

3 WAYS TO MAINTAIN A STRENGTHS FOCUS

Assessing and diagnosing student strengths is an enlightening experience and one that many students refer to as a turning point in the way they view themselves. However, life moves on quickly and we are soon back into the grind of normal classes, assignments, assessments and exams. Strengths can quickly fade to be a distant memory unless we are intentional in maintaining a strengths focus.

1. Keep “Strength Profiles” visible

A great idea is to keep the list of your students’ Top 5 Strengths in a visible, central place. As we engage with different students, we will notice them use their own strengths in day-to-day learning and relational interactions.

- We’ll see Jack using his *Solution Finder strength* to figure out ways to resolve a problem;
- We’ll witness Amani’s *Charismatic strength* in her friendliness and extroversion, even when it’s interrupting the class or laughing aloud;
- We’ll see Rachael’s *Winner strength* when she asks what everyone else got in the test, driving her motivation and desire to be the best.

Even a cursory glance at a student’s strengths before a lesson or preceding a disciplinary conversation can invoke a greater level of understanding and empathy. If a student feels affirmed, there is a greater chance of improvement.

2. Adopt Strengths Language

Put up the Strength Posters in your classroom and refer to them often. Point out the gold in students and affirm the moments they are using strengths. Those students who feel difficult for us will also have their strengths and will benefit from being affirmed and celebrated with words that remind them of their best self.

3. Use the MyFuture Journal & follow up worksheets

The MyFuture Journal is an excellent way to follow up on Student Strengths. It guides students to create goals based on their Strengths, and then journal their progress over 30 entries. It keeps strengths central.



Over the following pages, you will find additional Worksheets that you can photocopy and use with students to follow up on their strengths. These include:

1. **MyStrengths, MyLearning** – a great summary exercise to finish off their MyStrengths session.
2. **Motivation & Engagement** – In which environments are you most engaged?
3. **MyStrengths In Action** – Students reflect on when they have used their strengths.

WORKSHEET 1: MySTRENGTHS, MyLEARNING

Read the examples on each of your MyStrengths cards to get ideas for the following:

STRENGTH	Write strength name
What's an example of how you use this strength?	
When have you used this strength in your work or learning?	
How would this strength benefit your learning?	
What are two ways you can use your strength this coming week?	
Who could you benefit/ help with this strength?	

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WORKSHEET 2: MOTIVATION & ENGAGEMENT

We are each motivated and engaged in very different areas from one another.

- Some love reading, others need to be physical;
- Some love a difficult challenge; others thrive in a social setting;
- Some are highly creative, while others are logical and analytical.

In this worksheet, we are required to identify 3 moments we have enjoyed a lesson, a workspace or a learning environment. Dig into why you enjoyed it and what that tells about our strengths, personality and learning style.

What to do:

1. Read through the 8 examples listed in the "Alive on the Inside" section
2. Beneath each example, write 2 strengths that the person could be using in that example
3. Finish by coming up with your own examples of where you have felt most engaged in work or learning.

ALIVE ON THE INSIDE – Case Studies:

Sam, 16yrs: I feel really engaged when I'm working. Sure, a job at Maccas is not anything special, but I actually really love it. I'm always busy and productive, rotating between registers and cooking. I like the pace, feeling like I can keep up with whatever they throw at me. Time flies when I'm working hard.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Bev, 17yrs: I feel most engaged in drama class. I love acting and performance. It's my chance to get out of my own skin and be someone else for a while. I like doing different voices, and even accents. I'm pretty good at the Irish accent, and I can do others from South Africa, India and even New Zealand. I like expression and creativity.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Dom, 16yrs: I love video games. But not because I'm lazy. Mostly because of the challenge. The strategy games are my favourite and I will not be defeated. I'll just keep practicing until I can dominate. I don't like the games which are easy – I like figuring out how to win, even if I'm just competing against my previous best score.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Nic, 15yrs: I'm definitely most engaged in art class. I'm constantly drawing and painting and creating. If I could do that all day, then I'd be happy. I'm just easy-going, keep to myself and get busy in my zone.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Bobby, 18yrs: I can talk to anyone. I recently got a job at a carwash, but instead of washing the cars, the boss put me on the front counter because I just talk to the customers and upsell everything, tell them that they need something extra and that we'll look after them. He always says I've got the gift of the gab.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Bryce, 14yrs: I feel most engaged when we do anything practical. I'm a hands-on person so I love woodwork, metal work, even cooking. I love PE and even the practical parts of science. The areas I struggle is when there's too much theory and not enough "let's do it".

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Liv, 15yrs: I'm always reading. I just love it. I can read 2-3 books per week. Particularly if it's about history or other people. When there's a reading task or a new book study for the term, I'm into it. I love learning and for me, more is better. I dig into all the details and want to know it all.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

Jess, 17yrs: I look after my sister after school until about 7pm. My Mum works late and so I do the cooking and make sure everyone is doing what they are supposed to. I like feeling responsible and grown up. I take that same responsibility with me to work where I feel best if they trust me to lock up or do something significant.

Strength: _____ Strength: _____

ALIVE ON THE INSIDE – Your Examples:

Think of 3 moments/times when you have felt engaged, excited, focused in your work or learning.

- These might be your best classes or learning environments.
- It might be a part time job that you enjoy.
- It could be a time you had to lead or listen or be responsible or care.
- It might be a project you did, an event you put on, an activity you love.

