

Five Phases of Strengths-based Advising
Laurie A. Schreiner, Ph.D.

STEP 1: **Identify** students' strengths.

STEP 2: **Affirm** their strengths and increase their awareness of their strengths.

STEP 3: **Envision** a future by discussing their aspirations and how their strengths can help them reach their goals.

STEP 4: **Plan** specific steps that students can take to meet their goals.

STEP 5: **Apply** their strengths to challenges they face. Help students identify the skills and knowledge they need to add to their natural talents in order to develop strengths.

STEP 1: **Identify** students' strengths.

Questions to ask to help students identify their strengths:

1. What is your favorite subject? What do you enjoy learning about the most?
2. What do your friends say they like best about you?
3. Tell me about a time in your life when you accomplished something you were proud of.
4. What can do you for hours on end?
5. If money were no object and you knew you could not fail, what would you love to do?
6. Tell me about a time recently when you were "in the zone" – you were thoroughly enjoying yourself and doing something well.
7. Tell me about a challenge you've experienced in your life that you have overcome. What did you do to overcome that challenge? How did you do it?
8. What do you think are specific things you have done so far in your life that got you to college?

STEP 2: **Affirm** their strengths and increase their awareness of their strengths.

1. Which of your strengths do you feel you rely on most to be successful?
2. What strengths are most characteristic of you? Give me an example of a time when you used one of these strengths.
3. Talk to three people who know you well—how do they see your strengths operating in your daily life or in your interactions with them?
4. Which of your strengths do you think will be most useful to you in succeeding academically? Relationally? In your career?

STEP 3: **Envision** a future by discussing their aspirations and how their strengths can help them reach their goals.

1. What are you most looking forward to while in college?
2. Imagine yourself graduating from college. What do you see yourself doing as a result of being a college graduate?
3. How would you describe the person you want to become? What is that person like? What is that person able to do? What kind of relationships does that person have? What will it take for you to grow toward becoming that person?
4. How can you capitalize on your strengths to become the person you want to be in 5 years?

STEP 4: **Plan** specific steps that students can take to meet their goals.

1. Hone that aspect of yourself so that it is a SMART goal—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. For instance, an aspect of yourself that you want to develop may be that

you want to be a good leader so you can get a job in management in a corporation. Translate this into a “smart” goal:

- a. Specific—“a good leader” isn’t very specific. “I want to become someone that is able to positively influence the people with whom I work” is more specific, and “I will take a Public Speaking course so that I learn effective communication skills” is even more specific.
 - b. Measurable—what does it mean to positively influence someone? Define it in terms that you can see and measure. For instance, “I will take a Public Speaking course and ask my professor and peers in the class for feedback on my communication skills.”
 - c. Attainable—the goal needs to be under your control and able to be attained by you, regardless of what others around you do. For instance, “I will have a good relationship with my peers” isn’t completely under your control. But “I will ask my peers for feedback” is.
 - d. Realistic—your goal needs to be something you can accomplish as a college student with your particular constellation of talents. “I will get a job as the president of a corporation when I graduate” isn’t realistic. But “I will apply to at least five companies for management training opportunities” is.
 - e. Timely—your goal needs to be something you can accomplish while you are in college—and the shorter the time frame, the easier it is to stay motivated! “I will graduate with honors” may be a long-term goal, but “I will turn in all my assignments early this semester so I can get feedback and then revise them” is an intermediate step toward the long-term goal that may keep you more motivated this semester!
2. What strengths do you have that can help you progress toward your goal? How can you capitalize on those strengths?

STEP 5: Apply their strengths to challenges they face. Help students identify the skills and knowledge they need to add to their natural talents in order to develop strengths.

- Course Selection
 - What kinds of courses do you tend to do well in or enjoy most?
 - What courses sound most interesting to you? Which of these meet graduation or major requirements?
 - What other demands do you have this term—sports, family, work, and other obligations that will affect your commitment to classes? How do these courses fit with your other obligations?
- Career Planning
 - What are some past jobs or hobbies or volunteer opportunities you have had that were especially enjoyable to you? What made this experience so enjoyable?
 - What kind of environment tends to bring out your best? Describe this in as much detail as possible.
- Academic Struggles
 - What are some academic tasks that you do well or that come easily for you?
 - What strengths are you using when you are engaging in these tasks?
 - How could you use those same strengths when you are struggling with an academic task?
- Adjustment Difficulties
 - When have you experienced loneliness/homesickness/conflict before in your life?
 - What did you do in those situations that seemed to help you?