



How to Use Your Character Strengths

Here are some strength-building exercises created by the VIA Institute. Use these to spur thought and action on how you can focus on and use your strengths. Find ways to focus on them at home, at work, in all aspects of your life.

Courage

Bravery

- Identify an area in which you generally shy away from confrontations. Practice the phrases, the tones, and the mannerisms that will enable you to effectively confront the situation next time.
- Don't be afraid to befriend someone who is different but positive at work.

Perseverance

- Set five small goals weekly. Break them into practical steps, accomplish them on time, and monitor your progress from week to week.
- Keep a checklist of things to do and regularly update it.
- Select a role-model who exemplifies perseverance and determine how you can follow her/his footsteps.

Honesty

- The next time you are asked for advice, give constructive, direct and authentic feedback.
- Honor your commitments in all of your relationships, in life and at work. If you agree to do something or schedule a time to meet with someone, be reliable and follow through.

Zest

- Improve your sleep hygiene by establishing regular sleep time, eating 3-4 hours before sleeping, avoiding doing any work in the bed, not taking caffeine late in the evening, etc. Notice changes in your energy level.
- Do a physically rigorous activity (bike riding, running, sports singing, playing) that you always wanted to do but have not done yet.
- Call old friend and reminisce good old times.

Humanity

Love

- Convey love at work by making an effort to understand who you're working with, finding out what is important to them and engaging with them on the topic regularly.
- Engage in a favorite activity with a loved one (e.g., hiking, going to an amusement park, biking, walking in the park, swimming, camping, jogging).

Kindness

- Perform a random act of kindness each day (ex: slowing to allow a car in front of you, complimenting a co-worker, buying a treat for your partner).
- Say kinder and softer words to people when interacting through email, writing letters, talking on phone. Smile when answering the phone and sound happy to hear from the person on the other end of the line.
- Take out a friend(s) on a surprise dinner and pay for it.

Social Intelligence

- Practice noticing, labeling and expressing emotions. After you become aware of an emotion, label it, and if appropriate, express it to another.
- Write five personal feelings daily for four weeks and monitor patterns.
- Watch a favorite TV program or film muted and write feelings observed.

Justice

Teamwork

- Volunteer for activities such as serving as a Big Brother or Big Sister or constructing a Habitat for Humanity house.
- Help someone close to you set a goal and then periodically check on their progress.
- Start a book club with family members, friends or colleagues. Schedule a time to meet and discuss the selected books.

Fairness

- Self-monitor to see whether you think about or treat people of other ethnicities and cultures stereotypically.
- The next time you make a mistake, self-monitor to see whether you admit it.

Leadership

- When two people are in an argument, mediate by inviting others to share their thoughts and emphasizing problem solving.
- Lead an activity, assignment or project and actively solicit opinions from group members.
- Read a biography and/or watch film of your favorite leader and evaluate how he/she inspires you in practical ways.

Temperance

Forgiveness

- Take 20 minutes and write about the personal benefits that resulted from a negative incident.
- Think of someone who wronged you recently. Put yourself in their shoes and try to understand their perspective.

Humility

- Resist showing off accomplishments for a week and notice the changes in your interpersonal relationships.
- Notice if you speak more than others in a group situation.
- Admit your mistakes and apologize even to those who are younger than you.

Prudence

- Think twice before saying anything. Do this exercise at least ten times a week and note its effects.
- Remove all extraneous distractions before you make your next three important decisions.
- Visualize the consequences of your next decision in one, five and ten years' time.

Self-Regulation

- Next time you get upset, make a conscious effort to control your emotions and focus on positive attributes.
- Set goals to improve your everyday living (e.g., room cleaning, laundry, doing dishes, cleaning your desk) and make sure you complete the tasks.
- Pay close attention to your biological clock. Do your most important tasks when you are most alert.

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence

- Keep a "beauty log." When you believe you are seeing something beautiful – whether it is from nature, is human-made (e.g., artwork), or is the virtuous behavior of others – write it down. Describe the beauty in a few sentences.
- Get regular exposure to green space in your environment, especially if you live/work in an urban setting.

Gratitude

- Write down three good things that you are grateful for each day.
- Set aside at least ten minutes every day to savor a pleasant experience.

Hope

- Write an internal movie that features one of your goals. Picture yourself overcoming the obstacles, developing pathways around and through problems, to reach your goal.
- Write about a good event and why it will last and spread. How is this event linked to your actions?

Humor

- Think about a past even in which you used humor for your benefit and the benefit of others.
- Write down the humor of your everyday life. Each day make a conscious effort to be aware of your sense of humor, others' sense of humor, funny situations, and clever comments and record them in a daily journal.
- Watch a funny sitcom/ movie or read a comic/funny blog daily.

Spirituality

- Cultivate sacred moments in which you set aside time to "just be" with a special/sacred object or space/environment.
- Build in spiritual tools as a regular practice (ex: prayer, meditation, exploring nature) or as a way of approaching life (ex: giving charity, showing compassion to less fortunate individuals).
- When experiencing trauma or a difficult situation, look for the deeper meaning and purpose of the experience.

Wisdom

Creativity

- When facing a problem, define the issue clearly and then practice divergent thinking (ex: developing multiple solutions/outcomes rather than just one solution).
- Set time aside each day for creative thinking or creative activities (such as: writing poems or using an everyday household object in a new way).

Curiosity

- Consider an activity you dislike. Pay attention to 3 novel features of this activity while you do it.
- Practice active curiosity and explore your current environment, paying attention to anything you may often ignore or take for granted.

Judgment

- Play devil's advocate on an issue that you have strong opinions about.
- Examine a past event that you are not happy with (not following through with a goal) and brainstorm ideas for other ways that you could have approached that event/activity.

Love of Learning

- Deliberately learn five new words, including their meaning and usage, at least twice a week.
- Read a non-fiction book monthly on a topic you find absorbing and engaging.
- Follow an ongoing global event through newspapers, TV or internet.

Perspective

- For your next interaction, first focus on listening carefully and then focus on sharing your ideas and thoughts.
- Read quotes on wisdom, find one that resonates and then re-write it to make it your own and put it to memory. Try to think about ways that you can live more true to that quote.
- Find someone wise (alive or someone who has passed on), read or watch a film on their life, and identify how their life can guide your decisions and actions.