



PHOTO NO. 1 The child prefers pushing the car with their left hand.

Is there such a thing as a “typical” left-hander?

Allow me to introduce a typical left-hander in the shape of Lena Leftley, a 16-year-old grammar school pupil.

Lena is highly sociable, has been voted class president on numerous occasions and looks after her fellow pupils as if it were the most natural thing in the world. She sometimes focuses so hard on others that she forgets herself.

Even as a ten-year-old, the first thing she did when she arrived home from school was to tell her mother about all the interpersonal problems between her classmates. It was only once she had gone through every last detail that she would remark, “Oh, by the way Mum, I got another A in my maths test.”

Lena loves the idea of spending her free time acting in a theatre group, singing in a choir, dancing and painting. She would ideally like to do all four, but she is not allowed to because it would get in the way of her schoolwork. It sometimes really annoys Lena’s mother that her daughter focuses so much on fun.

And that is not all: Lena is also extremely strong-willed, which regularly tests her mother’s temper. “Even as a four-year-old, Lena would happily repeat a request 33 times if it meant she got what she wanted,” her mother complains. “When I said ‘no,’ she simply didn’t hear me. Or perhaps she didn’t want to hear me. Where on earth does she get it from?”

Her parents nevertheless refer to Lena as their “sunshine”. Lena’s left hand possesses greater dexterity, sensitivity, strength, speed and stamina than her right. She also tends to use her left hand when gesticulating. It is fair to say that Lena’s left side is her stronger side: She is left-footed, left-eyed and left-eared, carries bags on her left shoulder, wears rings on her left hand and refers to her left side as her “beautiful side”.

How can we tell if someone is a “left-hander” or a “right-hander”?

Both groups are recognisable by not only the hand and foot they use to carry out everyday tasks, but also the eye and ear they favour. What many people do not know: Left-handers can also be identified on the basis of their characteristic traits.

Typical signs of left-handedness:

- Use of the left hand: A true left-hander carries out all everyday tasks using the left side of their body. Can you think of twenty such tasks straight away? Here is a list of indicative examples: Writing, painting, holding a

telephone, throwing, tooth brushing, eating, drinking, putting on make-up, using a computer mouse, eating with a spoon, cutting with a knife, using tools such as a hammer, a pair of pliers or a drill, playing racquet sports, weeding, watering plants, stroking animals.

- Use of the left foot or leg: Standing on one leg, hopping, jumping over obstacles, long and high-jumping, pushing along a scooter, kicking a football.
- Use of the left eye: Looking through a viewfinder, looking into a kaleidoscope, taking aim with a bow and arrow or a rifle.
- Use of the left ear: Listening, using a telephone, leaning towards the speaker during conversations.

People who carry out all important tasks left-handed are referred to as “active left-handers”. I would like to offer you the following definition:

Active left-handers write left-handed and carry out important everyday tasks using the left side of their body (i.e. their left hand, foot, eye and ear).

This definition also applies to right-handers, but the other way around.

A five-point introduction to left-handedness

Anyone who wishes to gain a good understanding of the topic of left-handedness needs to start with some basic knowledge. I am going to spare you a lot of specialist terminology and keep to the most important elements. In my opinion, there are five basic facts you need to know:

1. Handedness is pre-programmed into our brain.

Our brain consists of a left and a right half. Also referred to as a hemisphere, each half of the brain is about as large as a clenched fist. Perhaps you know this already, but there is one issue that is particularly important within the context of left-handedness: One half of our brain – either the left or the right – is “dominant”. It is not any larger, more beautiful or rounder than the other half, but simply more active.

2. The human body has a contralateral control system.

This means that the right hemisphere controls the left hand, foot, eye and ear. It is in fact responsible for the entire left side of the body, including the skin. The same also applies the other way around: The left hemisphere controls the right hand, foot, eye, ear and all the rest of the right side of the body.

3. A person with a dominant right hemisphere is therefore left-sided.

To put it in simple terms: Lena Leftley is left-handed. Remember that this applies to her entire left side, not just to her left hand, foot, eye and ear. One of the things Lena has in common with many other left-handers is that she refers to her left side as her “beautiful” or “best” side. She means the entire left side of her body, which is controlled by her dominant right hemisphere. Left-handers also prefer to have people they love on their left. They therefore feel more at ease sitting to the right of their partner.

4. Our dominant hemisphere is determined before we are born.

This fact is so fundamental that I am simply going to repeat it: Our dominant hemisphere – and with it our handedness – is determined before we are born. A person with a dominant right hemisphere is born left-handed; a person with a dominant left hemisphere is born right-handed.

5. Left-handers exhibit strengths attributable to the right hemisphere.

I was once introduced as an expert on left-handedness at a family celebration. Almost immediately, a 35-year-old man came up to me and introduced himself as a left-hander.

He was only half joking when he asked me the following question: “So, what exactly can a specialist in left-handedness do for me?”

“Perhaps I could guess your strengths?” I replied.

He liked the idea, as did the other guests. My guesses took the form of a series of questions:

“Are you sociable?” His wife responded straight away: “Yes, he’s always the one who sorts out arguments at the football club.”

“Do you possess any musical or theatrical talent?” This time it was the man’s neighbour who spoke: “Just wait until this evening!”

“Would you describe yourself as imaginative or creative?” “Yes,” responded the 35-year-old himself, “at work I’m known as the ‘ideas man’.”

“Are you strong-willed?” Who else should chime in but his mother? “Even as a child he was stubborn as a mule!”

“Do you have a good sense of colour?” His wife joined in once again: “He certainly does! He picks out matching colours as quick as a flash when we are out shopping for clothes.”

“Is it important to you that justice is done?” “Yes, as a child I always wanted to be a judge,” confirmed the left-hander.

“Have you got an eye for the big picture?” A slightly baffled colleague answered:

“Definitely, I have no idea how he manages to keep such close track of everything.” It was the left-hander himself who rounded things off by exclaiming “Bull’s eye!” The other guests nodded in agreement. We all realised we were sitting with a true left-hander.

Knowledge in a nutshell

- People with a dominant right hemisphere are left-sided. We call them “left-handers”.
- People with a dominant left hemisphere are right-sided. We call them “right-handers”.
- Our handedness is decided before we are born!
- Left-handers who write with their left hand and carry out important everyday tasks using the left side of their body (i.e. their left hand, foot, eye and ear) are referred to as “active left-handers”.
- Left-handers often exhibit the following strengths: Social skills, imagination, creativity, theatrical talent, willpower, musicality, sense of colour and an eye for the big picture.
- Right-handers are stronger in the following areas: Numbers, time, order, logic, reporting, recounting and analytical thinking.