

## Introduction

**By Christopher Peterson, Ph.D.**

*Science Director, VIA Institute*

*Professor, University of Michigan*

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
  - o Creativity
  - o Curiosity
  - o Judgment & Open-Mindedness
  - o Love of Learning
  - o Perspective
2. Courage
  - o Bravery
  - o Perseverance
  - o Honesty
  - o Zest
3. Humanity
  - o Capacity to Love and Be Loved
  - o Kindness
  - o Social Intelligence
4. Justice
  - o Teamwork
  - o Fairness
  - o Leadership
5. Temperance
  - o Forgiveness & Mercy
  - o Modesty & Humility
  - o Prudence
  - o Self-Regulation
6. Transcendence
  - o Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
  - o Gratitude
  - o Hope
  - o Humor
  - o Religiousness & 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: Love of Learning (Score: 4.9)**

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 #2: Hope (Score: 4.7)**

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 #3: Perseverance (Score: 4.6)**

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 #4: Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (Score: 4.5)**

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 #5: Curiosity (Score: 4.5)**

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

### **Strength #6: Zest (Score: 4.5)**

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 #7: Bravery (Score: 4.4)**

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 #8: Humor (Score: 4.4)**

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 #9: Judgment and Open-Mindedness (Score: 4.4)**

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 #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: Religiousness and Spirituality (Score: 4.4)**

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 #12: Teamwork (Score: 4.3)**

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 #13: Kindness (Score: 4.2)**

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 #14: Perspective (Score: 4.2)**

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: Gratitude (Score: 4.1)**

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 #16: Social Intelligence (Score: 4.1)**

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 #17: Leadership (Score: 4)**

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 #18: Prudence (Score: 4)**

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 #19: Self-Regulation (Score: 3.9)**

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.

**Strength #20: Forgiveness and Mercy (Score: 3.8)**

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

**Strength #21: Fairness (Score: 3.7)**

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 #22: Honesty (Score: 3.7)**

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 #23: Creativity (Score: 3.2)**

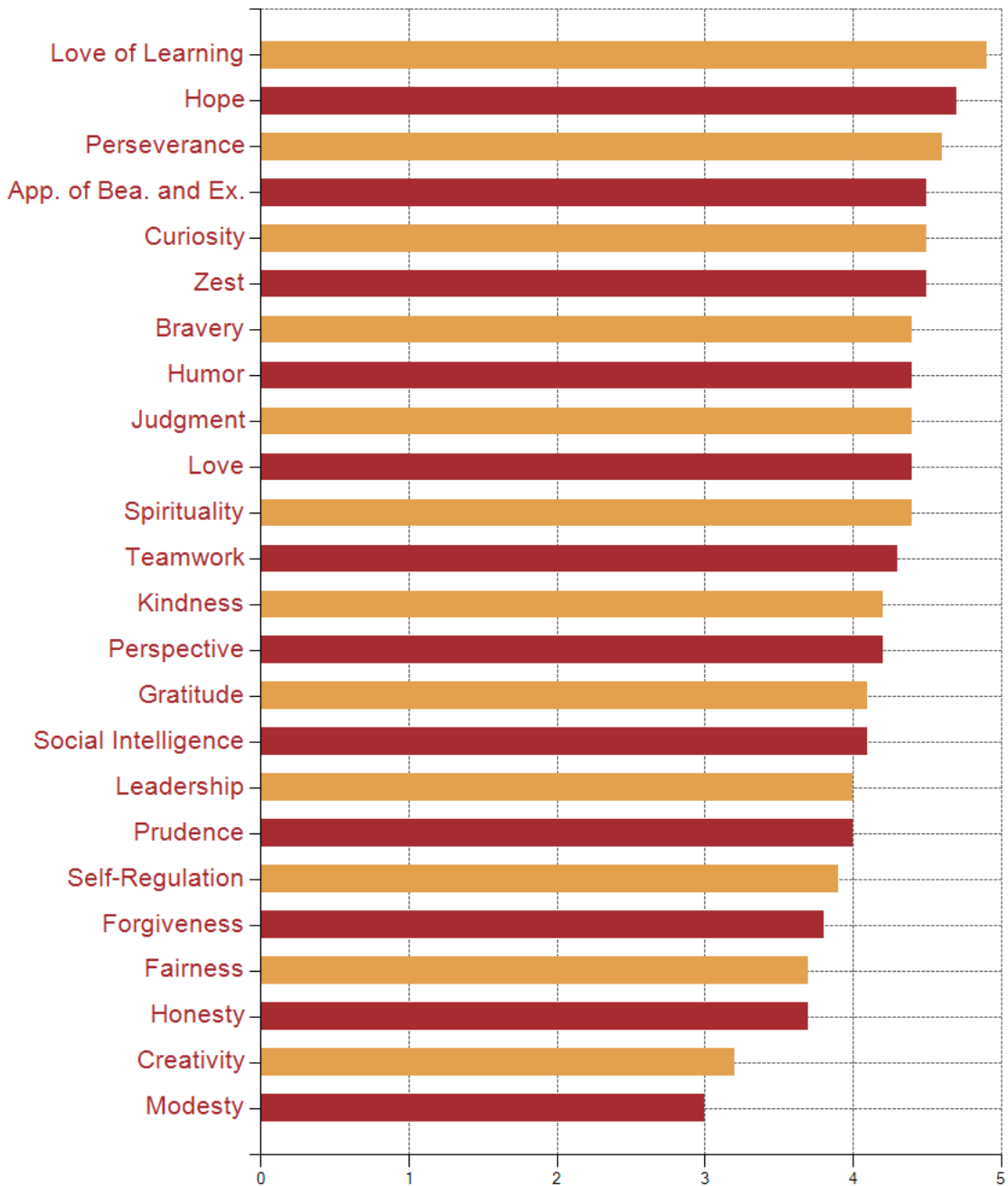
Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. You are never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible.

