

IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS

Explore Your Strengths from Good Experiences in Your Life

Recognizing your strengths is the first step to discovering a career fit that maximizes your opportunities for success and satisfaction. Significant strengths are motivated skills that are used repeatedly in experiences you have done well and enjoyed doing. The more you know about your strengths, the more you will understand how to adapt to the changing demands of the workforce. By using your strengths you will be able to improve interpersonal relationships, build your career, increase your job satisfaction, and reduce stress on the job.

Four Basic Steps to Exploring Your Strengths...

1. Accept yourself as having a unique kind of excellence that is always growing within you.
2. Recognize that the elements of your excellence have been demonstrated from time to time throughout your life. These elements have most likely been demonstrated in experiences you identify as achievements: **Good Experiences** in which you did things well, you enjoyed doing them, and you are proud of what you did.
3. Believe that by carefully identifying and studying your Good Experiences, you will find the pattern of skills and talents you have repeatedly used to make those experiences happen.
4. Focus on using this pattern of skills and talents or strengths. They are the reliable elements of your special excellence. This pattern of strengths provides clues to the kinds of career activities that are likely to be part of your future achievements regardless of your job titles or job descriptions.

Four Ways to Identify Good Experiences (something specific you...did well, enjoyed, are proud of):

1. What is the "good experience" that first comes to your mind? Describe it briefly in the following space and list your age at the time it took place.

2. What activities give you the most enjoyment when you are not at work? These could include hobbies, volunteer work, ventures, projects with the family, or anything else. Give two or more examples.

3. In your latest assignment, project, activity, or work, which parts of it did you do best and enjoy most? Give two or more examples.

4. In your formal schooling, which two or three subjects did/will you continue to study and enjoy most?

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List 10-15 or more of your good experiences, devoting a few words to each. It doesn't matter when they occurred, but rather what you did to make the good experiences happen and whether there were outcomes that you felt good about. These experiences can come from any part of your life: school, sports, employment, personal relationships, etc. Cover all parts of your life from childhood to the present. Remember the definition of a *Good Experience*: 1) Something you did well; 2) Enjoyed doing and; 3) Are proud of.

3 EXAMPLE: *Inventing a Study Abroad Experience*

1 EXAMPLE: *Business Management Group Project*

5 EXAMPLE: *Annual Backpacking Trip*

2 EXAMPLE: *Helped Plan Friend's Wedding*

4 EXAMPLE: *SAE Formula Competition*

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- _____
- _____

Which Good Experiences stand out as the best?

Prioritize your top ten experiences above, and place the ranking (1 for the top) in the boxes to the left.

List Your Prioritized Top 10 Good Experiences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

For 4 - 5 of your top 10 experiences write one or two paragraphs describing the situation, the tasks you completed, the actions you took and the outcomes you felt good about. See STAR method on page 29 to help you construct your "story."

Example of Good Experience

Inventing a Study Abroad Experience

The problem I had to solve was that I couldn't afford any of the study abroad programs offered by my school, but I felt strongly that experiencing another culture was necessary to the education I wanted—so I decided to go find one I could afford. First, I went to the registrar to find out what I would have to do to get credit and discovered that the school had to be accredited and that the credits could fulfill some of my general education requirements. Then I asked professors and other students and checked all the bulletin boards near all the language, culture and international studies departments. I wrote to several schools in Mexico and Spain for more information and signed up for work-study jobs on campus. I also took a job during Winter break to save money for my trip.

One of the accredited schools in Mexico seemed to have what I wanted: language, culture and history courses in Spanish and a home-stay experience. So I looked for transportation to Mexico and discovered a cheap bus tour package that would get me there and back (and it turned out to be a wonderful adventure, too). While there, I worked and played hard and the whole experience exceeded my expectations and raised my confidence. My language skills improved enough that I also was able to travel independently by bus to Mexico City, which led to several other adventures, and I learned more than I ever anticipated about life in another very different culture. Finally, when I returned to school the following year, I had earned eight general education credits toward my Bachelors in Latin American Studies.

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Strengths Exploration Chart

This chart enables you to re-examine your Good Experiences and identify possible strengths. Significant strengths will be those skills or talents that have shown themselves repeatedly in your top ten Good Experiences. A significant strength is inner-motivated—one that you almost can't help using whenever the opportunity comes up.

Instructions for using the chart: The first column is for exploration of your top Good Experience. Go down the columns scanning each of the skills, talents or strengths in the chart and put a check mark beside the ones that have been *strongly applied* in that experience. Do the same with the other Top 10 Good Experiences you described. The blank spaces at the end of the chart are for skills, talents or strengths you feel should be on the chart but are not there.

STRENGTH	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	STRENGTH	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Accountable												Mechanical Ability											
Adventuresome												Multi-Tasking											
Analysis/Analyzing												Negotiating											
Articulate												Observant											
Artistic Ability												Organization Ability											
Budgeting												Persevering											
Communicating												Persuasive											
Coordinating												Planning Ability											
Creativity												Policy Making											
Critical Thinking												Practical											
Design												Problem Solving Skills											
Detail Oriented												Productive											
Energy/Drive												Program Development											
Economical/Frugal												Research Skills											
Follow-Through												Sales Ability											
Foresight												Service Oriented											
Imagination												Showmanship											
Independence												Systems/Procedures											
Initiative												Teamwork											
Interpersonal Skills												Technology Skills											
Innovative												Training/Teaching											
Leadership												Troubleshooting											
Liaison/Collaborate												Writing											
Maintain Perspective																							
Managing																							
Manual Dexterity																							
Marketing																							
Mathematic Ability																							

Implications: Items with the highest totals could be significant strengths. Examine those skills that have the highest totals and think about the many situations in which you have used them. How could you use these skills in your ideal job? Are there ways you could combine some of the skills to create opportunities? The completion of these activities begins a process of identifying significant strengths and finding meaningful work where you can be at your best and utilize more of your potential. You may want to consider meeting with a career counselor in The Career Center to discuss the process of uncovering your strengths and ways of creating new opportunities that provide career satisfaction.

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Strengths Reality Test

To identify your significant strengths, perform the following reality test (try to test 6-12 strengths):

Write the strengths you wish to test in the boxes below. For each strength, identify three distinct examples of experiences in which you strongly applied that strength. First, review the Good Experiences used to complete the Exploration Chart on the previous page for ideas. Next, think of other experiences that are good examples of using that strength. It should be relatively easy to come up with three examples, if the strength you are testing is truly a significant strength.

Strength: _____

Examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Strength: _____

Examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Strength: _____

Examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Strength: _____

Examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Strength: _____

Examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Strength: _____

Examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Implications: When seeking employment the best opportunities will be those where there is a match between the skills needed to do the job and your significant strengths. Feature the strengths you have tested above on your resume in a Background Summary (see the resume example on page 18). Incorporate examples of how you have demonstrated these strengths in your answers to interview questions (see "How to Answer 'Tell Me About Yourself'" on page 30). Meet with a career counselor at The Career Center to explore further how your strengths can be used in your job search.

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