

Introduction

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You have just taken the VIA-IS (VIA Survey of Character Strengths or VIA Survey), which assesses your own strengths of character.

Character strengths are morally valued styles of thinking, feeling, and acting that contribute to a fulfilling life. “Character” has become a major focus in recent years, with an explosion of books that talk about identifying and using strengths at work or in your personal life.

What distinguishes the VIA-IS from other strength inventories is its thorough basis in theory and research. The individuals who created the VIA-IS - Christopher Peterson at the University of Michigan and Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania - are leading psychologists. With a panel of renowned scholars, they spent years systematically reading and synthesizing dozens of philosophical, religious, and scientific discussions of good character. They identified what was common across these discussions: core virtues and specific character strengths that represented these virtues in use. Their work is summarized in the 2004 book “Character Strengths and Virtues,” published by Oxford University Press.

These psychologists, along with many of their colleagues, then developed and tested ways to measure each of these character strengths. The VIA-IS is one of the strategies they created. Scores from the VIA Survey are reliable, stable, and valid. They agree with reports by friends and family members of the people who completed the test. To date, nearly one million adults worldwide have completed the VIA Survey, and a great deal of research has been

Character Matters

Here is some of what has been learned about good character.

- Character is plural. It makes good sense to distinguish among different strengths of character, as the VIA-IS does, and to describe an individual’s strengths in terms of a profile.
- Character strengths have a structure. In other words, people are high or low on different strengths of character, and certain profiles are more typical than others. Accordingly, there exist what can be called easy alliances among given character strengths, such as with forgiveness and kindness, as well as soft tradeoffs, such as bravery and prudence. (See *Balance*, p. 16)
- Character has important consequences, but these consequences differ according to the specific strength. Some character strengths are strongly linked to happiness, others to physical health, and still others to success at school and work.
- Although character strengths are usually stable over time, they can and do change in response to important life events or as a result of deliberate actions that result in lifestyle changes. This report suggests ways to boost the strengths that you have.

conducted into character. This research has been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, satisfying the gold standard of scientific research (see <http://www.viacharacter.org>).

You will find different types of feedback here, all based on how you completed the VIA-IS. The results are only useful if you answered the questions with candor. Because all of the character strengths are desirable—that is why they are included—there may have been a temptation to shade or exaggerate your answers. The results can be faked, but the only person truly faked out is you.

Despite the established validity of the VIA-IS, you are urged not to treat the results as more “real” than

the traits and styles that the survey attempts to measure. Psychology has gone down that road with respect to IQ scores and intelligence, and we should learn some lessons from that sorry story. So, if someone scores relatively low on the VIA scale of kindness yet lives a life of obvious charity and benevolence, the scale score does not trump the life. The discrepancy points to the less-than-perfect success of any survey measure and not to anything about the individual completing it.

Some of the feedback is provided in terms of your top (“signature”) VIA character strengths, which is a convenient shorthand for describing the essence of who you are. But appreciate that character strengths are conceived as dimensions and not as categories, a point that such simple feedback might obscure. People have more or less of all the strengths, as opposed to a set of discrete strengths versus weaknesses. Indeed, lesser strengths are simply that and certainly not weaknesses. You should understand that in the feedback about your signature strengths, the comparison is to your other strengths. For example, you could score low on the VIA scale of teamwork but still be one of the best teammates in the world. The point is that “teamwork” for you is not as salient or evident as your other strengths, but still might play an important role in some circumstances.

How To Read Your Profile

By Neal H. Mayerson, Ph.D.

Chairman, VIA Institute on Character

This VIA Survey Interpretive Report provides you with information about the strengths of your personal character traits, and a number of perspectives for understanding your character fully.

Your Character Strengths (1,2). First, you will see a top-down rank ordering of your character strengths with brief descriptions of each strength, along with a graphic presentation. The average raw scores that are shown represent the average score over the 10 questions that comprise each of the 24 character scales. The absolute strength of a character

trait indicates the degree to which you tend to value and express that trait in your life. Lesser strengths are just that - strengths that are less central to defining your essence but strengths nonetheless. Low scores do not indicate “weaknesses” of character.

Your Signature Strengths (3). This report examines each of your top five (and in case of a tie, your top six) character strengths – called signature strengths. What is most important about the designation of “signature strengths” is that they are the character traits that are most dominant in your life, the ones that define an important core of who you are – your essence of being. Expression of signature strengths of character feels comfortable and natural, not requiring particular effort and deployment of will-power. The designation of the top five character strengths as “signature” is a convenience, and you need to consider the degree to which these top strengths, or others, are critical in defining your true self.

Research indicates that it can be beneficial to focus on giving rich expression to one’s signature strengths of character, and that building up certain lesser strengths can have particular benefits as well. Try to be deliberate in finding new ways and new circumstances in which to deploy your character strengths.

The Virtues (4,5). This report in your Profile offers two perspectives of how you score in terms of the broader Virtue categories. “The Virtues are the broad categories that represent the best of human behaviors that are intrinsically valued across time and cultures. Virtues are the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. These six broad categories of virtue emerge consistently from historical surveys. We argue that these are universal, perhaps grounded in biology through an evolutionary process that selected for these aspects of excellence as means of solving the important tasks necessary for the survival of the species.” (Peterson and Seligman, Character

Strengths & Virtues, 2004) You will see two graphs: graph 4 shows the Virtue categories only, and graph 5 shows the individual strengths that comprise each Virtue category. This report provides perspective of which virtue categories are more or less dominant in your character.