**Strength #24: Modesty and Humility (Score: 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.

## 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.

#### Love of Learning (Score: 4.9)

Love of Learning, a character strength in the virtue category of Wisdom and Knowledge, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Simply, it is having a passion for learning for its own sake. It is mastering new skills, topics and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally. Love of learning is the sustained version of another VIA strength – curiosity – and the two strengths often go together. Curiosity means that one finds the world an interesting place. Love of learning means you add systematically to what you know about the interesting world in which you live. The wisdom and knowledge virtue category includes strengths that are primarily cognitive in nature and are related to the acquisition of knowledge and information in the service of a good life.

Love of learning describes the way in which you engage new information and skills generally, and the well-developed individual interest you show with particular content, such as video games, politics, flowers, history.

You and others high in this character strength are cognitively engaged. You typically experience positive feelings in the process of acquiring skills, satisfying your curiosity, building on existing knowledge, and/or learning something completely new. This strength helps you persist in the face of setbacks, challenges and negative feedback.

Love of learning is inherently fulfilling—that is why it's called love. That warm emotion persists even when frustrations intrude. One qualification: Those positive feelings may not always be front-and-center in your awareness while you're learning something. Instead, you may be in a state of flow and not especially mindful of anything other than the task at hand.

Love of learning describes the process of engaging content that may or may not result in immediate achievement or a high test score. Instead, over time, you may develop a deeper or wider knowledge of things to be learned, and be able to make substantial and creative contributions to others' understanding of them.

This character strength is one of the most treasured - by teachers, parents, and colleagues. Your love of learning can elevate other people in the vicinity. It may also be contagious, stealing from one student to another until all are engaged.

What does research reveal about love of learning? It is associated, not surprisingly, with education. Love of learning leads us to seek further education, and further education leads us to love learning more. Those in professions that require the ongoing acquisition of new information, like journalism and teaching, are especially high on the strength of love of learning.

It is not one of the most common signature strengths in the VIA Classification, and it is more common among adolescents than adults. This means that as you get older, you may need to guard against its erosion. For you, there should be no such thing as enough knowledge.

Love of learning supports positive experiences, which in turn, may predispose psychological and physical well-being. This character strength has been associated with healthy, productive aging.

As noted, this strength needs to be nurtured if it is to be sustained over time. Researchers have identified factors that support learning to learn. These include strategies that teachers (including parents, employers or therapists) can use to adjust instruction to match students' learning styles; tasks designed to meet learners' strengths, interest and needs; and methods people can use to regulate their own learning.

