**

**With Health Professionals**

Originally developed to help hospital staff cope with downsizing and restructuring, it was used in helping managers cope. The day before one “so short” workshop a group of managers had been told that their units would be closed. Still, they came to the workshop and we used the framework to process the experience. One manager who described herself as a “Driver” had gone home and made lists of the things she needed to do when telling her staff. Her greatest fear was being unable to manage the strong emotional part of it all. Interestingly, she rated a “Harmonizer” as a person with whom she had the most difficulty under normal circumstances but in this situation she **saw that a “Harmonizer” was what** she needed in order to help the team with their emotions through the process. Similarly, a “Harmonizer” was afraid that she would not be able to stick to the scripted message when giving the news to her staff. She realized that she needed a “Driver” to help her staff through the process, even though she had earlier seen “Drivers” as the people she could least get along with.

During the downsizing, a husband and wife team who had retained separate names were put in a tricky predicament. Human Resources had unknowingly put the wife in the position of having to “bump” her husband. She, a “Harmonizer” was unable to act because of the depth of her feelings. Her husband, on the other hand, who described himself as an “Enthusiast” was optimistic about the future and ready to move on but couldn’t get his wife to believe him. Surfacing their differences in personal style helped them to gain insight into their dilemma and move through it.

With physicians we used the exercise to gain insight on physician preferences for CME approaches. “Drivers” wanted an agenda, a plan and clear goals that they could get on with. “Enthusiasts” did most of their learning before the cme event and were frustrated by the wait and avoided lectures.

They also avoided group work because others slowed them down. Analysts wanted the facts and figures and preferred lectures, while Harmonizers much preferred group and highly interactive learning.

### **With Disease Support Groups**

In a workshop for 120 people attending a Diabetes Association support group, participants rated themselves then their primary support person, spouse, physician and diabetes nurse. The overflow crowd prevented us from using the grid format. Instead, people were simply asked to raise their hands if they fell into a quadrant and then whether the description fit and in what way did they see it. People gained insight and the discussion quickly flowed and was a source of both insight and laughter. When the “other person” was added the drama increased. One couple described themselves as “harmonists” and were quickly able to identify one reason for their frustration with their visits to the doctor. They were too concerned with pleasing him to let him think that they didn't understand a word that they were being told. One woman came to me and said that finally her husband understood why she did what she did. It had taken 45 years of marriage. Another couple a “driver” and a “harmonist” came to understand the difficulty they had coping with the diabetes when one just wanted to get on with it while the other wanted to talk and express their feelings.

In a workshop focusing on talking about having dementia, it became clear that responses to the possibility of having dementia were diverse but, in some respects at least, reactions could be predicted by the “So Simple” guide. “Harmonists” were most concerned with how the family might feel. “Enthusiasts” want to try to any promising cure and at any price, often without telling the doctor. “Drivers” are frustrated with the length of the time it took to make the diagnosis and would begin to make plans, while “Analysts” would deny the difficulties and demand the proof more strongly than others and especially in the context of driving difficulties.

### **With a conference on Diversity**

Finally, 250 people in a conference on diversity used the guide to explore the reality that within group diversity is always much greater than between group difference.

## Summary

The "So Simple" guide is hardly a replacement for other, longer, better validated approaches to understanding individual differences but it does have a useful purpose. It fits effectively into many teaching contexts and its highly interactive and reflection supporting qualities work well with adult learners. In addition though, it often prompts quite important learning. Everyone is needed on the raft is one learning. Disagreement is often due to difference and not to wilfulness is another. Resistance to learning may be that teachers are not teaching in the way that a student prefers to learn is a third. While are most likely to have difficulty with people who share fewer of our characteristics it is often these characteristics that we need when the going really gets touch are among the insights routinely surfaced by the exercised. Another is I think more profound, nothing less than the rewriting of a commandment.

The golden rule needs to be rewritten was the conclusion of one student... Rather than "doing . . . as you would have done to yourself" she argued we might better "do unto others as they would have done unto themselves". And the "So Short" guide can help you to do it.

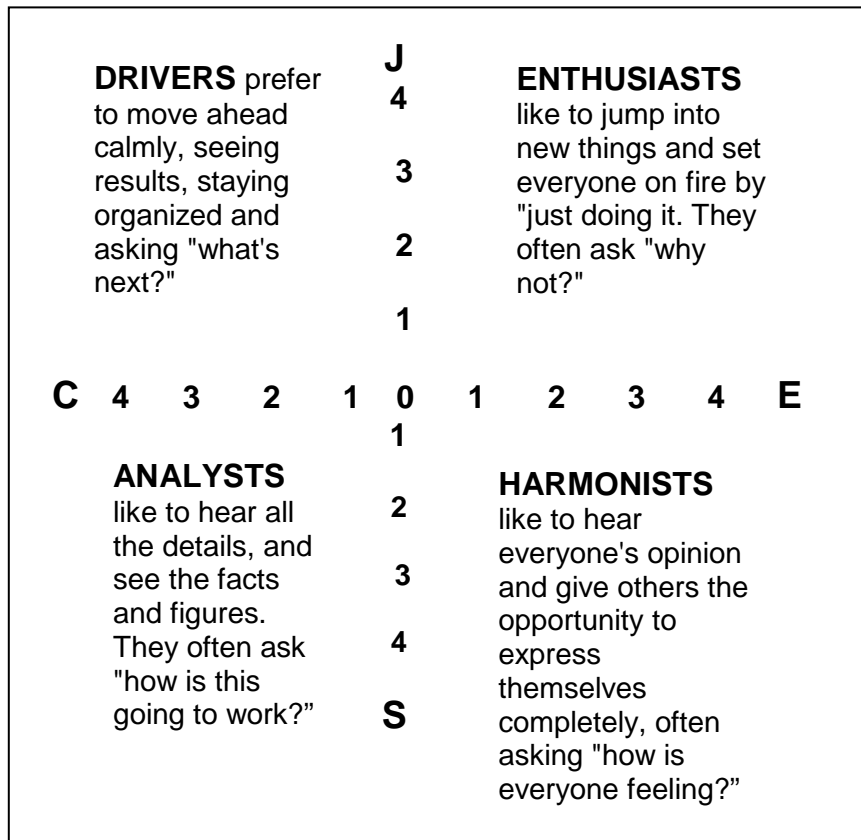
**The exercise is simple to use and simple to interpret. People can do it for themselves. Please feel free to use the exercise in your work wherever you see that it fits. And remember, it's so simple you can't make a mistake and if you do it's no big deal.**

