



The concepts discussed in this article are a part of the comprehensive analysis of songwriting presented in the complete book "Songcrafters' Coloring Book: The Essential Guide to Effective and Successful Songwriting", by Bill Pere. For additional information or to order a copy, visit <http://www.songcrafterscoloringbook.com>

*(More on this topic in the complete Songcrafters' Coloring Book)*

## SONGCRAFTERS' COLORING BOOK by Bill Pere

### Taking the Mystique Out of Critique

*"Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears".*

-- Marcus Aurelius

Critique sessions and song pitching sessions, in their many shapes and forms, are a mainstay of songwriter organizations and other music industry groups around the country. The opportunity to receive feedback from peers and pros, and to hear and critique the work of colleagues is invaluable.

The better we understand the dynamics of critique sessions, the more value we can contribute as critiquers and the more value we can get out of them as critiquees. Critique sessions bring people together in many roles and relationships. Whenever people must interact and communicate, understanding the four fundamental dimensions that shape our interactions is valuable. These have been discussed previously but are briefly summarized here for new readers: The four dimensions, represented by letters, are:

#### **1. How we focus our energy:**

E= Extrovert (75% of the population) ---> Outgoing; Acts first, thinks after; Seeks interaction with others;

I= Introvert (25% of the population) ---> Introspective, reflective; Thinks first; Inner voice;

#### **2. What we pay attention to or Perceive:**

S= Sensor (70% of the population) ---> Focus on detail, precision; Sensory data and facts matter most;

N=iNtuitive (30% of the population)---> Focus on 'big picture'; Concepts, ideas, and possibilities matter most;

### 3. How we make our decisions and Judgments

T = Thinking (50% of males, 40% of females) ---> Logic, Reason, Objectivity, Fairness ; Seeks what is true;

F = Feeling (50% of males, 60% of females) ---> Emotions, Subjectivity, Kindness; Seeks what is valued;

### 4. Which aspect of our life we emphasize (i.e., #2 or #3 above)

J = Judging (50% of the population) ---> Order, planning, schedules; No loose ends; Quick conclusions;

P = Perceiving (50% of the population) ---> Random, spontaneity, wing-it; Open-ended, Withholds judgment;

When all four dimensions are taken into account, there are sixteen combinations, each with very distinctive strengths and areas where they excel. There is a strong relationship between a preference profile and choice of career path. A preference means the mode that the person is in when there are no external situations or pressures at work... it is their preferred state of being. A person can (and often must) act in their non-preferred modes, but this requires expending energy and thus is not effectively sustainable for long periods.

The following table shows the standard way in which the sixteen profiles are grouped. In this table, each square has only one preference different from any adjoining square.

	All "S"	All "S"	All "N"	All "N"	
All "J"	<b>ISTJ</b> "Doing What Should Be Done"	<b>ISFJ</b> "A High Sense of Duty"	<b>INFJ</b> "An Inspiration to Others"	<b>INTJ</b> "Everything Has Room For Improvement"	All "I"
All "P"	<b>ISTP</b> "Ready to Try Anything Once"	<b>ISFP</b> "Sees Much But Shares Little"	<b>INFP</b> "Noble Service to Aid Society"	<b>INTP</b> "A Love of Problem Solving"	All "I"
All "T"	<b>ESTP</b> "The Ultimate Realists"	<b>ESFP</b> "You Only Go Around Once in Life"	<b>ENFP</b> "Giving Life an Extra Squeeze"	<b>ENTP</b> "One Exciting Challenge After Another"	All "E"
All "F"	<b>ESTJ</b> "Life's Administrators"	<b>ESFJ</b> "Hosts and Hostesses of the World"	<b>ENFJ</b> "Smooth Talking Persuaders"	<b>ENTJ</b> "Natural Leaders"	All "E"
	All "T"	All "F"	All "F"	All "T"	

(Descriptions from  
Kroeger and Thuesen)

