

The Left-Handers Club Initial Survey Results

Left-Handedness and career choices

We started this survey on Left-Handers Day 2002 to find out whether there is a link between being left-handed and the choices people make in work and other activities. We wanted to answer questions like:

- Are there some jobs where left-handers have advantages or disadvantages?
- Are there some jobs where there are more or less left-handers than average?
- Do people think there is a direct link between these two?

You can see and complete the survey yourself at
www.left-handersday.com/new_survey.html

In the two months after Left-Handers Day on 13 August 2002 we received just over 1,500 completed surveys and these preliminary results are based on an analysis of those surveys. We will be publicising these results in the media and encouraging more people to complete the survey as the bigger sample we have, the more valid the results. We plan to have a complete analysis of the survey and any follow up activities it generates available by end of June 2003 and use it as a main theme for Left-Handers Day 13 August 2003.

Our thanks to all of you who have completed the survey so far.

If you would like to make any contribution to the analysis or follow-up work from the survey, please see the section at the end of this page.

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Statistical validity?

We have tried hard to produce a survey that gives useful information, to check the data carefully and analyse it in a professional way. By its nature, the survey cannot be fully "scientific", because we cannot control the sample of people who complete it and the information given is based on personal opinions. We have, however, collected the considered views of a lot of people and we think they give valid information and lead to conclusions that could guide more targeted and scientific work in future.

Who took part in the survey?

As we expected, the vast majority of people who completed the survey are left-handed themselves.

The stated handedness the survey respondents was:	Left-handed	91%
	Right-handed	3%
	Ambidextrous	6%

40% of our survey respondents were male and 60% female (which is in line with previous surveys we have conducted on other left-handed subjects). It is generally thought that there are slightly more male left-handers than female in total so does this just reflect the fact that males are less likely to fill in surveys?

Are there advantages to being left-handed in some groups?

We asked whether people thought there were advantages or disadvantages to being left-handed in their group or whether it was the same for left and right-handers.

Same for left and right-handers	53%
Left-handers have advantages	16%
Left-handers have disadvantages	31%

Nearly a third thought that left-handers were at some disadvantage in their groups.

Bearing in mind that 91% of the people were left-handed themselves, right-handers may just put this down to general minority group moaning! However, left-handers are generally a very adaptable lot and used to putting up with inconveniences, usually without moaning. Also, we asked WHY they were at a disadvantage and got some very interesting comments (see below). The disadvantages relate mainly to practical issues like equipment and workplace layouts that are difficult for left-handers to use.

If we asked a group of right-handers the same question, what would they say? Our guess is that nearly 100% would say that there was no difference. However, of the small number of right-handers who have actually completed our survey, 30% thought there were disadvantages for left-handers. From looking more closely at their surveys, this is explained by the fact that they have left-handers in their family and can see the problems for themselves. Also, to come to our left-handed website and complete the left-handed survey, they clearly have a higher than average interest in left-handedness! It is also interesting that 16% of all the people thought they actually had an ADVANTAGE from being left-handed. Closer analysis (see below) shows that these advantages are generally thought to arise from the creative / artistic / intelligent / right side of the brain which is dominant in left-handers. They are also related to a fairly narrow range of jobs and professions.

Are there more or less left-handers than average in some groups?

We asked people whether they thought there were more or less than the average 10% of left-handers in their groups. Where possible, we asked them to give us the total numbers of people in the group and the number of left-handers and provided a form for people to complete to verify the information.

As most people completing the survey were left-handed themselves, and we DO tend to notice other left-handers around us, our feeling is that people's assessment of the numbers should be fairly reliable. Following on from the initial conclusions of this survey, we hope to encourage a closer and more formal look at the numbers in some of the exceptional groups.

Average number of left-handers in the group	26%
More than average	34%
Less than average	39%

If left-handedness DOES NOT affect career and other group choices, we would expect to have most people saying that there were an average number of left-handers in their group. As only 26% said that, the implication is that there IS some link between handedness and life choices.

If that is the case, and as most of the people in the survey are left-handed themselves, we would expect them to have chosen groups where left-handedness is an advantage and therefore mainly say that there were MORE left-handers than average in their own group.

Indeed, 34% DID say that, but surprisingly 39% said they were in groups with LESS than the average number of left-handers.

Maybe this is not as simple as we thought!

To get to the bottom of this, we have to look more closely at the data to see if there is a match between groups where people think there are advantages or disadvantages to being left-handed and whether those same groups have more or less than average numbers of left-handers.