**Figure 1. The "So simple you can't make a mistake and if you do its no big deal" Guide to one another in all sorts of situations**

Use the ratings to plot **your** place on the So Simple grid and mark it with a triangle. Then plot the other **person** you rated. The results can be insightful & amusing. Remember, we are not rating whether someone is good or bad. We need all kinds of people. We are trying to understand each other's reaction to events.

**React quickly and hate to wait**

**Stay cool  
calm and  
collected  
no matter  
what**



**Let feelings  
and  
emotions  
show a lot**

**Wait, watch, hear all sides**

**DRIVERS** prefer to move ahead calmly, seeing results, staying organized and asking "what's next?"

**ENTHUSIASTS** like to jump into new things and set everyone on fire by "just doing it. They often ask "why not?"

**ANALYSTS** like to hear all the details, and see the facts and figures. They often ask "how is this going to work?"

**HARMONISTS** like to hear everyone's opinion and give others the opportunity to express themselves completely, often asking "how is everyone feeling?"

Figure 2

**“SO SIMPLE YOU CAN’T MAKE A MISTAKE, & IF YOU DO IT’S NO BIG D EAL”**  
**A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER IN ALL SORTS OF SITUATIONS**

Think about yourself on the following two scales. Give yourself one rating on each scale by circling a number which reflects “the way you see yourself”.

Remember that in this guide there are no right or wrong ways to be, so be as open as you can and try not to sit on the fence (i.e. do not circle 0).

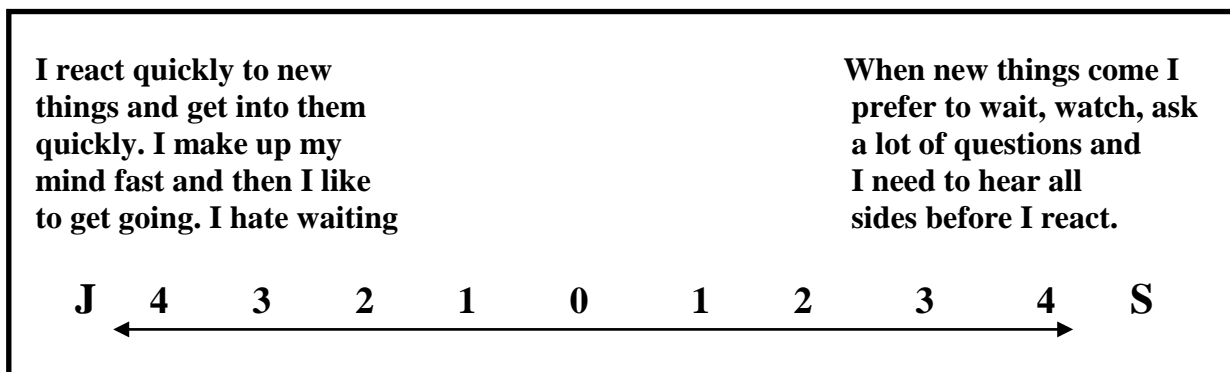
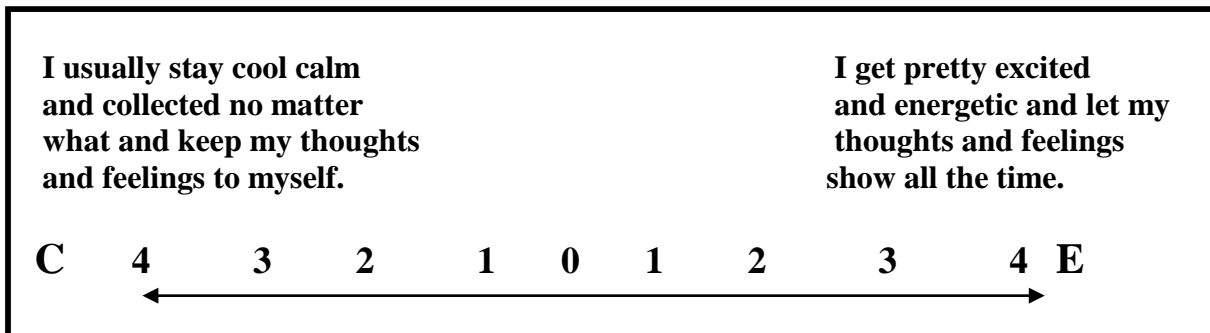




Figure 3

**“SO SIMPLE YOU CAN’T MAKE A MISTAKE, & IF YOU DO IT’S NO BIG DEAL”**  
**A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER IN ALL SORTS OF SITUATIONS**

Think about a (You can add whatever you like e.g. a colleague, a physician, a student, a teacher etc.) whom you found difficult to work with and rate that person on the following two scales. Remember that in this guide there are no right or wrong so try not to sit on the fence (i.e. do not circle 0).

