

# Reliability of Communication Style Scores

Dr. Bethany Shifflett; Department of Kinesiology  
San José State University



## Abstract

Good communication skills can be an important factor influencing learning. One of the tools available for identifying individual communication style is Gregorc's (1978) Transaction Ability Inventory (TAI). Given conflicting reports regarding the psychometric characteristics of style assessment tools, including Gregorc's inventory, this study explored the reliability of TAI scores from collegiate faculty.

Reliability (stability) was found to be good (intraclass R coefficients ranged from .79 to .96) for scores in each of the four style categories.

## Participant Information (N=46)

Males	35%
Females	65%
Median Age	55.5yrs
Median Teaching Experience	15 yrs
Administrative Experience	48%
Dominant Style	
Concrete Sequential	20%
Abstract Random	13%
Concrete Random	09%
Abstract Sequential	04%
> One Category	35%

## Methods

Data was collected via an online survey consisting of the TAI, demographic items, and notice of informed consent. A week following receipt of responses from an individual, each was asked to complete the TAI a second time so that the reliability of the category scores could be examined.

For each participant a score for each style category was obtained by summing the values given for the 10 words in each category. The maximum possible score for a category was 40 and the minimum a score of 10. Using Gregorc's (1982) guidelines regarding strong affiliation with a category, individuals were placed in one or multiple categories when their total score in a category was 27 or higher.

To obtain a single measure that would indicate the degree to which communication style was strongly dominant in one area or multiple style categories, a differential score was computed for each individual. The differential score was the difference between the highest and lowest total scores among the four style categories.

Reliability in terms of the stability of the differential scores as well as scores from each of the four style categories was obtained using the intraclass R statistic. For comparison to other studies, estimates of internal consistency across the words for each category were also obtained.

## Results/Discussion

The reliability of the scale scores is of primary importance as this score is what style determination is based on. Establishment of good reliability in this study for the style scores suggests that measures from the TAI can be confidently used to identify communication styles among collegiate faculty.

The literature presents divergent views on the application of information pertaining to learning/communication/cognitive style preferences. At one end of the continuum are researchers who recommend that teachers match their teaching style to students' learning style preferences. At the other end there are researchers suggesting that the impact of such matching is negligible if present at all. Thus, an important consideration is how faculty might make practical use of information about their own and their students' preferred or dominant communication style.

Echoing the suggestions of others, this author recommends that insights gained regarding communication style should lead to individual reflection on how a person might best function in a given situation and subsequently grow in ways that could benefit them personally and professionally.

## The TAI

Gregorc's (1978) Transaction Ability Inventory (TAI) was selected to assess communication style. This inventory was used since it produced scores in discrete scales that were readily interpreted, was designed specifically for use in educational settings, was particularly easy to adapt to an online environment for administration, took little time to complete, and the TAI, or Gregorc's Style Delineator (1982) have been frequently used in a research setting. The TAI has four categories designed to provide a description of the ways in which individuals give and receive information - their style of communication.

**Concrete Sequential:** Individuals have a tendency to favor specifics, see situations in black and white, be cognitively based and accepting of authority, accept and give mostly corrective feedback, give careful attention to detail, and have little tolerance for distraction.

**Abstract Sequential:** individuals have a tendency to be analytical, accepting of documented authority, hypothetical, theoretical, see things in terms of models with logical parts, follow overarching, meaningful, and logical guidelines, anticipate excellent performance while giving and expecting to receive mostly corrective feedback, and have little tolerance for distraction.

**Concrete Random:** Individuals have a tendency to make intuitive leaps, see the whole picture with overlapping parts, accept varying forms of legitimate authority, be oriented toward problem solving and the application of information, anticipate mixed performance while giving and expecting to receive approval and corrective feedback, follow overarching guidelines with reasonable structure, and like a stimulus-rich environment.

**Abstract Random:** individuals have a tendency to be affectively grounded, be subjectively and personally oriented, follow broad over-arching guidelines, favor minimal structure, and enjoy a busy environment.

## Reliability of Communication Style Inventory Scores

Scale	Stability	Estimate 1 administration	Internal Consistency
Concrete Sequential	.96	.93	.78
Abstract Random	.85	.75	.73
Abstract Sequential	.79	.65	.59
Concrete Random	.95	.91	.48
Differential Score	.90	.82	NA