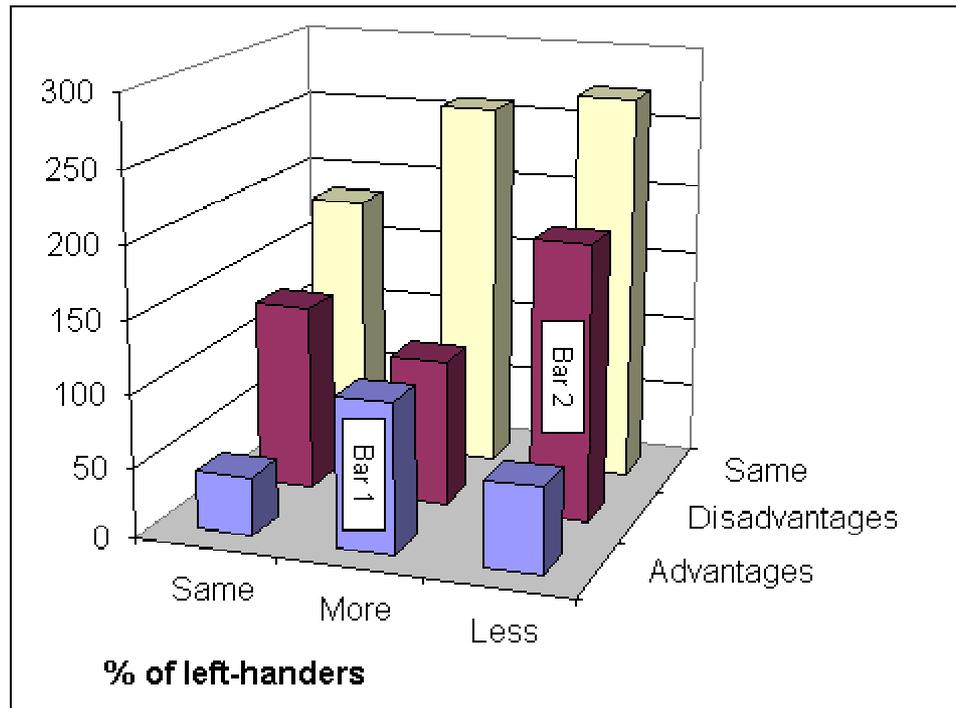
Do left-handers choose groups where they have an advantage?

We analysed the data to cross-match people's views on whether there were advantages with whether there were more left-handers in their group.

The chart below shows the data, with the height of the bars representing the number of people for each cross-match.

The blue bar labelled "Bar 1" shows that a large proportion of people who thought there were ADVANTAGES for left-handers in their group also thought there were MORE left-handers than average in their group.

Conversely, the red bar labelled "Bar 2" shows that a large proportion of people who thought there were DISADVANTAGES for left-handers in their group also thought there were LESS left-handers than average in their group.



This seems to support the idea that there is some direct link between handedness and job choice

How does this apply to specific groups?

We summarised all of the hundreds of individual job and other group titles you gave us into some broad areas to get an overview of the answers you gave us. The table below shows those broad groups and whether they were picked out as having advantages / disadvantages and more / less left-handers.

Where there is a correlation such as advantages for left-hander AND there actually being more left-handers than average, the "match" column show "yes".

Group	Adv	Dis	More	Less	Match
Administration		X		X	Yes
Business				X	
Finance					
Management					
Professional					
Government					
Services (forces, police etc.)					
Sales				X	
Information Technology	X		X		Yes
Technical services			X		
Media			X		
Arts	X		X		Yes
Music	X		X		Yes
Sport	X		X		Yes
Trades					
Manual		X		X	Yes
Health		X			
Education		X			
Mother / housewife		X			
Students		X		X	Yes

We can draw some interesting (and some worrying!) conclusions from this summary:

- There seem to be some clear matches between perceived advantages and career choice in some fields. These are generally those we would expect, where right-brain dominance gives an advantage and people have a free choice of the career, for example in arts, music, sport and, not quite so obviously, information technology.
- In some areas that are generally accepted to have more left-handers, such as the media, our survey confirms the expectation in terms of numbers, but the people do not see themselves as having any particular advantage in that area.
- In administrative and manual jobs, people see disadvantages and there are indeed less left-handers as well. Are they deliberately avoiding awkward work setups, tools, machinery etc.?
- There are some worrying groups, such as health, education and housewives, where people see clear disadvantages and difficulties but have to put up with them to continue with their chosen vocation.
- The biggest worry is the match in the students group between perceived disadvantages and actual lower numbers. 45% of our student respondents thought there were disadvantages for left-handers and 50% thought there were less left-handed students than the population average. Are students actually giving up their studies because of the difficulties they face as left-handers?

We can get some more insight into these conclusions by looking at the detailed comments that people made about WHY they thought there were advantages or disadvantages in their groups

Detailed comments on advantages and disadvantages?