Comparative Profile (6). This report shows how your character strength scores compare with others of your demographic profile, based on gender, education, and age. Comparative data offer another perspective for assessing the strength of your character traits. In using this report we offer a cautionary note. Research shows that comparisons with others can be used to belittle oneself or others, and we caution against such use of comparative data. Instead, when comparisons are made we recommend they be done even-handedly and without judgment, and that the data only be used as points of perspective. What is most important is what character strengths you possess and to what degree you express them authentically in your life.

Balance (7). This report offers a different perspective of your character strengths. Factor analytic studies have shown that the 24 VIA character strengths can be organized around two primary dimensions. One dimension is the continuum of Self-Others, which describes the degree to which a character trait focuses attention on oneself or on others. The other dimension is Heart-Mind, which describes the degree to which a given character strength is based in mental activities or in matters of the heart (e.g. feelings, intuitions). This report provides a picture of how your signature strength profile is balanced along these two dimensions.

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

1. Wisdom and Knowledge
 - oCreativity
 - oCuriosity
 - oJudgment & Open-Mindedness
 - oLove of Learning
 - oPerspective
2. Courage
 - oBravery
 - oPerseverance
 - oHonesty
 - oZest
3. Humanity
 - oCapacity to Love and Be Loved
 - oKindness
 - oSocial Intelligence
4. Justice
 - oTeamwork
 - oFairness
 - oLeadership
5. Temperance
 - oForgiveness & Mercy
 - oModesty & Humility
 - oPrudence
 - oSelf-Regulation
6. Transcendence
 - oAppreciation of Beauty and Excellence
 - oGratitude
 - oHope
 - oHumor
 - oReligiousness & Spirituality

1. Your Character Strengths

This is the ranking of your strengths from top (1) to bottom (24). Brief sketches of the meaning of each strength are provided and the numerical scores used to rank them. If two scores are the same or very similar, you should not over-interpret any differences between them.

Strength #1: Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (Score: 5)

You notice and appreciate beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.

Strength #2: Creativity (Score: 5)

Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible.

Strength #3: Curiosity (Score: 5)

You are curious about everything. You are always asking questions, and you find all subjects and topics fascinating. You like exploration and discovery.

Strength #4: Gratitude (Score: 4.9)

You are aware of the good things that happen to you, and you never take them for granted. Your friends and family members know that you are a grateful person because you always take the time to express your thanks.

Strength #5: Forgiveness and Mercy (Score: 4.8)

You forgive those who have done you wrong. You always give people a second chance. Your guiding principle is mercy and not revenge.

Strength #6: Love of Learning (Score: 4.7)

You love learning new things, whether in a class or on your own. You have always loved school, reading, and museums-anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn.

Strength #7: Perseverance (Score: 4.7)

You work hard to finish what you start. No matter the project, you "get it out the door" in timely fashion. You do not get distracted when you work, and you take satisfaction in completing tasks.

Strength #8: Bravery (Score: 4.5)

You are a courageous person who does not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain. You speak up for what is right even if there is opposition. You act on your convictions.

Strength #9: Humor (Score: 4.5)

You like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. You try to see the light side of all situations.

Strength #10: Love (Score: 4.4)

You value close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated. The people to whom you feel most close are the same people who feel most close to you.

Strength #11: Teamwork (Score: 4.4)

You excel as a member of a group. You are a loyal and dedicated teammate, you always do your share, and you work hard for the success of your group.

Strength #12: Zest (Score: 4.4)

Regardless of what you do, you approach it with excitement and energy. You never do anything halfway or halfheartedly. For you, life is an adventure.

Strength #13: Modesty and Humility (Score: 4.3)

You do not seek the spotlight, preferring to let your accomplishments speak for themselves. You do not regard yourself as special, and others recognize and value your modesty.

Strength #14: Perspective (Score: 4.3)
Although you may not think of yourself as wise, your friends hold this view of you. They value your perspective on matters and turn to you for advice. You have a way of looking at the world that makes sense to others and to yourself.

Strength #15: Fairness (Score: 4.2)
Treating all people fairly is one of your abiding principles. You do not let your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people. You give everyone a chance.

Strength #16: Honesty (Score: 4.2)
You are an honest person, not only by speaking the truth but by living your life in a genuine and authentic way. You are down to earth and without pretense; you are a "real" person.

Strength #17: Social Intelligence (Score: 4.2)
You are aware of the motives and feelings of other people. You know what to do to fit in to different social situations, and you know what to do to put others at ease.

Strength #18: Judgment and Open-Mindedness (Score: 4)
Thinking things through and examining them from all sides are important aspects of who you are. You do not jump to conclusions, and you rely only on solid evidence to make your decisions. You are able to change your mind.

Strength #19: Kindness (Score: 3.9)
You are kind and generous to others, and you are never too busy to do a favor. You enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if you do not know them well.

Strength #20: Hope (Score: 3.8)
You expect the best in the future, and you work to achieve it. You believe that the future is something that you can control.

Strength #21: Leadership (Score: 3.8)
You excel at the tasks of leadership: encouraging a group to get things done and preserving harmony within the group by making everyone feel included. You do a good job organizing activities and seeing that they happen.

