

## Your General Abilities: Who Are You?

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What do you excel at and what would you LIKE to excel at? What is simply a natural part of who you are, and what abilities can you develop with a certain amount of attention, effort, and guidance? Almost always, if you want to be good at something, you need to practice it:

- If you want to be a better public speaker, put yourself in situations that encourage or force you to talk in front of groups, and know that your ability and confidence will grow with time, if you're patient and persistent. Also pay attention to people who are very good at public speaking, noticing what they do to make their delivery so effective.
- If you're not very organized, experiment with ways to become more organized (a lot of people say that keeping a planner is hugely helpful not only for remembering what you have to do but pacing/prioritizing what you do).
- If you're good at big picture thinking but want to improve your ability to consider details and the implementation of big picture ideas, you'll need to learn to focus your thinking in a new way. When you have a great general idea, try to break it down into its smaller components, asking what are the different pieces of this idea? What would I need to focus on first? Is there a logical order or flow to these different parts? Is there anything problematic about this idea? What needs some tweaking? What *actions* will I need to take in order to make this idea actually happen?
- If you're good at details and implementation but tend not to come up with the main ideas for things, do what you can to get your creativity and initiative going. Think of the people you know who always seem to come up with good ideas. What makes these ideas so cool? You might even ask them if there's anything they do to think creatively—what's their creative process? Everyone's different, so what works for one person won't necessarily work for another. But it never hurts to ask! Try to think more broadly, pushing yourself outside your comfort zone—It's the only way you'll ever expand that comfort zone.

- Remember that an “ability” doesn’t have to mean some concrete thing that you can do (e.g. fix a computer that isn’t functioning); it can mean a gift for making people feel comforted in a crisis or being able to see an issue from different points of view or having a knack for learning new languages easily. If you have such a talent, think about different environments in which you might want to exercise that ability, whether it’s in a volunteer role, a hired work position, or an academic setting. It will test your interest and actually strengthen what you already do well.

If you don’t have a particular ability right now, but want to develop it, be patient. You might amaze yourself—or you could find that it will never be one of your greatest strengths, but trying it should teach you *something* valuable that you can carry into the rest of your life. It never hurts to know that you can’t excel at everything, but you can certainly *improve* your abilities one way or another.