Group	Advantages	Disadvantages
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can write and use computer mouse (on right) at the same time • QWERTY keyboard was originally designed to slow down right-handed typists - faster for left-handers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most everyday things are geared to a right-handed world • Mouse, keyboard, telephone equipment, cheque book, layout of computer accounts packages • Custom-fitted office is for a right-hander - 8 hours a day of suffering! • Equipment, desk sharing, PC sharing awkward • In a bank, teller stations are completely right-handed • Shorthand difficult • Post office counters set up for right-handers • Cash books, ledgers favour RH
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different outlook on life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paperwork favours righties • Press button security locks
Sales		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash registers are designed for RH use • Card swipe positions
Information Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better at design, structures, analysis • Visualisation in 3 dimensions • More flexible as have had to adapt • Approaching problems from different perspective • Determined, methodical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer equipment • Using screwdriver in network cabinets
Technical services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converting 2D images on blueprints to 3D images in the mind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lab equipment all RH • RH tools, callipers, micrometers
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual thinking • Ability with words, expressing self • Generating ideas • Composition of stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk designs • Cameras are for right eye
Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More creative • More artistic, learn faster • More open and free thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smudging work • Equipment, e.g. tripods
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotion • Nonconformity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of equipment and range available • Tuition books written for RH
Sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different angles • RH not used to playing a lefty • Better spatial thinking ability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining equipment • Coaching by right-handers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can react faster 	
Manual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bricklaying - can work from opposite direction to RH • Can screw and hammer in awkward corners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most tools are for RH • Start/stop buttons on machinery and power tools • Factory equipment made for RH
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract problem solving ability • More intuitive • Lots of left-handed neuropsychologists • More adaptive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinic and examination rooms set up for RH, e.g. light positions • Operating theatre set up is RH • Documentation difficult to write in • Phone handsets on left, have to be transferred to right hand to take notes • Writing in registers and counterfoil books
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing on board, not standing in front of what has been written already • Creativity and imagination • Comprehend problems better and faster • Lateral thinking, creative ways of teaching • Can teach left-handed children better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems with scissors, rulers • Guillotine • Projectors, screens • Filing back-to-front • Teaching RH children letter formations difficult • White boards difficult • Writing with chalk on a blackboard is hard as you have to push the chalk across and it does not write smoothly • Need to move equipment when changing classrooms • Copying machines designed for RH
Mother / housewife		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything made with RH in mind • Tin openers, washing powder boxes, scissors, kettle, dog poop-scoop, knives, electrical appliances, irons, • You have to re-program your brain to work with all the RH items
Students		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things don't work properly • Desks built for RH • Writing more difficult, smudging • Design workshop tools • Some teachers think left-handers are lazy • Bunsen burner

General comments and fun

A lot of people added a general comment to their survey and we thought you would find them interesting / fun...

- Until I went to your left-handed shop and read your newsletters, I did not realise how disadvantaged I was. I have just grown up with it and learnt to accommodate. I even felt guilty when I was told I was clumsy e.g Putting the arms on record players!
- This is awesome! I've often noticed that my organisation has a large percentage of left-handers and I always wondered if there was a correlation.
- All the left handed people I know do seem to have a more creative streak in them than the right handers
- We will arise and crush those of the right handed persuasion. Our time is soon.
- I think it's cool to be different. I like to tell people I'm left handed.
- When I left school I toyed with being a dental nurse, but had to flag it away as every thing was set up for right handers.
- Pens on strings to sign credit cards etc. Only on Right hand side. Short strings. Grrrr!
- I hate living in a right-handers world!
- Usually in my math classes, if we have lefties they are very bright, that including myself :)
- Journalism has, in my experience, a hugely disproportionate number of left-handers than the percentage of the population as a whole.
- Lefties rock!
- I LOVE being left-handed, yet those darn school desks make my life hell...
- On August 13th, we rise up

Conclusions so far

- There is clearly a lot of interest in this survey and we will carry on collecting data and analysing results.
- There DOES seem to be a link between left-handedness and the career choices people make.
- Nearly a third of left-handers think they are at a disadvantages in their work and have comments to make about it!
- 16% of left-handers thought they actually had an advantage in their work, although this only seems to be in a limited range of jobs such as the media and arts.
- Some areas of work are more affected than others and further work is needed to study certain jobs more closely.
- Left-handers DO seem to be adaptable and to put up with inconveniences and disadvantages in the workplace, but should they really have to?

What happens next?

We want a lot more people to complete the survey so we can extend our analysis and target areas for further work. We will be doing media releases on the survey analysis so far so you may see features on it in your local media. We hope that you and they will encourage more people to do the survey and tell others about it.

We will be trying to raise interest from government and education sources to investigate some of our findings more scientifically.

We will also be trying to find teaching establishments and students who would like to pick up on the work we are doing and develop sections of it more thoroughly.

We will be publishing the full results of the survey in August 2003 and promoting it heavily to raise awareness and interest for Left-handers Day, August 13th 2003.

- If you are able to help us with any of this, please contact keith@left-handersday.com
- If you have completed the survey, thank you very much and would you send details of it to all the people in your address book!
- If you have not yet completed the survey, please go to www.left-handersday.com/new_survey.html

Thanks again to everyone who has helped us with this so far

Don't forget

Anything left-handed have sponsored the survey so far and will continue to support it through to completion in 2003. They have the world's greatest range of left-handed products to make life a bit easier and remove some of the disadvantages people have picked up in our survey.

You can see their site at www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk

and you can see all their latest new products at

https://shop.anythingleft-handed.co.uk/acatalog/new_products.html

They also produce regular newsletters which will include the results of our survey and details of our ongoing work related to it.

[Register for FREE membership of the Left-Handers Club](#)