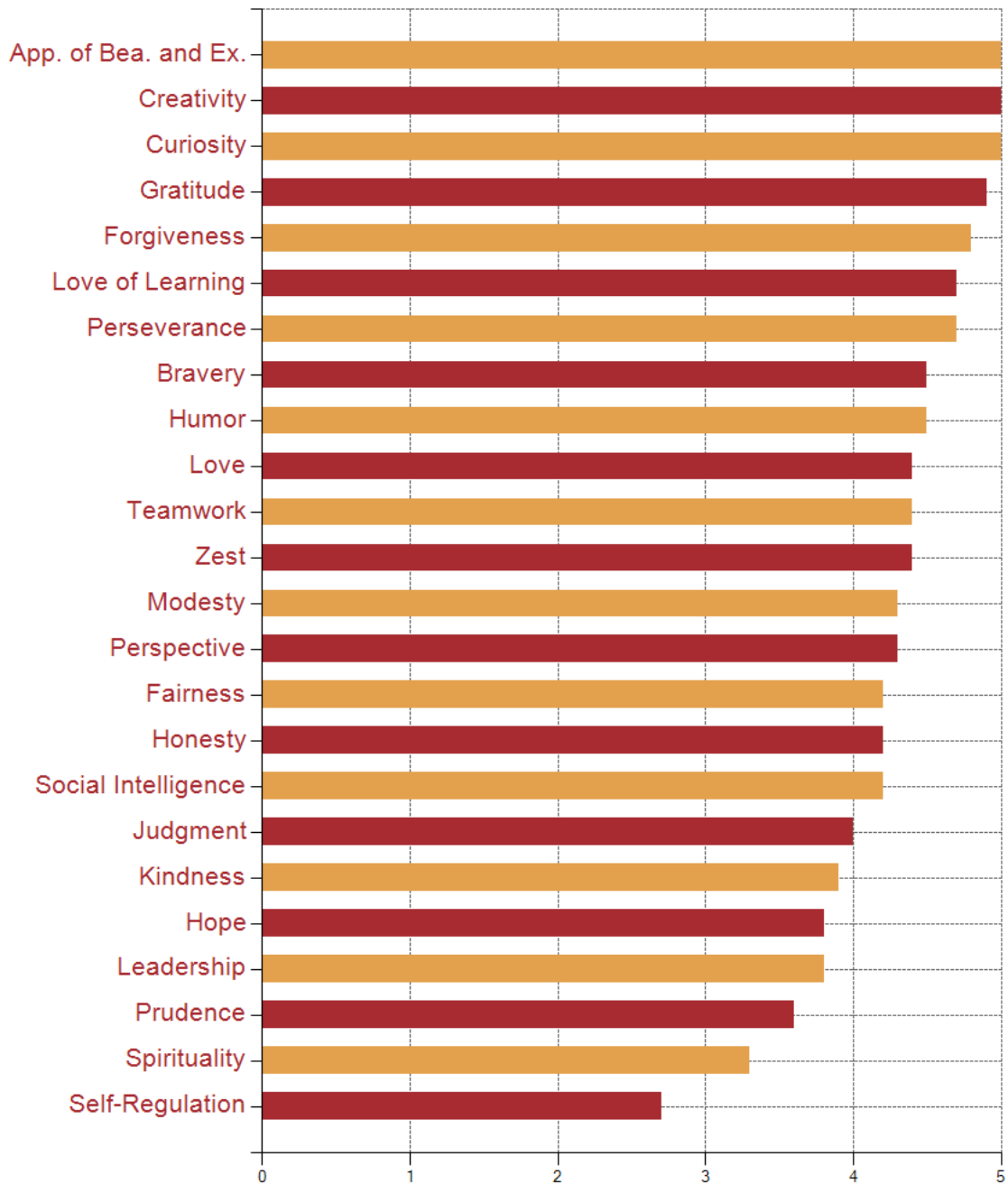
Strength #22: Prudence (Score: 3.6)
You are a careful person, and your choices are consistently prudent ones. You do not say or do things that you might later regret.

Strength #23: Religiousness and Spirituality (Score: 3.3)
You have strong and coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe. You know where you fit in the larger scheme. Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you.

Strength #24: Self-Regulation (Score: 2.7)
You self-consciously regulate what you feel and what you do. You are a disciplined person. You are in control of your appetites and your emotions, not vice versa.

2. Your Character Strengths in Rank Order

This graph depicts your character strengths ordered by your average raw score: 1 is least like me, 5 is most like me.



3. Your Signature Strengths

Your signature strengths are the five strengths for which you scored the highest. These are strengths of character that a person owns, celebrates and frequently exercises. Detailed descriptions of these strengths and what researchers have learned about them are provided, along with some suggestions about how to use your top strengths. Remember the caution already expressed that a character strength not in your top five should not be regarded as a weakness.

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (Score: 5)

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, a character strength in the virtue category of Transcendence, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. It involves noticing and appreciating beauty and excellence in various domains, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience. The transcendence category includes strengths that allow humans to forge connections to a larger universe. In this case, you connect, directly and powerfully, with excellence.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence (or simply appreciation) refers to the ability to find, recognize, and take pleasure in the existence of goodness in the physical and social worlds. As a person high in this strength, you frequently feel awe and related emotions, including admiration, wonder, and elevation, while walking in the woods or in a city, while reading novels or newspapers, while learning about people's lives, or while watching sports or movies. A person low on this strength goes about daily life as if wearing blinders to that which is beautiful and moving.