Then dig. Why did you like it? What was stimulating about it? What felt challenging? Why was it engaging?

Moment 1:

Finish this sentence: I feel most engaged when I... _____

What is it about this activity that engages you most? _____

Which of your strengths are you using in that moment? _____

How could you do more of that? _____

Moment 2:

Finish this sentence: I feel most engaged when I... _____

What is it about this activity that engages you most? _____

Which of your strengths are you using in that moment? _____

How could you do more of that? _____

Moment 3:

Finish this sentence: I feel most engaged when I... _____

What is it about this activity that engages you most? _____

Which of your strengths are you using in that moment? _____

How could you do more of that? _____

WORKSHEET 3: STRENGTHS IN ACTION



Refresh your strengths. When have you used your own strengths in the past few weeks?

What you'll need:

- The "All 35 Strengths" double-sided sheet (Search "All 35 strengths" at hub.mystrengths.com.au)
- Teachers may need access to the MyStrengths Dashboard to confirm your Top 5 strengths

What to do:

1. Take the double-sided sheet "All 35 strengths" and do the following two tasks:
 - **Strengths-in-Me:**
Read through the list of all 35 strengths and CIRCLE your own Top 5 Strengths. Note: if you are totally stuck, you would have an email from MyStrengths on the day you took the assessment.
 - **Strengths-in-Others:**
As you read each strength trait, think of someone else who would have that trait. Write down their name next to the trait. Examples:
Structured = Mum.
Charismatic = Justin Bieber.
Developer = Miss Perkins.
Winner = My brother Sam.
2. In the next section, write down 2 examples of where you have used each of those strengths and one new way that you will use this strength in the coming week. For example:
 - *Lead Strength:* Our group had an assignment to do and no one was really organising it. So I spoke up and gave each person a role and got the thing moving.
 - *Prudent Strength:* In the holidays, I went out with my friends one weekend. Some of them were drinking and smoke some weed. But I didn't because I didn't know what was in it. I'm glad, because two of them ended up sick and in trouble.
 - *Strategic Strength:* I've started saving money for a new game I want. This week, I'll work the extra shift on the weekend to get a bit more money for it.
3. Once finished the writing task, form a group of 3, and share with the other 2 people your own examples.
4. The teacher may ask you to hand in the worksheet or keep it.

Learning Outcomes:

- Identifying strengths in action helps to develop a growth mindset as we discover our competencies and positive contributions.

- Thinking through strengths-in-me and strengths-in-others trains the brain toward a strength-focus and away from the prevalent deficit bias. Our brain works to repeat the positive achievements.

STRENGTH #1	Write strength name
Example 1: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
Example 2: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
What is a new way you can use this strength in the coming week?	

STRENGTH #2	Write strength name
Example 1: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
Example 2: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
What is a new way you can use this strength in the coming week?	

STRENGTH #3	Write strength name
Example 1: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
Example 2: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
What is a new way you can use this strength in the coming week?	

STRENGTH #4	Write strength name
Example 1: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
Example 2: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
What is a new way you can use this strength in the coming week?	

STRENGTH #5	Write strength name
Example 1: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
Example 2: How have you used this strength in the past few weeks?	
What is a new way you can use this strength in the coming week?	

FOLLOW UP EXERCISES FOR EDUCATORS

As teachers, we may need our own reminders to maintain a strengths focus. The following exercises can be done at anytime and are useful to do as a faculty group or for individual reflection.

EXERCISE 1: STRENGTH-SPOTTING

What you'll need:

- "All 35 Strengths" listed in Chapter 6, or search "All 35 strengths" at hub.mystrengths.com.au

Step 1: Mentally choose 3 students who are the most challenging to you.

Step 2: With those students in mind, go through the list of 35 strength traits and circle/highlight/select the positive traits that you see in that student.

Step 3: Optionally: If you have not witnessed those students in a variety of environments, take the next fortnight to deliberately look for the positives. Watch the way they interact with others; ask about their home environment; enquire as to when that student feels most engaged and capable in their learning.

Then go back over the list and identify the strengths that you have seen in them.

CHALLENGING STUDENT	Child name	Where you've seen strength used
Strength #1 you notice in them		
Strength #2 you notice in them		
Strength #3 you notice in them		

Learning Opportunity: We can manually shift our focus from what's wrong to what's right. Our perception of students can change, and the way we feel about them – which has a marked effect on the way we engage, teach and support - can be altered with intentional focus training.

EXERCISE 2: THAT'S SOMEONE I KNOW!

Step 1: Print out the list of all 35 Strengths.

Step 2: Read down the list of strengths, writing the name of a student or a colleague next to each of the strength traits. The name you write will be someone who really personifies that strength trait.

Step 3: Report back to a group of your colleagues who have a shared knowledge of students. Read down the list together and mention the people and examples of strengths-in-action for those who you've mentioned.

Learning Opportunity: Each teacher will have different experiences and insights of each of our students. By discussing positive strength traits and giving examples to one another, we build a strength which affirms the strength-based learning principles that:

- all children have strengths and abilities;
- children grow and develop from their strengths and abilities;
- the problem is the problem—the child is not the problem;
- when children and those around them (including educators) appreciate and understand the child's strengths, then the child is better able to learn and develop.