How can you build this signature strength? Avail yourself of opportunities, formal and informal, to learn more. Take an evening class. Join a book club. One's hobby can also provide all sorts of opportunities to learn. For example, gardeners tend to score very high on this strength. As you know, gardening is not just scattering seeds about and seeing what happens. A gardener needs to learn all sorts of things to be successful. By implication, most any recreational activity other than watching television provides a way to use this strength and enhance it.

This character strength seems to be enhanced by curiosity; when you are curious about a subject, you are more likely to love learning about it. Also important to building this character strength is the meaning you attach to the subject you're learning - or what you will gain by learning it.

### **Hope (Score: 4.7)**

Hope, a character strength in the virtue category of Transcendence, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Hope is expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it. Hope, optimism, future-mindedness, or future orientation all represent a pervasive cognitive, emotional and motivational stance toward the future characterized by sustained good cheer and goal-directed efforts. The virtue category of transcendence includes character traits that reach beyond people, to forge a connection to the larger universe.

As someone high in hope and optimism, you possess

both "little optimism"—characterized by specific expectations—and "big optimism." As an example of the former, it's common for you to think like this: "I will find a convenient parking space this evening." Big optimism refers to larger and less specific expectations, such as, "Our nation is on the verge of something great." You are anchored in the present but tethered to the future, constantly setting goals and planning your strategies. You make "to do" lists, wear a wristwatch, and balance your checkbook, activities that imply an orientation to the future. You feel hopeful and you feel with conviction. You are full of good cheer and good feeling, and you are energized and directed by these emotions.

Your character is highly admired by society. You see the bright side, reach for the stars, keep your chin up, and so on. Your optimism is, more often than not, self-fulfilling and contagious. As such, your character strength is a gift to others. Anthropologist Lionel Tiger argued that hope is what makes the human condition possible. Because our intellectual ability allows us to foresee our own mortality, hope arose to keep us in motion despite existential dread. Your optimism makes you popular, successful, and desired.

Hope and optimism have significant positive consequences. They predict success in all sorts of domains: academic, athletic, military, political and vocational. They are correlated with freedom from anxiety and depression; good social relationships and physical well-being. Hope and optimism also correlate with active problem-solving and attention to problem-relevant sources of information. They are associated with conscientiousness, diligence and the ability to delay gratification. The only well-documented downside of this strength is a tendency to downplay risks.

Some research points toward likely enabling factors for hope, such as family environment and parenting styles, adherence to orthodox religion, and past experience of success, whereas trauma and failure of all sorts leads to more pessimism.

What else does research reveal about hope? Among children, adolescents, and adults, it is one of the strengths most robustly linked to satisfaction with life. People who are hopeful are unlikely to be anxious or depressed. Hopeful students do better in school. Hopeful people persevere, especially when challenged. They are also more resilient. Bad things do happen to people, but hope is a buffer, mitigating the psychological damage that can follow in the wake of setbacks and failures. One of the most solid research findings in the literature is that hope leads to a long life. According to the VIA database, the most hopeful people across jobs are CEOs. They have to be! And if you can think of yourself as the CEO of your own life, then hope will serve you well.

A great deal is known about how to build hope and optimism. Like many of the VIA strengths, hope is contagious, which means that if you can choose the people with whom you associate, opt for those who are themselves optimistic. They will rub off on you. That's just one strategy, of course, and a rather passive one.

A second strategy is to become aware of what psychologists call your automatic thoughts. When you encounter a setback or difficulty, what is your immediate reaction? Some people spiral off into despair. Other people, like you, do not catastrophize. Instead, you think that there is a lesson here to be learned and that the challenge can be surmounted. You do not automatically conclude that failure makes you a loser. Our automatic thoughts importantly determine our emotional reactions, even if we are not entirely aware of it happening. In the rare times you feel pessimistic, if you can become more aware and interrupt yourself, you will support even more your strength of hope.

A related idea is that many people are reluctant to congratulate themselves when things do go well. However, research is clear that optimism is built by success, and you need to recognize the successes in your life for the building to occur. Congratulating yourself can be a private and quiet thing, but it needs

to occur if you want to enhance your hope.