You are responsive to physical beauty, including auditory beauty such as music; skill or talent, whether in art, athletic performance or mathematics; and virtue or moral goodness displayed as kindness, compassion, forgiveness and so on. These are self-

transcendent emotions. Appreciation of beauty and excellence is akin to the mystical experience defined a century ago by William James in which one feels a sense of truth, oneness with the universe, an inability to express experience in mere words, and a vividness and clarity of sensation and perception.

It is likely that, to some degree, you inherited a predisposition to appreciation of beauty and excellence. "Openness to experience" is the most heritable of the "Big Five" personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness; conscientiousness, emotional stability and intellectual openness), and appreciation of beauty is closely related to this trait. We can speculate that being raised in a family, school or local environment in which people openly express their appreciation of beauty and excellence also enables the trait. While it is not known, we would also expect that nature-based programs, such as Outward Bound, art-based programs, role-model programs (Big Brothers Big Sisters), and religious retreats would foster development of appreciation of beauty and excellence.

What does research reveal about appreciation of beauty and excellence? This is a mature strength, more salient among adults than adolescents. The VIA Classification regards appreciation of beauty and excellence as a broad strength, brought to bear not only with respect to art and music but also with respect to the beauty of nature and skilled performance of all sorts. A notable example of this strength is when it leads one to notice and marvel at moral excellence—when someone in our vicinity does something selfless and good.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence is a strength that may help you cope with emotional challenges or other difficulties, and is certainly evident in their aftermath. If you are going to stop and smell the roses, you obviously need to appreciate those roses, literal and metaphorical.

In contrast to many of the other VIA strengths, the display of this one leads immediately to a positive emotional experience that can be identified as awe or elevation. Accordingly, to enhance this signature strength, consider learning more about how to savor these positive emotions when they occur. The research literature on savoring provides useful advice. Share your appreciation of beauty and excellence with other like-minded individuals. Immerse yourself in the experience and put other things out of your mind. Take souvenirs, and do not put them out of sight in a drawer.

Some research has found that keeping a "beauty log" enhances the engagement with beauty. When you feel 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. Set a goal to write in your log at least 3 times per week.

Although not extensively studied, what is called upward social comparison—finding role models whose excellence in one or another way really impresses you and gives you a goal—provides another way to enhance this strength. Consider spending more time learning about those people.

Creativity (Score: 5)

Creativity, in the virtue category of Wisdom and Knowledge, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Creativity, simply, is thinking of new ways to do things. It can be defined as novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things that include, but are not limited to, artistic achievement. The virtue category of wisdom and knowledge includes cognitive traits related to the acquisition and use of information in the service of a good life.

Your creativity has two essential components: First, you produce ideas or behaviors that are recognizably original. Words like novel, surprising, ingenious or unusual are often used to describe you. However, there's more to your creativity than originality. You

use this character strength in a positive way to help you solve your own life problems and those of your family, friends and colleagues.

Of course, creativity is found in degrees. At one extreme are those individuals who rarely, if ever, come up with an original idea, and when they do it seldom works. At the other end of the spectrum are those persons who are highly recognized for their exceptional creativity, such as great scientists, poets, composers and painters. The latter is often referred to as "Big C" creativity. "Small c" creativity is somewhere between the two extremes. Everyday creativity, ingenuity, is at play when people are able to generate creative solutions to a variety of problems. Our homes, offices, art galleries, concert halls, transportation systems, and economies are full of examples of creative people ingeniously solving life's dilemmas.

Two primary conclusions can be drawn about the attributes of highly creative individuals. First, creative people are not necessarily intellectually brilliant, yet they are not unintelligent either. All are at least above average in intellectual ability. Second, what really distinguishes creative individuals like you is not your intelligence, but your disposition. You tend to be independent, nonconformist, unconventional, even bohemian, and are likely to have wide interests, greater openness to new experiences and a more conspicuous behavioral and cognitive flexibility and risk-taking boldness.

Creative people work in every domain, from the sciences to the arts. Scientific "creatives" are likely to be less independent, more conventional, less open to new experiences and more intelligent. Artistic "creatives" tend to be more emotionally sensitive.

Creativity, though fairly stable over time, can be enhanced by environments that are supportive, reinforcing, open and informal. On the other hand, creativity can be impeded by time pressure, close supervision or critical examination.

What does research reveal about creativity? By definition, people who are creative like to think of new ways to do things, but this is not the same thing as devising a complicated way of accomplishing something already doable in a simpler and perfectly satisfactory way. True creativity shows itself in practical solutions to challenges in life.

Researchers find that people who are creative combine expertise in a given area with a child-like naïveté, meaning that they see things in a fresh way. Expertise and a fresh perspective exist in obvious tension. Expertise can sometimes over-ride creativity, thereby precluding the fresh look. All sorts of strategies have been suggested for breaking yourself out of the typical way of seeing things, and many come down to asking “What if?” and “Why not?”

