



We each have unique strengths. Identifying our strengths, personal qualities, and transferable skills is important for many reasons, and especially when finding a new job. Your strengths can impact what type of work you look for, how you present yourself in your resume, cover letter and interviews, and what skills you bring to the workplace.

Our strengths are the behaviors and abilities that come naturally to us and what we do well. For example, you might be really good at starting conversations with strangers or you might have an eye for detail. Or maybe you're good at problem solving and persevering until you find an answer to something you're working on. All of these behaviors and abilities could be considered your strengths.

However, many of us rarely take an inventory of our personal strengths, and, when we do, it can be challenging to talk about them. It might feel awkward to talk about what we're good at and it might feel difficult to "toot your own horn". We might not realize that our unique qualities, even our idiosyncrasies, can be our strengths. We might take these characteristics for granted and minimize them by saying "I've always been that way". But statements like this dismiss our strengths, instead of acknowledging their worth.

There are numerous benefits to knowing your strengths. **People who recognize and regularly use their strengths have a better grasp of what makes them unique, can better appreciate their self-worth, make career decisions based on their skills and talents, and better evaluate their role and contributions at work.** This guide will help you identify the strengths that make you unique and how to talk about the things you're good at. You'll also learn about skills that can transfer to a work setting and how to translate those skills into jobs you love.



Activity 1 – What make you unique?

Instructions:

To start thinking about your own personal strengths and qualities, fill in the blanks with one-word or short descriptions. Think about situations in both your personal and professional life. There are no wrong ways to answer the questions and choose the first answer that comes to your mind.

Things I am good at:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Compliments I have received:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Challenges I have overcome:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Ways I've helped others:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What I am most proud of in my life:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What makes me unique:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What I value the most:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What do you admire about yourself:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Identifying Strengths and Skills

Why is it Important?

Now that you've thought a little about the things you're good at and what makes you unique, it's time to pinpoint the strengths and skills that you should consider when you're deciding what type of career you want or when you're preparing for a job interview.

You can use your strengths as a guide to help you figure out which jobs might work well for you, and which jobs to avoid. For example, if one of your strengths is that you're creative, you might want to look into jobs that allow you to use your imagination and come up with original ideas. Or if you're a people person, a customer-facing job will allow you to use your social skills and play to that strength. **Finding a job that utilizes your strengths will not only make work more enjoyable for you, but you will also get the chance to develop those skills further.**

Not only is it important to consider your strengths when contemplating what kind of career you want, but you will also most likely be asked to consider your strengths when interviewing for a job. Employers want to know whether your skills and characteristics are well suited for the position. Therefore, understanding and articulating your strengths will help you make the case that you're the right person for the job.



For more on how to answer “What is your greatest strength” during an interview, read this article: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-your-greatest-strength-2061282>

How to Identify Your Strengths

Now that you know why identifying your strengths is important for your professional development, how do you go about doing that? How can you tell if a specific task, value, or responsibility is a strength?

It's important to note that understanding your values, strengths and interests is often a **lifelong process** and it's natural for them to change over time. However, practicing **self-reflection** is a great way to start identifying what you're good at, what characteristics best describe you, and what types of activities you most enjoy. There are many different ways to identify your strengths, and this guide can help you perform a self-assessment of where your strengths lie. When completing this self-assessment, also consider these factors:

- **Listen to feedback** – You can supplement your own self-perception by listening to what others say about you and your work. Pay attention to when you receive compliments or feedback, both at work and in your personal life. You might discover strengths you never paid close attention to before.

- **Consider your passions** – Your strengths are often closely related to the activities you most enjoy. When you're good at something, you usually get a lot of satisfaction and enjoyment out of doing it. You also usually take the time to practice and hone the skills associated with activities we're passionate about. If you have any hobbies, what skills are closely related to them? Your ability to enjoy tasks that someone else may not be willing to do is also a strength in itself, so pursuing your unique talents and interests is a great way to identify your positive attributes in the workplace.
- **Pay attention to when you are most productive** – Throughout your day-to-day activities and work, take note of when you feel productive. If time seems to pass by quickly and you accomplish a task without getting distracted, you are likely using your strengths to get the work done. Consider when you feel most focused and what motivates you during those times. On the other hand, when it seems like time drags on while completing a task or you're struggling to find the motivation to get anything done, these might be times where you're not using your strengths.
- **Ask others directly** – In addition to listening to feedback and paying attention to when and where you receive compliments, asking your friends, family, or colleagues about your strengths can give you additional insights that you may not have noticed otherwise. You might consider seeking opinions from a variety of sources and from people who know you in different contexts. For example, a family member or friend might be able to tell you that you're a really great listener, while a co-worker or manager might share that you are dependable and always follow through with responsibilities.
- **Seek out new experiences** – Your own perception of your strengths is heavily based on life experiences. Therefore, trying new skills, hobbies and activities is essential for identifying your strengths. You can seek out new experiences by taking classes, asking coworkers if you can shadow them, learning new technical skills and taking on leadership roles in new areas. You may be surprised at what strengths you discover by taking the risk of trying something new in the workplace.