One of the most important strategies for building hope is to set goals. It is important to construct goals that are realistic and meaningful to you. The next step is to think about multiple pathways you might take to reach a goal (note this is very different than thinking there is only one way you can attain the goal). What will help keep you motivated to reach the goal? Who will support you or how will you support yourself when challenges arise?

Write about your best possible self: Take some time to imagine a future in which you are bringing your best possible self forward. Visualize this in a way that is very pleasing to you and that you are interested in. After you have formed this idea, share it with someone in your support network.

### **Perseverance (Score: 4.6)**

Perseverance, in the virtue category of Courage, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Perseverance, simply, is sticking with things. It is finishing what one starts, persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles, taking pleasure in completing tasks. The virtue category of courage includes character strengths that entail the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal.

Perseverance is not as flashy as bravery, but it involves the mustering of your will in the face of contrary impulses. It is not fear that threatens your action, but boredom, tedium, frustration and difficulty. You successfully fight the temptation to do something easier and perhaps more pleasurable. Perseverance is not laziness, sloth, giving up, losing heart, losing interest, taking shortcuts, going for the quick fix, or vacillation.

Society highly values perseverance. We salute the tortoise, the little engine that could, and Rocky Balboa. Their success is not what draws us. Rather, it is their perseverance. A paragon of persistence is

Thomas Edison, who doggedly tried more than 6,000 substances before hitting on carbonized cotton thread as a useful filament for the electric light bulb. He famously is reported to have said, “Genius is 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration.”

It is likely that you persevere because you expect to reach your goal. Scientists have shown that when you perceive you will succeed, you will persist longer at both easy and difficult tasks. It is likely that, as a persistent person, you have an internal locus of control, and are more likely to attribute failure to lack of effort than to luck. Near wins foster positive expectancies and promote your sense of persistence. It is likely that you are optimistic, as there is a strong connection between optimism and perseverance, and that you have a generally high self-esteem.

There are benefits of perseverance. It offers you an increased chance of attaining difficult goals, enhanced enjoyment of your hard-won success, as well as improved skills and resourcefulness which you can apply to new situations and circumstances. Another benefit is your sense of self-efficacy that comes with the experience of mastery.

Perseverance can be nurtured and taught in three general ways: (a) relating the notion of high effort with high reward and low effort with low reward; (b) emphasizing intrinsic rewards over extrinsic (monetary) rewards; and 3) through social supports, such as close supportive relationships. Positive feedback has been shown to make a difference, although the issue is quite complex.

What does research reveal about perseverance? It pays off with success in many domains of life: school, work, athletics, the National Spelling Bee. Some researchers have played off perseverance and talent (“innate” skills) and find that perseverance often trumps talent. Of course, there are areas of life in which perseverance is futile, so one must choose wisely. Research is clear that high expectations and lofty goals are beneficial, especially when coupled with perseverance. But the goals need to be difficult

and not impossible. Other people whose judgment you value can provide some guidance about plausible goals, keeping in mind your resources and other assets.

Perseverance is not a particularly common signature strength because by definition it entails hard work. How can you enhance this strength, recognizing that doing so is difficult?

Two strategies are especially helpful. First is to reframe your progress toward any goal and the setbacks that will occur along the way. These should not be seen as failure and all that failure implies. Rather, setbacks provide useful information so view them as opportunities to grow and to learn. They allow you to learn what does not work, and you should welcome these lessons and use them as you continue toward your goal. When you fail at something, specifically ask yourself: How did this benefit me? What did I learn?

The second strategy is to break lengthy tasks into separate steps (or mini-goals) that are more manageable. Keep your eye on the final goal, but celebrate each step toward it. And be sure to get support from others along the way. Social support will be crucial in facilitating your perseverance.

### **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (Score: 4.5)**

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.

### **Curiosity (Score: 4.5)**

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.

### **Zest (Score: 4.5)**

Zest, one of the character strengths in the virtue category of Courage, is one of your Signature Character Strengths. Simply, zest is approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated. The virtue category of courage

entails the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal.