How can you build your signature strength of creativity? Most importantly, if your ability to think of new ways to do things is to result in something that is lastingly important, you need to practice, practice, and practice. We may speak about flashes of creativity and sudden insights, but the elaboration of these into something valuable takes hard work and sometimes years of preparation. Also important—probably necessary—is the role of other people. Like many of the VIA strengths, creativity is contagious, and more so than many. We have the popular stereotype of the lone genius working in isolation from others, but that does not square with studies of real people acknowledged as creative. Mentors and teachers figured in the lives of all. As Isaac Newton said, “If I’ve seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.” If you want to be more creative, find your own giants and climb aboard.

To further explore your signature strength of creativity, you also might try:

- Practicing divergent thinking: Develop multiple alternatives rather than one solution when you are faced with a problem.
- Developing a creativity workout: Set aside time

each day solely to think, learn, and perceive in novel ways.

- Examining an event from your past when you used creativity to your benefit and the benefit of others.

Curiosity (Score: 5)

Curiosity, in the virtue category of Wisdom and Knowledge, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Curiosity is taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake, and finding new subjects and topics fascinating. It is exploring and discovering. The wisdom and knowledge virtue category includes positive traits related to the acquisition and use of information in the service of a good life.

Curiosity, interest, novelty-seeking, and openness to experience represent your intrinsic desire for experience and knowledge. You want to know things. And this approach to life is consistent and stable. You actively pursue new, varied, and challenging experiences. While it is true that all individuals experience curiosity, you differ from them in terms of the frequency, intensity and duration of your exploration. You are fulfilled when you find an answer, have a new experience, or learn a new fact, whereas someone who is not curious experiences no such fulfillment and may even be disquieted by novel experiences. Your character strength carries you beyond mere openness to new experiences into the actions associated with personal growth in the cognitive, emotional and behavioral sense. Curiosity has a developmental trajectory. Curious children grow into curious adolescents who become curious adults.

Because curiosity can never be satisfied in the same way twice, it fuels you in both positive and negative ways. It is likely that you constantly ask questions. But not all questions are appropriate in all situations. An overly curious person may stick his or her nose into danger by ignoring “no trespassing” signs, literally and metaphorically.

A number of social and environmental factors can influence the development and expression of curiosity. Because new situations inherently provoke anxiety, caregivers who nurture and grant autonomy are likely to enhance the development of curiosity in infants and toddlers. These children are more likely to be open to new experiences and master developmental tasks. Anxiety and excessive self-focused attention are inhibiting factors with regard to the experience and expression of curiosity. The belief that you have autonomy in any given situation has been shown to facilitate curiosity. Internal locus of control is important here. Also important are dynamic, reciprocal relationships, feelings of belonging and closeness to others.

What does research reveal about curiosity? Among adults, it is one of the strengths most robustly linked to satisfaction with life and to work. People who are curious are happy and will be happy. Curiosity characterizes people in teaching professions and more generally those whose work entails knowledge and the acquiring of new information.

How can you develop or enhance your curiosity? Perhaps paradoxically, people tend to be curious about topics about which they already know a great deal. People who are curious ask lots of questions, and they take the answers seriously, which leads to more questions. Some practical advice is therefore to identify an area of your life (e.g., a hobby, work) in which you are expert and resolve to become even more of an expert. Ask questions, do research, Google away. And talk to other people who are more expert than you in this area.

You also might try:

- Practicing being curious when you come upon an activity that you dislike. Pay attention to at least three novel features of this activity while you do it.
- Applying curiosity in one new way each day for a specified period of time.
- Writing about ways you use curiosity in your work, family life or pursuit of pleasure.

Gratitude (Score: 4.9)

Gratitude is one of your top five, or Signature Character Strengths. Gratitude, a strength in the virtue category of Transcendence, is the sense of thankfulness in response to a gift. The gift can be deliberate, such as a piece of art from your child; or an accident, such as a cool breeze on your face on a hot day. What marks gratitude is your psychological response to the gift: the transcendent emotion of grace – the sense that you have benefited from the actions of another.

Grateful people experience a variety of positive emotions, and may even be inspired to act in more virtuous ways – being more humble, for example, or persistent, or kinder. Gratitude is empathetic, too: Grateful people not only recognize when they've been given a gift, but they can empathize with the effort involved by the giver.

Psychologists have found that gratitude is sustained across situations and over time. Theorists have identified three components of gratitude: (a) A warm sense of appreciation for somebody or something; (b) A sense of goodwill toward that person or thing; and (c) A disposition to act that flows from appreciation and goodwill.

Gratitude is highly prized in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu thought; Cicero held that “gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.”

Your disposition toward gratitude appears to enhance pleasant feeling states more than it diminishes unpleasant emotions. In other words, you don't deny or ignore the negative aspects of life. Your gratitude, however, typically makes you more open to experience, more conscientious, more extraverted, more agreeable and less neurotic than your less-grateful counterparts.

Your strength of gratitude enhances your personal and relational well-being and is quite likely beneficial

for society as a whole. You tend to provide compassion, sympathy, financial loans, and emotional support more frequently than non-grateful people. You also may be healthier: The effects of positive emotions closely related to gratitude positively affect cardiovascular and immune functioning.

One successful strategy to enhance gratitude in children is when parents emphasize the strength of community created or strengthened through gratefulness, and diminished or destroyed through ingratitude. The focus is on thankfulness – not politeness or obligation.

What does research reveal about gratitude? Among adolescents and adults, it is one of the strengths most robustly linked to satisfaction and happiness. Grateful students earn better grades. Grateful people enjoy their work.

