

Understanding The Aspect Compass

(rev. 03/25/25)



The cardinal directions of **The Domain Compass** represent four basic areas of functioning within the brain and mind.

The East represents *Emotions*. On a physiological level that represents those parts of the brain (mostly found in the base of the brain) that only understand emotions. Without a lot of words, those parts of the brain don't have much language. Instead, they process information in terms of emotions and then communicate feelings and moods to the rest of the brain.

The South represents *Cognitions*. Those parts of the brain are found behind the forehead and possess lots of words. Those parts of the brain process information in terms of analysis and other forms of thought.

The West represents *Behaviors*. These parts of the brain are also mostly found in the base of the brain. Some behaviors are internal. These are physiological changes to things like breathing, heart-rate, muscle-tension, blinking, and all sorts of other autonomic reactions. Other behaviors are external. These are the actions that other people can observe.

The North represents *Executive Skills*. These functions are mostly found in the pre-frontal cortex of the brain, essentially behind the forehead but deeper in than the frontal cortex which is so involved in cognitions. This part of the brain monitors the functioning of the rest of the brain, integrates all the activity so that people experience themselves as one single person, coordinates the operations of the rest of the brain, and regulates the other functions so that emotions, cognitions, and behaviors don't become so extreme that they are self-sabotaging and counter-productive.



The Aspect Compass illustrates a metaphor for how the different parts of the brain can be conceived of as forming four aspects of the mind.

The *Artist* is the first Aspect of the mind to develop. We are all born Artists, with lots of emotions, but not a lot of behaviors or thoughts or self-regulation abilities. The Artist doesn't have logic. It makes decisions based on what feels best.

The *Scout* Aspect starts up as soon as the baby starts interacting with the world but really develops a lot once the baby starts crawling and walking. This part of the toddler's brain has four functions. (1) Explore the world. (2) Look for resources to meet the Artist's and the Warrior's needs. (3) Try to make sense of how the world works. (4) Report back to the Chief. The Scout develops lots of words and communicates to the rest of the brain through thoughts.

The *Warrior* Aspect is all about doing. Every internal and external behavior takes energy. The Warrior is the mission-focused part of the mind that engages in actions. Some actions are external behaviors and some actions are physiological reactions to the Artist's emotional

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communications or responses to the Scout's cognitive communications. The Warrior doesn't have a lot of words but communicates through external and internal (physiological) behaviors.

The *Chief* Aspect is tasked with integrating, coordinating, and regulating the other Aspects of the mind. Even though the brain consists of lots of different specialized parts, the Chief is responsible for integrating a person's mind so that they experience themselves as one person, with a single mind. In addition to integrating the workings of the Artist, the Scout, and the Warrior, The Chief also coordinates their different ways of processing the world. Finally, the Chief monitors the other aspects and regulates extreme functioning.

The Artist tends to feel regulated when expressing its feelings. The Artist wants to be seen and wants to be heard. So, when engaging in any artistic activity, The Artist tends to feel relatively centered. At other times, The Chief regulates The Artist through soothing self-talk or even soothing visualizations. The Chief also regulates The Artist through developing the Executive Skills of Reaction Inhibition and Stress Tolerance.

When The Artist becomes uncentered, it starts screaming its feelings and moods to the rest of the brain. That flood of chemicals tends to shut down the Scout and drown out the Chief. Instead, The Warrior thoughtlessly and automatically reacts to The Artist. The Emergency Reaction System includes three classic options: Fight, Flight, or Freeze.

The Scout tends to operate in a highly regulated fashion when a person is engaged in some sort of exploration. This could be physically moving through the world or just intellectually exploring. The Scout is always trying to make sense of the world. However, The Scout doesn't really have logic. The Scout doesn't really understand cause and effect. Instead, The Scout tends to use association and correlation. When this one thing happens, this other thing tends to also happen or happens next.

The Chief regulates the Scout's thinking through executive skills, like planning, prioritizing, organizing, sustained attention, time management, task initiation, working memory, and flexibility. These executive functions set boundaries on The Scout's thinking. Tasks that require exercising executive skills tend to make The Scout operate in a centered fashion. So, organizing a room, making a schedule, making a plan, prioritizing between different choices, all regulate The Scout. The Chief also uses Beliefs to regulate, to set boundaries on, The Scout's thinking.

The Warrior is action-oriented. It understands cause-and-effect and feels centered when the body is in controlled motion and when its actions are logical to achieve its mission. The Warrior, especially with internal behaviors, is very reactive to The Artist. The Chief regulates The Warrior by exercising conscious control of the autonomic nervous system. For example, by consciously slowing down and deepening breathing, by consciously relaxing tensed muscles, or by exercising the body with controlled repetitive motions. The Chief also uses executive skills like Goal-Directed Persistence to support The Warrior's sense of mission. The Chief's Values also form important boundaries on The Warrior's behaviors.

In order to regulate the other aspects, The Chief must first develop Self-Monitoring abilities. That then leads to the development of the executive skill of Self-Awareness which lets The Chief know when Self-Regulation is needed.