



Am I gifted? Giftedness means many different things. What does it mean to gifted people themselves? The definition most gifted people feel comfortable with is from the Columbus Group , 1991

Giftedness is Asynchronous Development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally.

Asynchronous Development? We know that gifted people develop differently from birth. In their first years many gifted children walk earlier, talk earlier, concentrate on information earlier. Many, but not all figure out numbers or reading with hardly any help from adults. Adults usually recognise them as being “different” by how long they can concentrate on something that interests them. Gifted babies might look at faces very carefully, demand certain toys or books, or insist on doing things for themselves before other children the same age do these things. Most young gifted children are 1/3 ahead of children their age. They are also very curious. If you drove your parents mad insisting on knowing *why* all the time, (and they still remember that) you are probably gifted. (Wanting to **know** why is different from **asking** why). Asynchrony means out of step with most others.

Gifted people seem to learn using different methods. They may be *instant* or *ahaa!* learners. Small organized pieces of learning or repetition may even confuse them. Some of their learning methods can make them seem weird. Many concentrate so hard on something interesting that they can't hear or see someone trying to attract their attention. Gifted people who get lost in daydreams, music or good books, may need to be touched to bring them back to reality. They may be using unusual brain paths to learn.

Advanced Cognitive Abilities? If gifted people are given IQ tests, a measure of how much knowledge you have at a particular age, their extra knowledge for their age means they have higher IQ scores than the regular population. This is asynchronous development as well as the *cognitive abilities* part of the definition above. In Canada, a gifted child in the school system must be in the top 2% of the population, usually based on IQ averages. If an IQ score is the test used, gifted children have IQ's above 132 in B.C., the cutoff for 2% of the population. (An average IQ is 100. In the United States, schools call students gifted if they have IQ's above 120. Some gifted people have IQ's as high as 200.) This doesn't mean they are smarter or get better marks than the regular population. An IQ is just a fraction that compares knowledge between people of a similar age. A high IQ means you have a wider range of knowledge than is expected for people your age. If you start reading younger than everyone else, or read more, you may have more knowledge. Using that knowledge is something else! People with very high IQ's often do poorly on school type tests.

An IQ score alone is not considered an assessment of giftedness. IQ tests aren't always an accurate way to tell, especially if you have a non-english cultural background. A major piece of the definition is the heightened emotional intensity of gifted people which sets them apart as a group.

Heightened intensity? Psychologist, Kasimierz Dabrowski, found gifted people have stronger responses to situations than do most people. He called these **over excitabilities**. This is the part of the definition that gifted people really feel describes them. Gifted people feel things more intently. They are “happier when happy, sadder when sad, angrier when angry”. They also feel a deep need inside to connect emotionally , often needing unusually strong and deep friendships . There are no simple tests for this, which is why schools usually use IQ scores instead of over excitabilities, to try to find out who might be gifted. If you know you have some of the over excitabilities below , especially the emotional over excitability, you should read as much as you can about what it means to be gifted.

Emotional over excitability is a main difference between “regular” and gifted people. Gifted people have much stronger emotions, they may cry more often about books, movies, music , ideas or important events. They have heightened empathy and compassion for other people and feel strongly that situations which are “not fair” should be changed, by them if necessary. Other high IQ groups may not have this strong emotional response which is a key part of being gifted. It is also a reason why gifted people feel different from the rest of the world, who seem to care less about issues which are *really important* to gifted people. They can feel guiltier, more compassionate, more sensitive, or more lonely. Gifted people tend to analyze themselves a lot and may judge themselves by impossibly high standards. This can also make gifted people more susceptible to depression, especially when they feel they are the only ones who *really* care. In a regular population gifted people may appear introverted, some only feel comfortable around other gifted people.

Besides being emotionally over excitable, many gifted people are also over excitable in other areas.