We know a great deal about the cultivation of gratitude. Different research groups have shown that people who stop and count their blessings on a regular basis become happier, lastingly so if they make this a regular routine (doing this at the end of the day seems to work better than doing it at the beginning of the day). You can count your blessings - recall moments of gratitude associated with even ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people you encountered - in your head or out loud. However, what seems to work best is literally to write them out and then reflect on why these good things have happened.

The point is to be mindful while being grateful. That allows the benefits to permeate the rest of your life and to make you attentive throughout the day to what goes well. Saying perfunctory grace over dinner, for example, can be so ritualized as to become mindless and unlikely to build gratitude as a strength.

To further explore your signature strength of gratitude, you might try:

- Writing a gratitude letter to someone who has had a

meaningful impact on your life. Consider delivering the letter in person.

- Praying. Prayer has been found to increase gratitude. Pray in a form that is comfortable to you, e.g., prayers of thanksgiving for the good in your life.
- Replacing any ungrateful thoughts that you have with thoughts of gratitude and appreciation.

Forgiveness and Mercy (Score: 4.8)

Forgiveness and Mercy, in the virtue category of Temperance, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Simply, forgiveness and mercy is letting bygones be bygones. It is granting pardon to those who have done wrong, accepting the shortcomings of others, giving people a second chance or not being vengeful. The virtue category of temperance includes character strengths that protect us from excess.

As someone with a strong disposition to forgive, you would be able to say: “When someone hurts my feelings, I manage to get over it fairly quickly. I don’t hold a grudge for very long. I think it’s important to do what I can to mend my relationships with people who have hurt or betrayed me in the past. I am not the kind of person to try to get even.”

Forgiveness and mercy is the character strength that undoes hatred. Forgiveness and mercy are the opposite of spite, vengeance, hard-heartedness, and mercilessness.

Forgiveness can be defined as the removal or cancellation of a transgression or debt so that a transgressor becomes a candidate for a restored relationship with the offended party. In some religions, including Judaism, it is paired with repentance on the part of the transgressor, which involves sincere remorse, compensation and a resolution to behave differently in the future. In Christian theology, repentance is not required for forgiveness. Buddhism has no direct concept for forgiveness, but it is closely related to compassion, which emphasizes easing the suffering of others.

Scholars agree that forgiveness is separate from the concept of reconciliation, which is the restoration of the broken relationship, and involves the restoration of trust.

As you know, when you forgive, your psychological responses to the transgressor and transgression become more positive (i.e., benevolent) and less negative (i.e., malevolent). As your moral reasoning has developed, you have come to view forgiveness as an unconditional gift given to transgressors based on your belief in the innate value of all persons.

Scientists have shown the willingness to forgive varies with age, with young children generally being least willing to forgive and older adults being most willing. More likely to forgive are people who experience empathy, who adopt the perspective of the transgressor, who are agreeable in nature and do not ruminate on the offense. Less likely to be forgiven are the transgressions that are perceived to be intentionally committed and have severe consequences. Apologies promote forgiveness. Partners who characterize their relationship as highly satisfying, committed and close are more likely to forgive when transgressions occur.

What does research reveal about forgiveness? It is rare as a signature strength, especially among the young. It is more likely to be encountered among those who are married as opposed to those who are not, a finding that makes perfect sense and is worth considering by anyone who is unmarried but wants to be. Forgiveness is also more likely to be encountered as a signature strength among those whose work entails supervising others. Again, this is a finding that makes sense and provides insight into what it means to work effectively with other people.

Forgiveness is a challenging character strength to build. People who have greatly harmed us are of course the people we should consider forgiving, but if the harm is too deep and too grave, forgiveness is daunting, even repellent. Perhaps it is useful to realize that forgiveness is not a favor to the other

person but a gift to ourselves. It takes an emotional burden off our shoulders. Forgiveness liberates us from the past, although it need not entail forgetting what has happened. As John F. Kennedy famously remarked, "Forgive your enemies, but never forget their names."

There have been a number of interesting findings on how to build forgiveness. Keep in mind that with most of these it is ideal to have a helping professional at your side to support you, to help process feelings that emerge, and to help encourage you forward or caution you back as you navigate this territory.

Perhaps the most important concept related to forgiveness and enhancing forgiveness is that it is a process. Viewing forgiveness as a yes or no decision to make is unproductive. Rather, forgiveness should be repeated and practiced over time in different ways (e.g., journaling, writing letters, talking, reflection, etc.)