### "S/N" Factors in Critiquing

With this in mind, let's look at some typical critique session dynamics. When a writer presents a song, what kind of feedback is (s)he looking for? This points back to perhaps the single biggest difference between people... whether they are, by preference, "S" perceivers or "N" perceivers. These different ways of seeing the world impart a fundamentally different view of what a song is,

what it's purpose is, and what kind of critique is of value. "S" perceivers, seeing the world through senses, are interested in what is real, concrete and practical. Ask them what "math" is and it will likely be described as a way of keeping track of dollars and cents and of counting things...very concrete. "N" perceivers are interested in the theoretical and abstract. Ask them what "math" is and it will likely be described as the study of patterns...very conceptual. Ask each what a "song" is and the same polarity will emerge:

For “S” folks, a song is a commodity, a product, sounds that please or displease, a form of entertainment...and if it just happens to be very artistic too, that’s a bonus. For “N” folks, a song is a relation of patterns, an artistic expression, a mathematical construct, an arrangement of sounds in time to solve a puzzle, a form of communication...and if it makes some money too, that’s a bonus.

Neither of these views are right or wrong... they just emphasize different, but equally valid perspectives. From the “N” view, the song is the endpoint; Creation for the sake of creating. From the “S” view, the song is the means to achieve a different end i.e., commercial success. This difference is the essence of a fundamental polarity in the music industry as a whole...artistic expression vs. commercialism. The two do not have to be mutually exclusive, but they often are, unless all eight preference factors are at work in creating and crafting a song. It is very difficult to write a good song without expending energy in some of these dimensions to access the opposing perspective.

Just to show how distinct this S/N difference is, look at the preference-type table below showing the concentration of people who have selected careers in the arts and sciences, and those who opt for business and commerce. The polarity is as strong as can be, with the highest concentration of business orientation as far away as possible from the arts and sciences folks. The key separator is S/N.

The diagram illustrates the relationship between MBTI types and three domains of human activity, each represented by a downward arrow:

- Business and Commerce:** Points to a 4x4 grid of MBTI types. The types are arranged in a 2x2 block: ISTJ, ISFJ, INFJ, INTJ (top row) and ISTP, ISFP, INFP, INTP (bottom row). The rightmost column (INFJ, INTJ, INFP, INTP) is shaded gray, and the bottom-right cell (INTJ) is labeled "(Highest Concentration)".
- Science (Knowledge for the sake of Knowing):** Points to a 4x4 grid of MBTI types. The types are arranged in a 2x2 block: ISTJ, ISFJ, INFJ, INTJ (top row) and ISTP, ISFP, INFP, INTP (bottom row). The rightmost column (INFJ, INTJ, INFP, INTP) is shaded gray, and the bottom-right cell (INTJ) is labeled "(Highest Concentration)".
- Fine Art (Art for the sake of Creating):** Points to a 4x4 grid of MBTI types. The types are arranged in a 2x2 block: ISTJ, ISFJ, INFJ, INTJ (top row) and ISTP, ISFP, INFP, INTP (bottom row). The rightmost column (INFJ, INTJ, INFP, INTP) is shaded gray, and the bottom-right cell (INTJ) is labeled "(Highest Concentration)".

**This highlights how the S/N difference separates people according to their preference for the business or craft of music... { based on information from *Gifts Differing* by Isabel Briggs Myers }**

This tells us that these folks are going to give very different kinds of critiques, and that they are seeking very different kinds of feedback. A business orientation drives a person to want to know “will this song make money?”. An art/science orientation will drive one to know if the song is well crafted, and why it does or doesn’t work.

Two very important things that become clear after participating in many critique sessions are: (a) being a good critiquer is not the same as being a successful writer, and (b) being a successful professional does not guarantee being able to give clear and useful feedback to other writers. For example, a strong NFP writer may be very successful because of natural intuition, but may not be able to articulate clearly exactly what (s)he does to achieve that success. Strong N’s, because they communicate in abstractions, are not easily understood, at least by the 7 out of 10 “S” folks.

