

Appreciative Assessments

One tool for discovering strengths, based on the classification of strengths developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004), is the [Values-in-Action \(VIA\) Inventory of Character Strengths Survey](#). Just click on the link to take the Survey online, free of charge. After responding to 240 statements, respondents receive a report of their twenty-four character strengths in rank order. Although all twenty-four represent respondent strengths, the top five are identified as “signature strengths” since they are the ones that respondents tend to use most frequently, naturally, and easily. In the Peterson and Seligman taxonomy, the twenty-four character strengths are organized around six large categories called “virtues” that emerge consistently across history and culture as important for good life and work.

The VIA Taxonomy of Virtues and Strengths

- I. *Wisdom and knowledge*: Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
 1. Creativity: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
 2. Curiosity: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
 3. Open-mindedness: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
 4. Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
 5. Perspective: Being able to provide wise counsel to others

- II. *Courage*: Emotional strengths that involve exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal
 6. Honesty/authenticity: Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
 7. Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
 8. Perseverance: Finishing what one starts
 9. Zest: Approaching life with excitement and energy

- III. *Humanity*: Interpersonal strengths that entail “tending and befriending” others
 10. Kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others
 11. Love: Valuing close relations with others
 12. Social intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others

IV. *Justice*: Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

13. Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
14. Leadership: Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
15. Teamwork: Working well as a member of a group or team

V. *Temperance*: Strengths that protect against excess

16. Forgiveness: Forgiving those who have done wrong
17. Modesty: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
18. Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
19. Self-Regulation: Regulating what one feels and does

VI. *Transcendence*: Strengths that build connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

20. Appreciation of beauty: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life
21. Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
22. Hope: Expecting the best and working to achieve it
23. Humor: Liking to laugh and joke; bringing smiles to other people
24. Spirituality / religiousness: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life (Park & Peterson, 2009, p. 67)

As with the appreciative interviews, the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire does not ask about or focus on weaknesses. The twenty-fourth strength is not a weakness; it is a strength that one uses less frequently, naturally, and easily. Although we may at times lose sight of them, everyone has some experience of all the strengths. Teachers often find it quite affirming to discover and organize their strengths in this way. Posting a teacher's top five "signature strengths" in a place where both the teacher and the coach can refer to them regularly may enable teachers to tap into these strengths as they brainstorm ideas and design experiments to facilitate their learning and growth.