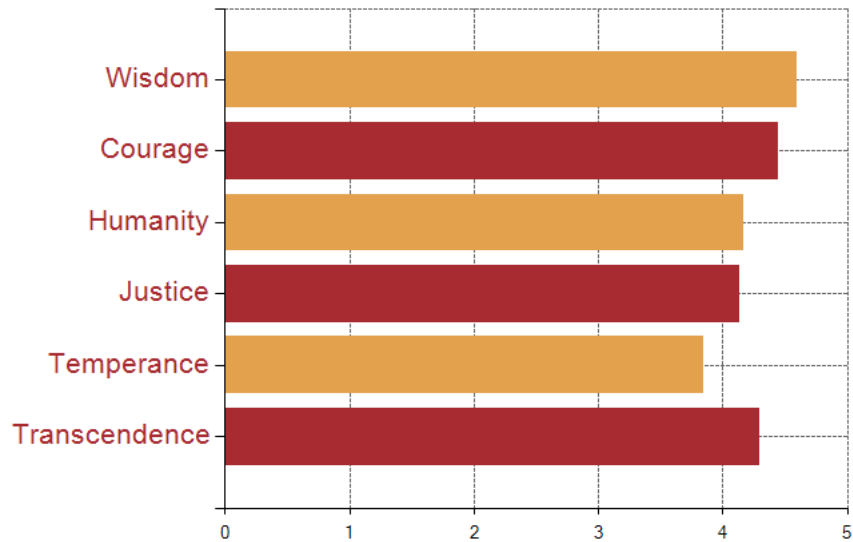
Research has found you can build forgiveness by writing about the personal benefits that may have resulted from a negative incident (e.g., a new behavior or activity you now do) or by writing about the meaning that the negative incident had for you (e.g., realizing a new purpose in life).

Extensive research shows that it is important to make a commitment to forgive and when ready, empathize with the transgressor.

Another strategy is to practice forgiveness in baby steps, starting with people who have not committed grievous sins but instead just annoy you. Positive psychologists call this letting go of grudges and recommend that it be done privately by simply resolving not to let one or another annoying person dominate your thoughts and feelings. Life is short and precious. Why let a jerk define your existence?

4. Core Virtues

The VIA Classification identifies six core virtues: (a) wisdom, (b) courage, (c) humanity, (d) justice, (e) temperance, and (f) transcendence. Some people have signature character strengths across these core virtues, whereas others have their most notable strengths within one or two virtue categories. This feedback shows you where your scores fall in terms of the virtue classification.



The Virtues

Wisdom and Knowledge – cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge

Courage – emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal

Humanity – interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others

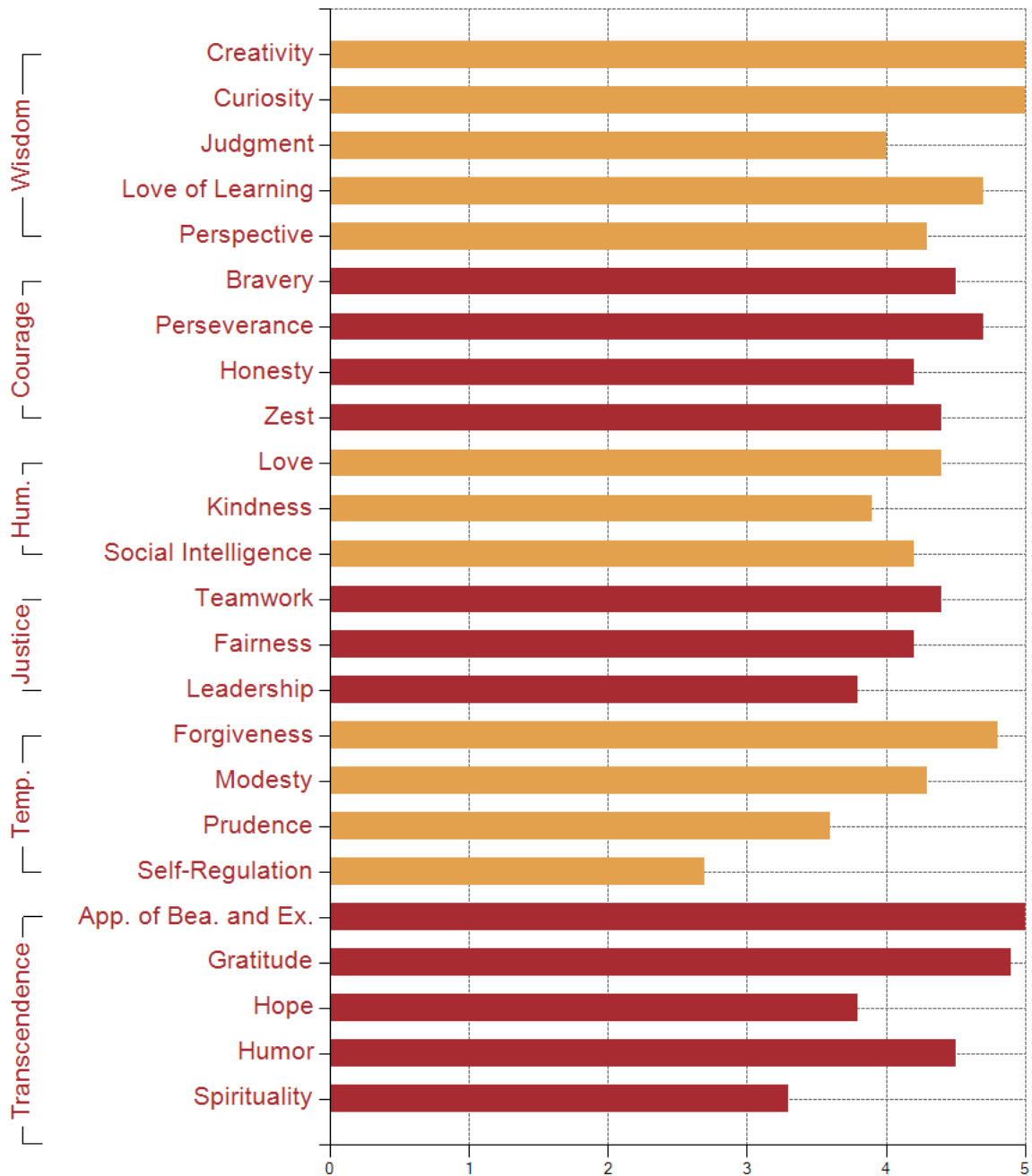
Justice – civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

