



Character Strengths

The importance of character strengths has been argued by across history.

From Aristotle (who championed practical wisdom), Confucius (benevolence), Cicero (gratitude), Aquinas (faith, hope, charity), and Comte–Sponville (love), no consensus has been reached.

And yet, we know that they are important.

The list of 24 strengths developed by positive psychologists Seligman and Peterson (2004),* are proposed to be the strongest character attributes, with the top five considered to be *signature* strengths.

Nurturing strengths is linked to increased happiness and satisfaction. In particular, the strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity are consistently associated with life satisfaction.

Character Strengths, the parts of personality that affect how we think, feel and act are divided into 6 core areas, called Virtues.

The 6 Areas of Character Strengths

Wisdom & Knowledge	Courage	Humanity	Justice	Moderation	Transcendence
creativity	bravery	love	teamwork	forgiveness	appreciation of beauty
curiosity	persistence	kindness	fairness	modesty	gratitude
judgement	integrity	social intelligence	leadership	prudence	hope
love of learning	zest			self-control	humour
perspective					spirituality

The 24 Character Strengths

Creativity [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.

Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience; finding all subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.

Judgment [open-mindedness, critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one’s mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.



Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows

Perspective [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.

Bravery [valour]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.

Persistence [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks.

Integrity [authenticity, honesty]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way; being without pretence; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.

Zest [vitality, enthusiasm, vigour, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.

Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.

Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favours and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.

Social intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit in to different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

Citizenship [social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.

Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.

Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintaining good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

Forgiveness and mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

Modesty and humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.

Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.



Self-regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.

Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.

Humour [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.

Spirituality [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

As humans we often tend to overestimate our strengths in certain areas, and to underestimate ourselves in others. The use of strengths in life, and in the workplace is linked to greater work satisfaction, increased engagement, and greater productivity.

*Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.