

VIA Character Strengths

What your results mean, and how to put them to work

What VIA is

The VIA Survey is a free questionnaire of about 10–15 minutes that ranks 24 character strengths from most to least characteristic of you. You took it after Session 5. More than 35 million people worldwide have taken it, according to the [VIA Institute on Character](https://www.viacharacter.org/).

- **Origin.** Psychologists Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman led a three-year study of virtue across religions, philosophies and cultures. They published the result in *Character Strengths and Virtues* (2004), a deliberate counterpart to the clinical manual of disorders.
- **What it measures.** Who you are at your best, not what you are skilled at. Talents are what you *can* do; character strengths are how you *tend* to do it.
- **Signature strengths.** Your top 3–7 strengths feel essential (“this is the real me”), energize rather than drain, and show up across settings. These are the main payoff of the survey.

Think of the 24 strengths as a keyboard: every person owns all 24 keys. Your signature strengths are the chords your hands find without looking.

The structure: 6 virtues, 24 strengths

The six virtues are the broad categories every tradition studied prized; the 24 strengths are the concrete routes to each.

Virtue	Its character strengths
Wisdom	Creativity • Curiosity • Judgment • Love of Learning • Perspective
Courage	Bravery • Perseverance • Honesty • Zest
Humanity	Love • Kindness • Social Intelligence
Justice	Teamwork • Fairness • Leadership
Temperance	Forgiveness • Humility • Prudence • Self-Regulation
Transcendence	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence • Gratitude • Hope • Humor • Spirituality

Wisdom and Transcendence hold five strengths each; Humanity and Justice hold three. No virtue outranks another, and your profile is a mix across all six.

Why identify and use them

Naming a strength is a start; *using* it on purpose is where the research shows results.

- **Lasting lift in well-being.** In a randomized trial, people who used a signature strength in a new way each day for one week were happier and less depressed for six months afterward (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, *American Psychologist*, 2005).
- **Some strengths matter most for life satisfaction.** Hope, zest, gratitude, love and curiosity show the strongest links to a satisfying life (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). All five can be practiced.
- **Work and service feel like a calling.** People who use four or more signature strengths in their daily work report more positive experiences and are more likely to see that work as a calling (Harzer & Ruch, 2012).
- **A common language.** Twenty-four plain words let a group name the good it sees in each other, instead of only the problems it sees.
- **Resilience.** Strengths are resources to draw on under stress; VIA reports users bounce back from difficulty and reach goals more readily.
- **Portable identity.** A job title retires; character does not. Strengths travel from career into the next chapter.

Peter Drucker put it bluntly in *Managing Oneself*: “Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong... And yet, a person can perform only from strength.”

Scripture says it more warmly: “**Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others**” (1 Peter 4:10).

Putting it to work

- 1 You took the free survey at viacharacter.org after Session 5. If you have not, it takes about 10–15 minutes, and the free result, which ranks all 24, is all you need. VIA also sells optional paid reports (Top 5, Total 24); none is required for this program.
- 2 Circle your top five and ask of each: “*Is this the real me?*” Keep the ones that ring true as your signature strengths.
- 3 Pick one and use it in a new way every day for a week. Example: if Curiosity is high, ask one person a question you have never asked them.
- 4 Spot strengths in others. Name one you see in your wife, a friend or a group member this week.

Sources: [VIA Institute home](http://VIAInstitute.org) · [The 24 character strengths](#). Research citations are listed by author and year.

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Wise Men Still Seek, Knowing Their Why’s