The most common statements at critique sessions are “I liked it...” or “I didn’t like it...”. We commonly call these opinions, but it’s extremely useful to understand all the different things that a simple “I like it” can mean. A writer may love to hear the statement “This song is great!” from a critiquer. Depending on that critiquer’s preference, that statement may reflect:

**NT** - The lyric is extremely well crafted and has a fresh way of communicating a worthwhile message. It was clear and flowed logically. These are the reasons it worked, and here are the specific things that can be improved.

**NF** - I liked it...It moved me, It spoke to me clearly and said something new, fresh, exciting, and important. I’m not sure exactly why. An aspect of the whole I didn’t like is ...”

**ST** - It’s definitely commercial. It has the right sound for today’s mainstream market. It can make money. Here are the things that don’t fit the accepted standards...

**SF** - I liked it and probably others will too. It felt right. It can entertain. Here is one detail I didn’t like...

Since “S” perceivers outnumber “N”’s by more than 2-to-1, and since business and entertainment are natural magnets for “S” folks, it’s a good bet that a panel of music business pros and entertainers will have a lot of “S” perspective and thus, commercial emphasis. Therefore, a verdict of rejection from such a panel does not necessarily mean your song isn’t a good song from an artistic point of view. Idealistically (hence, INFP), we as writers are striving to make a song widely appealing (commercial) while also having artistic integrity (enduring). When both are not achieved, being commercial still speaks to 7 out of 10, and being artistic speaks to 3 out of 10. A paradox of the industry is that the music business is fed by the products of the introverted intuitive (IN) process, but the business environment which markets those products comes from the opposite ES process, an environment where natural IN’s do not thrive, and which they tend to avoid, as shown in the above tables.

Another factor that enters into giving and getting feedback is style or genre. Just as different career paths are magnets for certain preference profiles, certain musical styles also more likely appeal to some types than to others. Country music and the “SJ” combination is a natural match. It’s concrete, down-to-earth lyric with conventional harmonic progressions and easily accessible rhythms. The styles that are driven primarily by rhythm, e.g., disco or rap, will appeal to the high-energy ES\_P profiles. The spontaneous, improvisational nature of jazz fits the “P” preference very well and its harmonic/rhythmic complexity may be a draw for the IN\_P. Other IN artists may be found on the fringes, in the arts-oriented coffeehouses, or in rock bands with very cosmic lyrics that are high in conceptual and symbolic content. The musical elements of their songs may be harmonically complex. Many solo artists on the folk circuit, and the patrons of that circuit, will be

introverts and intuitives. Thus, embedded in the ubiquitous “I like it/I don’t like it” may be the fact that the genre of the song does or doesn’t mesh with the preference of the critiquer.

### “T/F” Factors in Critiquing

The T/F preference is very much at work in critique sessions. Critique, by definition, is analysis, and to get practical, actionable advice, analysis is needed. Feedback with no analysis is an opinion poll. But ultimately, songs are successful because of how they make people feel. Analysis enables one not necessarily to produce that success, but to reproduce it. The value of polling is that, like test marketing, it gauges the potential for success. The value of analysis is to enable maximization and reproducibility of that success.

An “F” critiquer should try to discern why a song works or doesn’t work for them. A “T” critiquer should not minimize the importance of liking a song even though it may have flaws in it’s structure and craft. This will lead to more valuable feedback for the writer seeking input.