The next activity will allow you to identify some personal characteristics that you can use to recognize where your strengths lie. You can also practice how you would articulate these strengths in an interview setting or to a future employer.



Activity 2 – Personal Characteristics and Strengths

Instructions: Circle all the words from this list that describe you. Feel free to add words that aren't listed.

Accepting	Creative	Focused	Objective	Resourceful
Active	Curious	Frank	Observant	Responsible
Adaptable	Decisive	Friendly	Open-minded	Self-controlled
Ambitious	Dedicated	Generous	Optimistic	Self-motivated
Analytical	Dependable	Genuine	Organized	Self-reliant
Approachable	Detail-oriented	Good listener	Outgoing	Sensitive
Articulate	Determined	Hardworking	Passionate	Sharp
Assertive	Diligent	Helpful	Patient	Sincere
Calm	Diplomatic	Honest	Persistent	Skilled
Careful	Disciplined	Idealistic	Personable	Sociable
Caring	Discreet	Imaginative	Persuasive	Strong
Cautious	Effective	Independent	Pleasant	Sympathetic
Cheerful	Efficient	Industrious	Positive	Tactful
Collaborative	Encouraging	Innovative	Practical	Talkative
Committed	Energetic	Insightful	Precise	Thorough
Compassionate	Enterprising	Intellectual	Productive	Thoughtful
Competent	Entertaining	Kind	Professional	Thrifty
Confident	Enthusiastic	Leader	Quick learner	Tolerant
Conscientious	Ethical	Logical	Rational	Understanding
Considerate	Experienced	Loyal	Receptive	Versatile
Cooperative	Fair	Mature	Reliable	
Courageous	Firm	Methodical	Reserved	
Courteous	Flexible	Motivated	Resilient	

Of the words you circled, **list 4 that you consider your top strengths.**

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

From the words you circled, **which ones describe qualities or strengths that will be helpful on the job?**

Describing Strengths to a Future Employer

When describing your strengths to a future employer, it's important to include examples of how and when you've used your strengths. By providing a real life example of when you've used or shown your strengths, you can demonstrate how your strengths will help you succeed in a particular job.

Fill in the blanks, giving a specific example of a time when you demonstrated each quality. If possible, use an example from the workplace or a volunteer experience.

1. I am _____. One time I showed this quality was when I...

2. I am _____. One time I showed this quality was when I...

3. I am _____. One time I showed this quality was when I...

4. I am _____. One time I showed this quality was when I...

Transferable Skills

What are transferable skills?

Every job requires a different set of skills. Some are technical skills, or “**hard skills**”, which are learned abilities acquired and enhanced through practice, repetition, and education. Others are “**soft skills**”, which relate more to personality traits and behaviors rather than knowledge. Soft skills can be a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence.

Transferable skills can be hard or soft skills, but what sets them apart is that they can be used across multiple jobs and career fields. For example, language fluency is a hard skill, but it can be used in many different job settings. Similarly, teamwork is a soft skill, but most jobs require you to work as a part of a team in some way so it can be considered a transferable skill. Transferable skills are not only limited to the talents and abilities that you learn in the workplace. They can also be acquired through school, internships, hobbies, and volunteer experiences.



Transferable skills are very important to highlight in any job application or interview, but they are especially important to emphasize if you are making a career change. Even if there is new technical knowledge or hard skills that you will have to learn in your new career, you will most likely already have many of the skills and abilities to be successful in the job. You'll want to make sure that you discuss those transferable skills to potential employers and point out specific examples from previous jobs or experiences where you've used them.

How can you identify transferable skills?

Consider your work history, education, and volunteer activities. Can you think of any skills that you have consistently used throughout multiple situations? Most of the words from the previous activity on identifying your personal characteristics can be considered transferable skills because they are not specific to any one job or position. For example, if you identified hardworking or dependable as one of your strengths, those strengths are important to virtually any career you choose.