Temperance – strengths that protect against excess

Transcendence – strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

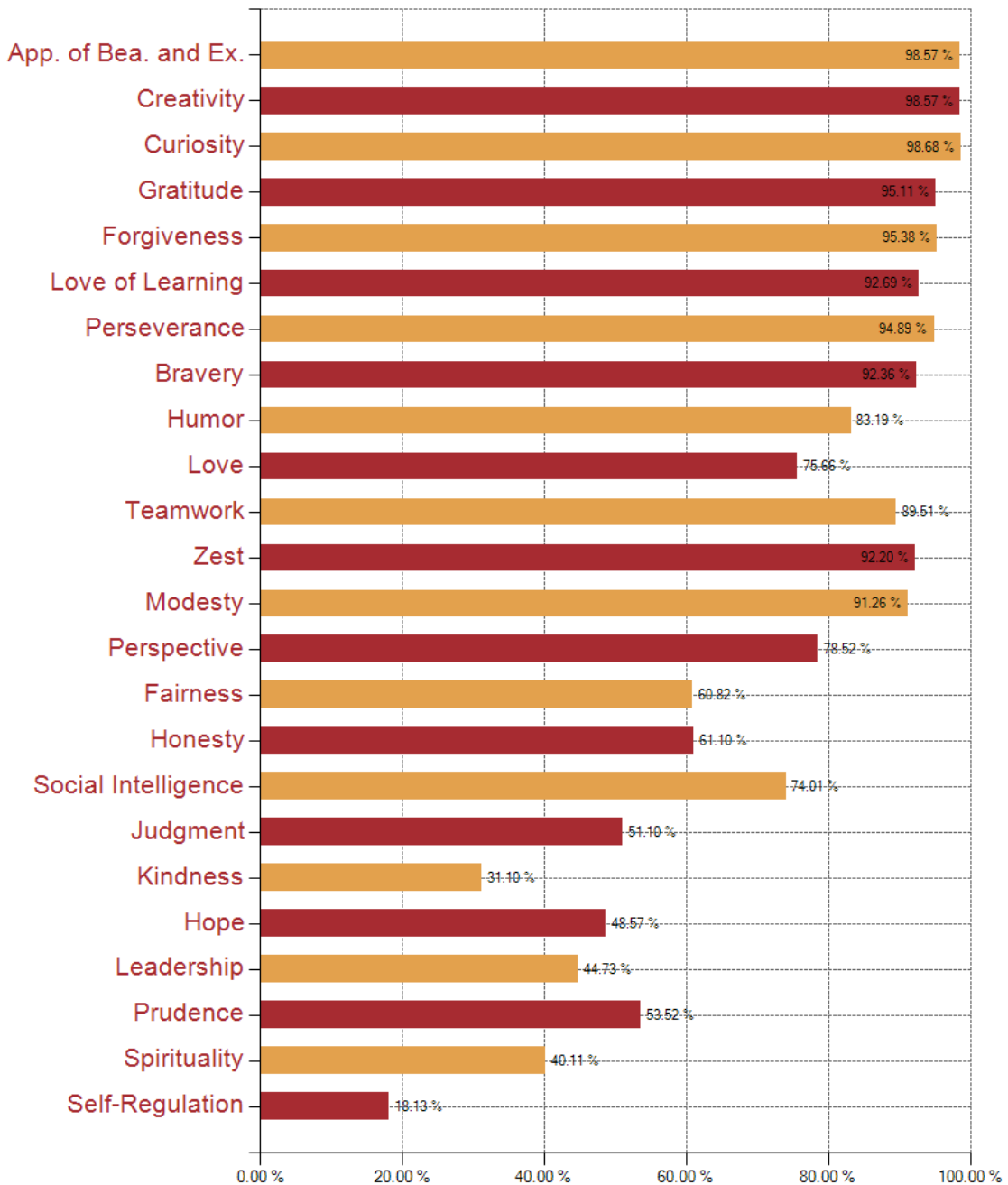
5. Your Character Strengths Grouped by Virtue Categories

This is your strengths profile showing your character strengths grouped within the virtue categories. The numbers 1 - 5 correspond to raw data scores.



6. Comparative Profile

This is your comparative profile, which indicates your character strengths compared to people who are like you in terms of age, gender and education. They are female and have some college. Scores are presented as percentiles. Percentile scores are understood as the percentage of people who scored lower than you. For example, if your score is 84%, then 84% of the population in your category scored lower than you and 16% scored higher.



7. Balance

One of the things that has been discovered about the structure of character strengths is that people and their strengths can be described along two dimensions: (a) a self-versus-other focus (e.g., curiosity versus teamwork); and (b) a head-versus-heart focus (e.g., open-mindedness versus gratitude).

In this circumplex model, your signature strengths are shown in red, or the darkest color. Two strengths close together on the graph comfortably co-occur, but strengths that are far apart are more likely to be traded off. The farther apart the two strengths are, the less likely it is that you habitually show both.