When the VIA Classification was created, zest was one of the last entries in the final list. It is never mentioned in traditional discussions of virtues, and its moral flavor is not always obvious. That said, the research shows zest to have many desirable consequences, to such an extent that it can now be considered one of the most important character strengths. It is strongly associated with happiness and life satisfaction, and among all the VIA strengths, it is the one strength that most characterizes people who love their work and regard it as a calling. This is true whether one wears a blue collar, a white collar, or a stethoscope.

Zest is as much a property of the body as it is of the mind. It refers to a feeling of being alive, full of energy and displaying enthusiasm for any and all activities. You are vigorous and energetic, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, peppy and high on life. You have joie de vivre. Your zest is not nervous energy, or hyperactivity. It is volitional and fulfilling as you bring it to bear on situations. You have enthusiasm about and for things. The opposite of this strength is being sluggish, depressed, subdued, dull, jaded, listless, limp, lethargic, and, notably, lifeless.

Zest at its deepest level refers to feeling alive. Vitality, one of the synonyms of zest, is derived from *vita*, meaning life. You feel alive, enthusiastic and spirited. You are physically well and psychologically integrated rather than fragmented. You experience meaning and purpose rather than feeling lost, disconnected or aimless. With some exceptions, you are fully functioning on a body level, mental level, and interpersonal level.

Your zest is trait-like, meaning it is a demonstrable generality in your experience and behaviors. There are paragons of this strength, like the Dalai Lama and Robin Williams. And, there are prodigies, like gymnast Mary Lou Retton as a young champion. You are the opposite of people who are draining and sour, who by their lack of enthusiasm are avoided if at all

possible.

Zest may have biological connotations - one of its synonyms is vigor, a term often applied to our physical being - but research shows that it is contagious, from one person to another. Families share a characteristic level of zest, and this is not simply due to common genes.

Zest, vitality, and enthusiasm are the proof in the pudding of character. It is the experienced psychological state of fulfillment produced by virtue-congruent activity. Zest is a way to describe the engagement and absorption of flow.

Health-related lifestyle behaviors can affect zest: Smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise are all associated with lower subjective vitality. Moderate exercise, such as a brisk 10-minute walk, tends to increase energy and decrease tension for up to two hours after the exercise has been completed. Eating a sugary snack, after the initial boost, decreases vitality. On a psychological level, zest is associated with the experience of autonomy and relatedness.

So how can your zest be enhanced? Health and fitness (and sufficient sleep every night) set the stage for zest but are not themselves sufficient. Rather, zest is a product of other people. Hang out with those who are enthusiastic, not jaded; with those who are energetic, not languid; and so on.

Zest is well-described as a value-added strength, meaning that its moral nature is best revealed when it is combined with your other signature strengths. So, when seeking situations in which to be more zestful, keep your other signature strengths in mind, and bring enthusiasm to how you enact them.

To deepen your experience of or further explore your signature strength of zest, you might try:

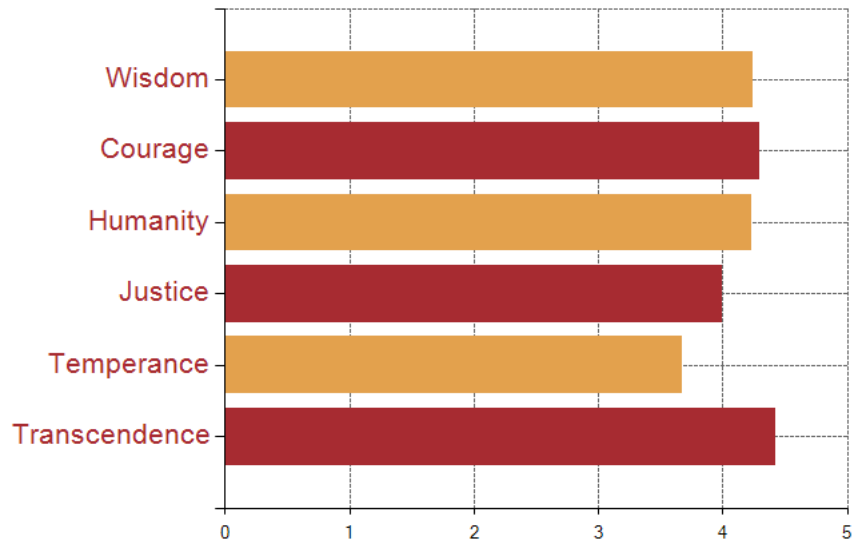
- Activating your behavior. If your physical status allows it, increase your daily movement, exercise, or activities that you engage in.
- Making experiential purchases. Spend your discretionary money on experiences (rather than on

material goods). This has been linked with greater connection to others and to a sense of vitality.