There is another important part of the “T/F” dynamic. The most rare of all the types are the iNtuitive Introverts (IN), about 4 in 100. However, these folks, naturally drawn to fine arts, are the most natural wordsmiths and wielders of metaphor, and there is likely a high proportion of IN’s at critique sessions (certainly true at CSA critiques). To an “IN”, an idea, a conceptual creation, is like a part of the soul. A song is not “just” a commodity...it is an extension of self. It takes courage for an IN to submit a song for critique, and the delivery of that feedback is important to that person’s sense of self. When a critiquer does not know what type of person the writer is, the safe bet is to assume it’s an IN, and deliver the critique with respect for the person’s feelings. Many writers have been turned off to the critique process because of all “T” and no “F” in the process. The art of giving constructive critique is to give meaningful, objective “T” feedback in an affirming, encouraging “F” package.

### “J/P” Factors in Critiquing

A person giving critique may do so as a “J”, offering *conclusions* e.g., “I liked it”, “It was good”, “It will never sell”, etc., or as a “P”, offering *observations* without a conclusion e.g., “The chorus didn’t rise”, or “There was a lot of space before the bridge”. As an attendee at a critique session, you might be able to discern who the “J” and “P” folks are in the group by listening for this. “P” feedback, being non-judgmental, is easier on the receiver’s feelings, but gives less information about the impact of the song...it lacks a bottom line. The ultimate “J” feedback is the professional who stops the tape after the first 15 seconds and says “Next song...”

A person *receiving* critique needs to be in a “P” mode (which means if they are a natural “J”, they have to expend the energy to remain open minded to the advice they are getting). After the advice is all in, it takes a “J” mode to make decisions on how to act on that advice (Here, the natural P’s must expend the energy). Quite often, a “J” receiver, upon hearing the first negative word, will close off any more incoming feedback by concluding that the critiquer doesn’t know what (s)he is talking about. Conversely, a “P” receiver is always open and appreciative of the feedback, but then doesn’t take action to translate it into an improved and re-recorded version of the song. Neither scenario will create a hit.

### In Summary

- Just because a song is a hit, it does not mean it’s an example of good songwriting (It can be a hit because of production, promotion politics, or other reasons)
- Just because a song is **not** a hit doesn’t mean it’s not a great example of good songwriting

- For “IN” writers seeking commercial success, seek out ES critiquers (and this will require expending energy, as it is not typical for an introvert to seek out others).
- For “ES” writers wanting feedback on the technical craftsmanship of their song, seek input from “IN” listeners.
- An “FP” critique environment fosters encouragement, support and affirmation, while
- A “TJ” environment emphasizes an objective, less personal, bottom line orientation.
- Any critique input should be taken as different but equally valid views of the endeavor we call songwriting.
- The writers intent for the song determines what kind of critique provides the most valuable feedback
- You, as the receiver of the input always has the final choice of what advice to accept or reject.

*Bill Pere was named one of the “Top 50 Innovators, Groundbreakers and Guiding Lights of the Music Industry” by Music Connection Magazine. With more than 30 years in the music business, as a recording artist, award winning songwriter, performer, and educator Bill is well known for his superbly crafted lyrics, with lasting impact. Bill has released 16 CD’s , and is President of the Connecticut Songwriters Association. Bill is an Official Connecticut State Troubadour, and is the Founder and Executive Director of the LUNCH Ensemble ([www.lunchensemble.com](http://www.lunchensemble.com)). Twice named Connecticut Songwriter of the Year, Bill is a qualified MBTI practitioner, trained by the Association for Psychological Type. He is a member of CMEA and MENC, and as Director of the Connecticut Songwriting Academy, he helps develop young talent in songwriting, performing, and learning about the music business. Bill’s song analyses and critiques are among the best in the industry. Bill has a graduate degree in Molecular Biology, an ARC Science teaching certification, and he has received two awards for Outstanding contribution to Music Education.*

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*For more information on MBTI, refer to: Gifts Differing by Isabel Briggs Myers, CPP Books; Type Talk by Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, Delta/Tilden Press; and Please Understand Me, by Kiersey and Bates, Prometheus Books. Also recommended is The Songwriters Idea Book, by Sheila Davis, Writers Digest Books.*