In addition to your personal qualities and strengths, what other skills have you learned from previous experiences that can be applied to another work environment? Consider these skill areas to identify any other transferable skills you may not realize you already have:

- **General Skills**
 - Listening
 - Understanding and carrying out written instructions
 - Communication (writing and speaking)
 - Punctuality

- **Interpersonal Skills**
 - Motivating others
 - Working and building relationships with customers
 - Training new employees or mentoring less experienced colleagues
 - Collaborating with others
 - Resolving conflicts
- **Management Skills**
 - Developing and overseeing a budget
 - Recruiting personnel
 - Reviewing resumes
 - Interviewing job candidates
 - Selecting new hires
 - Supervising employees
 - Scheduling personnel
 - Leading productive meetings
 - Negotiating contracts
 - Evaluating employees
 - Identifying and presenting problems to upper management
- **Clerical Skills**
 - Managing records
 - Familiarity with Microsoft Office programs
 - Performing data entry
 - Keeping track of accounts receivable, accounts payable, billing, and other bookkeeping tasks
 - Screening and transferring telephone calls
 - Greeting visitors
 - Using office equipment such as printers, copiers, and fax machines
- **Research and Planning Skills**
 - Solving problems
 - Defining the organization's or department's needs
 - Setting goals
 - Prioritizing tasks
 - Managing your time and meeting deadlines
 - Planning and implementing events and activities
 - Creating and implementing new policies and procedures
 - Coordinating and developing programs
 - Documenting procedures and results
 - Conducting research using the internet and library resources
- **Computer and Technical Skills**
 - Using job-related software
 - Using job-related equipment and machinery
 - Installing software on computers
 - Troubleshooting problems with hardware and software
 - Installing equipment
 - Maintaining equipment
 - Inspecting equipment to identify problems
 - Designing and maintaining websites



Tip for Job Interviews

If you are preparing for a job interview, pay attention to which transferable skills you should highlight that are applicable for the job. Although some skills, like communication or dependability, are relevant to almost every job or career field, there will be some skills that are more important to the job than others. Before your interview, determine what skills and strengths you have the match the job description and prepare examples to highlight them.

Finding a Job that Matches Your Skills

While we may have many transferable skills that we can use, it doesn't mean that we enjoy using all of those skills. By identifying the skills you most love to use, you can focus your job search effort and move closer to finding the right job for you.

Activity 4 – Your Shining Moment: Identifying Your Favorite Skills

We have all encountered challenges and obstacles throughout our lives. Through these experiences, we have used our strengths and skills to overcome these challenges and obstacles, and our strengths have most likely grown in the process. This activity will help you identify the skills you have from your personal and professional experience and which are your favorite to use.

Instructions:

- First, write down one experience or “shining moment” you’ve had at a job, at school, in a volunteer or service experience, or in your life.
- Next write an outline of what you did, step by step.

Story Worksheet

1. Describe the situation you were faced with or what you wanted to accomplish:

2. Tell what you needed to solve, any expectations, any challenges:

3. Describe the action you took and how you did it, step by step:

4. Explain the result of your actions (outcome, accomplishments, rewards, impact)

5. List the skills you used to achieve the result:

Repeat this activity by creating up to 5 or 6 more stories and identifying the skills you used in each situation. Finally, prioritize all the skills you've identified and prioritize the 10 or so most important to you. You may use this outcome to focus your job search in areas that uses your most favorite skills.



For more on information on aligning careers to your skills, visit this resource from Education Planner: <http://www.educationplanner.org/students/pdf/which-careers-match-your-skills.pdf> and read Vermont's Pathways to Promising Careers: <https://mcclurevt.org/most-promising-jobs/>

Conclusion and Reflection

We all have unique strengths and skills that we use in our personal lives and at work. When you understand your strengths, you can better appreciate your self-worth and make career decisions based on your skills and talents, which will ultimately make your job more enjoyable and satisfying. However, it can be difficult to know exactly what makes us unique and what our greatest strengths are. There are a number of ways to identify your strengths and skills, including talking to people who know you well, paying attention to when you are most productive or enjoying what you're doing, listening to feedback, and seeking out new experiences. It is also important to understand what transferable skills you already possess that can be used across multiple jobs and career fields. No matter how qualified you are for a given job, it's always wise to highlight your transferable skills in your cover letter or and during the job interview. Finally, by understanding what skills you enjoy using most, you can focus your search on those jobs that will fit you best.



Reflection Question: Did you learn anything new about yourself from completing these activities? What strengths and transferable skills will you emphasize during your next job interview?