- Increasing your gratitude or optimism, both of which have been linked with higher levels of zest.

## 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

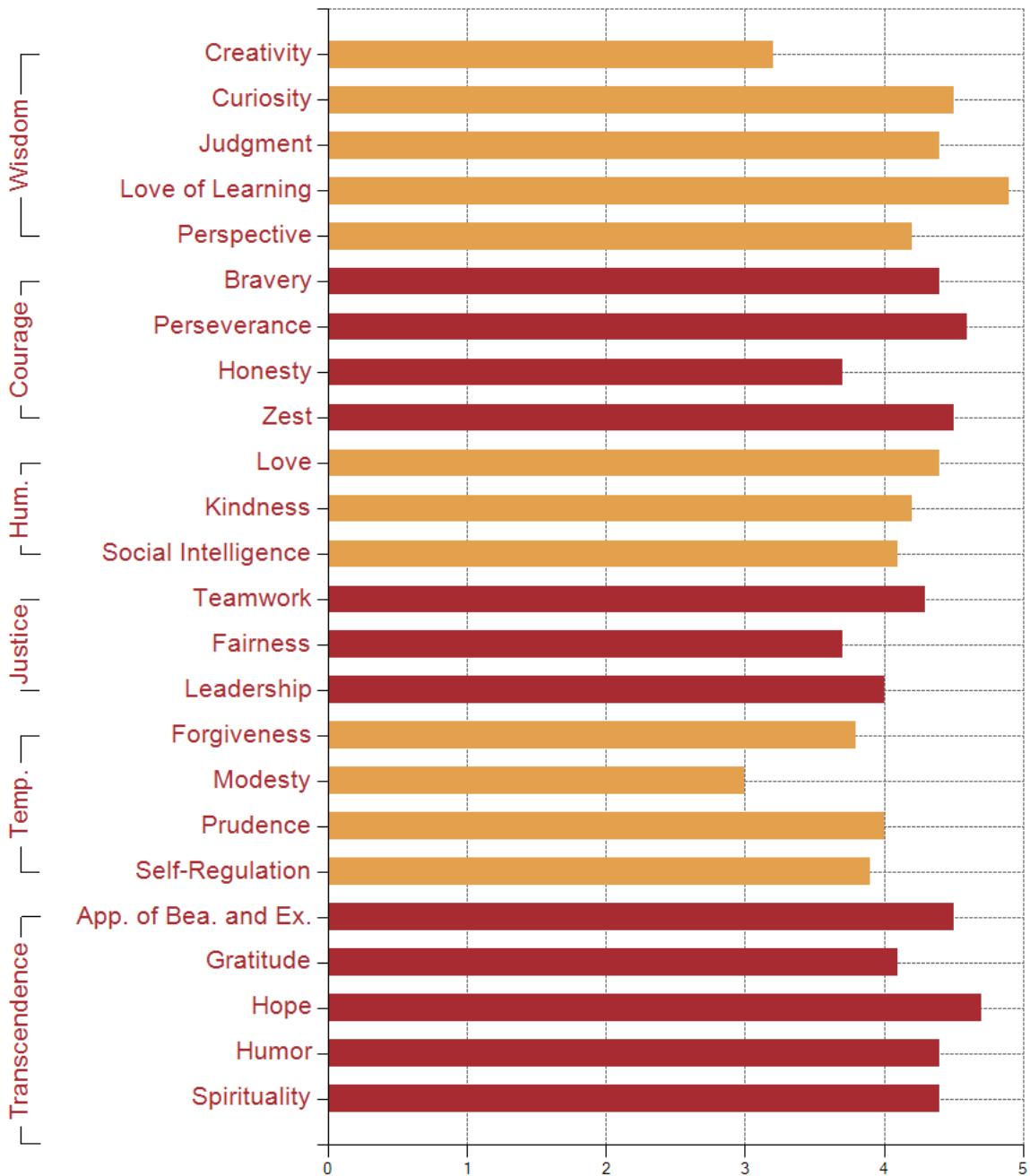
Justice – civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

