

Self-study material for students | © University of Helsinki Career Services

Identify your strengths and areas of development

Why?

Defining your skills and competence areas is not an easy task, but it is one that will significantly improve your job prospects. There are many ways to categorise skills. One set of skills involves the understanding of the phenomena, questions and themes of your field. Another is academic skills, which include, for example, an understanding of theoretical knowledge, critical analysis or research methodology skills. General career skills, in turn, are those accumulated through studies and all kinds of work experience: for example, you can improve your interpersonal skills or organisation skills through project-based courses or a job in the service industry.

In addition to the understanding, knowledge and skills that we acquire, we all also have personal strengths. Some of us are quick by nature and find it easy to grasp new things, while others are meticulous and thorough. Some are great listeners, while others shine when they get to be the centre of attention. Different jobs require different strengths, so all qualities can be either strengths or weaknesses depending on the job. The main thing is that you are able to identify and describe in many ways not just your skills, but also your strengths.

The purpose of this assignment is to help you identify and articulate your personal strengths and areas in need of development. The results will help you hone your job search documents and your job interview performance, for example.

What?

The assignment has three parts. The three parts are:

- 1. Mapping your skills and qualities
- 2. Articulating and prioritising your skills and qualities
- 3. Identifying areas in need of development

1. Mapping your skills and qualities

Think about qualities that describe you and skills that you have. You may have learned these at school, at university, at work or from your family, or they might simply be a part of your innate personality. Make a list or map of your strengths. At this point, leave all criticism aside and write down anything you can think of. **Note! You can also use the lists of skills and qualities provided as an appendix for inspiration.** They can help you find words to describe yourself.

Consider the following:

- What strengths and positive qualities can you see in yourself?
- What have you received positive feedback on from your friends, family, fellow students, colleagues or others?
- What do you enjoy doing? (We tend to be good at what we enjoy.)



• What have you succeeded at in your life? What positive things do these successes say about you?

2. Articulating and prioritising your skills and qualities

Now look at your list or map again. Choose about 5-10 skills/strengths/qualities that you feel describe you best or are otherwise topical for you. Use the following questions to describe them in more detail.

- In which situation have you used this skill, strength or quality?
- What role or part did you play in the situation? What happened?
- What was the end result?
- What other skills or qualities did you practise? What did you learn from the situation?

Example:

Skill / strength: organisational skills.

Description: I organised a student event at the University. The result was a successful event that attracted many participants and had a good vibe.

The skills I used (and developed): negotiation skills, coordination skills, public speaking skills, innovation skills, etc.

3. Identifying areas in need of development

Which skills do you list under areas in need of development? Choose one to five things that you would genuinely like to improve about yourself or that you think will prove useful in your studies or professional life.

Then think of concrete ways to develop these skills. For example, if you want to develop your language skills, make a plan: when, where and how will you improve your language skills. Bear in mind that none of us can possess every strength.

Sources: This assignment is based on the University of Helsinki Career Services assignment 'Analyse your strengths'. The word list has been adapted based on the strengths identification assignment by Riitta Aikkola, published in Finnish in Aikkola, R. 2011. <u>Valttityönhakutaidot – työkirja opiskelijalle</u>. Vaasa: Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.



Assignment appendix: The lists of skills and qualities

Print out and have a look on the following two lists. On a scale of **'not at all' to 'very accurately'**, rate how well the skills and qualities listed below describe you. You may have learned these at school, at university, at work or from your family, or they might simply be a part of your innate personality.

Go through the list fairly quickly. As you look through the list, you can tick the box on the right for any qualities or skills that you immediately know you want to improve. If you think you have a skill or quality missing from the list, feel free to add it!

This describes me, my way of working or my skills: I am	Not at all	To some extent	Fairly accurately	Very accurately	l want to improve this
able to seize opportunities					
active					
ambitious					
analytical					
benevolent					
brave					
broad-minded					
calm					
caring					
cautious					
compassionate					
composed					
considerate					
consistent					
controlled					
creative					
determined					
easy-going					
energetic					
enterprising					
enthusiastic					
fair-minded					
fearless					
flexible					
forthright					
gentle					
good at organising					
good with my hands					
happy					
hard-working					
helpful					



honest					
humble					
humorous					
imaginative					
independent					
innovative					
inquisitive					
insightful					
inspiring					
kind					
lively					
mathematically talented					
mature					
natural					
nice					
open					
organised					
outgoing					
persistent					
pleasant					
polite					
practical					
quick					
quick to learn					
quiet					
rational					
realistic					
reflective					
resourceful					
self-reliant					
sensitive					
social					
spontaneous					
sporty	\Box	\square	\square	$\overline{\square}$	\square
strong-willed		\square	\square	\square	\square
sympathetic	\square	\Box	\square	\square	\square
talkative					
thorough					
tolerant					
trusting					
unselfish					
warm-hearted					



This describes me, my way of working or my skills: I am good at	Not at all	To some extent	Fairly accurately	Very accurately	l want to improve this
adapting to new situations					
applying my knowledge and skills					
categorising things					
coming up with new ideas					
communicating clearly					
conducting research					
controlling myself					
delegating					
developing visions					
expressing myself in writing					
expressing myself orally					
finishing things					
gathering information					
getting along with people					
giving and receiving feedback					
handling conflict situations					
handling public relations					
holding the reins					
identifying my strengths					
influencing people					
justifying things					
learning from failures					
learning from past experiences					
listening to others					
making decisions					
making new acquaintances and contacts					
making observations					
making plans					
making small talk					
managing a project					
managing and tolerating routines					
managing my emotions					
managing my time					
managing myself					



managing pagelo							
managing people							
managing processes							
managing risks							
managing stress							
managing things							
mathematical thinking							
motivating myself							
moving things forward							
networking							
organising							
participating in meetings							
performing in front of an audience							
persuading people							
picturing the future							
planning my career							
prioritising							
questioning matters							
respecting diversity							
rewarding others							
sharing information							
solving problems							
strategic thinking							
supporting others							
taking controlled risks							
teaching others							
theoretical thinking							
tolerating uncertainty							
training others							
trusting myself							
understanding and managing the							
bigger picture		[[_		
understanding how the economy works							
understanding the basics of business							
using computers and software							
working in a group							
What else:							