Psychomotor over excitability (oe) describes gifted people who need to physically move to express themselves, or who talk faster and are impulsive. Gifted dancers and athletes have a strong oe in this area. Being a gifted artist doesn't mean you are *talented* or play or perform well. It means you have an inner *drive* to do something, to express your feelings, to move other people to understand you. (No one else may recognise or appreciate this need to express yourself or your method of doing it. People who are gifted pursue ideas for themselves and are often not appreciated.)

Sensual over excitability explains why some gifted people have stronger reactions to taste, touch, hearing, music, colour, smell. This can be a real problem. Some can only wear certain fabrics, can't stand perfume or particular tastes, lights or sounds. The sound of the words of a poem, may move them to tears. They may *have* to touch something, or need to be surrounded by a certain colour (even if that is not socially acceptable!) Some stimuli may make them ill. Others may cause them to shut down to try and avoid the stimulus or leave the room, block the sound etc.

Intellectual over excitability is the inner need some gifted people have to solve problems, search for truth, plan in detail, argue logic, think independently. Gifted people with this oe get turned on by thinking, often late into the night. Although this is the characteristic the world thinks of when asked to explain what gifted people *are*, it isn't true of *all* gifted people the way emotional oe is. The independent thinking part is often a problem too. Imagine Einstein trying to explain his difficult, un-proven theories to his high school physics teacher.

Imaginational over excitability is an ability to think and live in fantasy worlds. Gifted people with this oe can visualize amazing things, create private worlds, languages and friends. They also have a low tolerance for boredom and often flip off into their own worlds instead. Lots of gifted authors have this oe.

If I'm gifted why do I feel weird or different? Gifted people are a very small and unusual part of the population. The stronger your gifted characteristics the more unusual you are. Luckily, gifted people seem to have some type of *radar* that helps them find other gifted people. One person describes it as being a musical tuning fork or dowsing rod that starts to resonate when they walk into a room where there are other gifted people. Gifted people are very accurate about finding other gifted people, more accurate than tests.

If we use an IQ score to *sort* out *possibly* gifted people (there are other groups with high IQ's), here are your chances of finding someone like you in the population. The chances are even smaller if you stick to people your own age. At the exceptionally gifted level and above, people have little in common with the regular population. A person of 9 with an IQ of 133 (not always gifted in Canada) is three years *out of synch* with same age classmates and has more in common with 12 year olds. A 12 year old with an IQ of 169 has a mental age of about 20, and often very little in common with people the same age. (No wonder they don't necessarily have friends in a regular classroom.)

| Label | IQ range | Ratio in the Regular Population |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| In US, Canada Australia | in Canada must be above 132 IQ to be <i>gifted</i> | table from Miraca Gross <i>exceptionally and profoundly gifted students an underserved population Understanding Our Gifted 12 (2) pp3-9 Open Space Communications www.openspacecomm.com</i> |
| Mildly or Basically gifted | 115-129 (not considered gifted in B.C. schools) | 1 person in 6 (115) 1 person in 44 (129) |
| Moderately gifted | 130 – 144 (132-135 is where gifted starts in B.C.) | 1 person in 44 (IQ 130) 1 person in 1,000 (144) |
| Highly gifted | 145-159 | 1:1000 (IQ 145) 1: 10,000 (IQ 159) |
| Exceptionally gifted | 160-179 | 1: 10,000 (160) 1: 1 million (179) |
| Profoundly gifted | 180 + | Fewer than 1 in a million |

Will this change my life? Giftedness is inside you, you can't change who you are, but you can learn more about how it affects you and people around you. Talk to a gifted organization, go online to read about being gifted, look in the library for information, talk to your friends or a counsellor. Being gifted does not mean you will be successful at tests or life. It means you will always be different, and may feel your life is harder, less understood, or lonelier than it should be. Understand who you are, and what your over excitabilities are so that you can find your own place in the world and be comfortable sharing your gifts. There are others like you. Find them and share your unique intensity!