Temperance – strengths that protect against excess

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

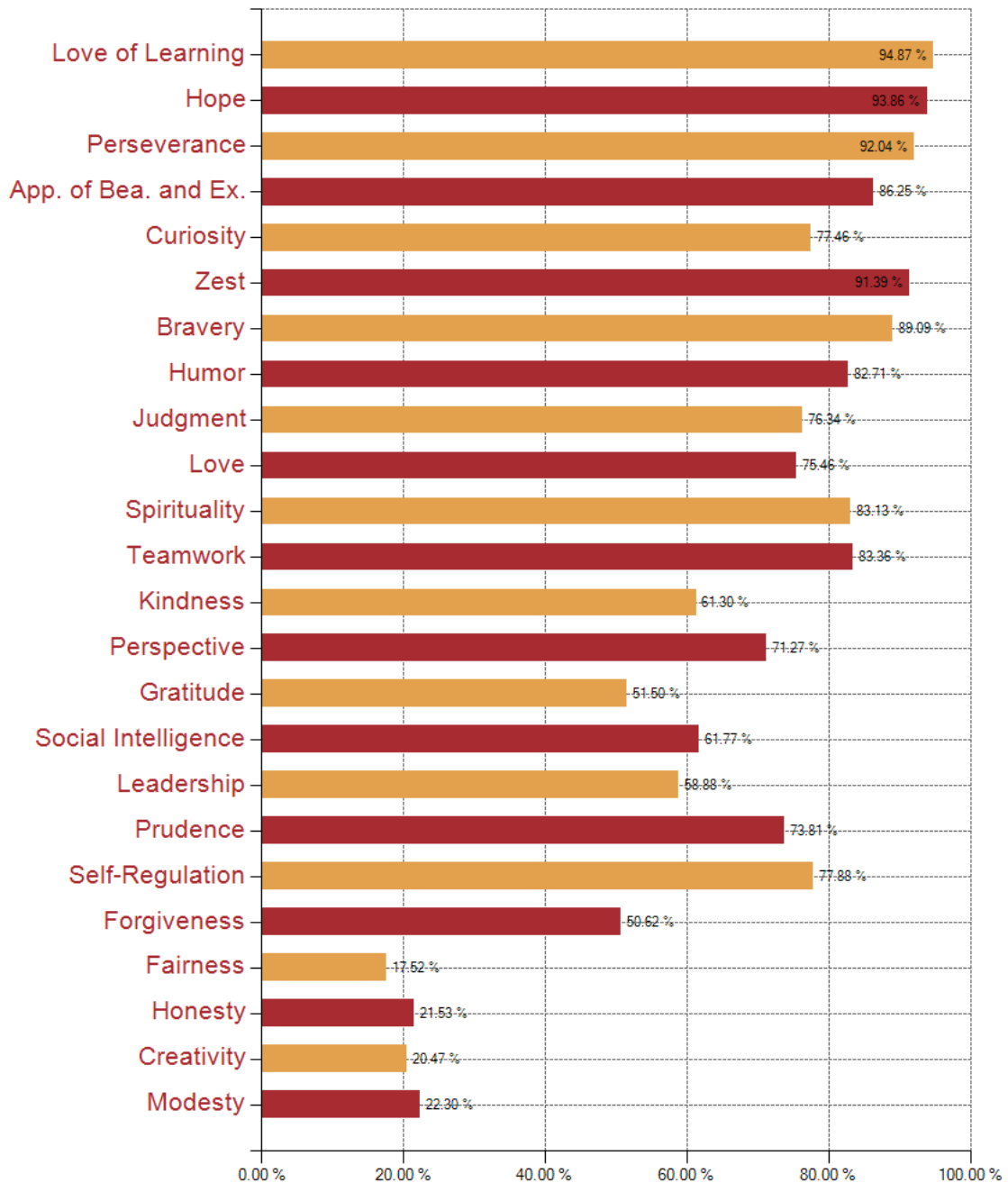
## 5. Your Character Strengths Grouped by Virtue Categories

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 post-college grads. 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.

