

Strengths at Work Map

A practical guide to recognising what you bring, finding words for it and understanding the conditions that help you do your best.

You do not need to have a job, a CV or the perfect words to begin. Start with something real that you did.

Strengths are often easier to recognise in action

People are sometimes asked to name their strengths as if the answer should come quickly: “I am a leader”, “I am confident” or “I am good with people”. That can feel difficult, especially if you have been criticised, overlooked, compared with others or asked to focus on what you find hard. A label can also feel too large or not quite true.

A more grounded starting point is to look at what you actually do. You might notice a problem early, remember a detail, help someone feel welcome, practise until a task becomes familiar, make a complicated job easier to follow or keep going through a difficult moment. These actions are evidence. A strength is one possible way of describing the useful ability behind an action.

This guide uses everyday examples rather than a score, personality test or fixed list of traits. Your examples can come from paid work, study, volunteering, caring, hobbies, community life, home responsibilities or ordinary routines. They do not need to be impressive to other people. What matters is that the example is real and meaningful to you.

Why strengths can be hard to see

A strength may feel so familiar that you do not notice it. You may think “anyone would do that”, even when the action took care, thought or persistence. Some useful work is also quiet and easy to miss: checking, preparing, noticing changes, making space for someone, preventing an error or helping a group stay organised. Praise and job titles do not tell the whole story.

It is also possible to be good at something and find it tiring. A person may be skilled at supporting others but need recovery afterwards. Someone may be excellent at solving urgent problems but struggle when every task is urgent. Recognising a strength does not mean you must use it constantly, without support or at a cost to your wellbeing.

The aim is not to prove that you can do everything. It is to build a fair picture of what you bring, what you want to develop and what helps your abilities show.

Different ways of working belong in this picture

You may do your best thinking by talking, writing, moving, observing or having time to prepare. You may need information in a clear format or a little more time to change between tasks. These preferences do not make your contribution less valuable. They help explain the conditions in which you can use your abilities. If a setting makes a task harder, record the setting as well as your response. This can prevent you from describing a barrier as a personal failure.

You can also hold more than one truth at once. You might enjoy helping people and need quiet time afterwards. You may be accurate and need a checklist when you are tired. You may learn quickly when shown a process and find vague instructions difficult. A useful strengths map makes room for both ability and the support that helps it last.

1. Begin with a moment, not a label

Choose one small event that you remember clearly. It can be ordinary: getting ready for something, sorting out a misunderstanding, learning a new routine, making something, helping a person, managing a change of plan or finishing a task that mattered to you.

A useful example has four parts

Part	Prompt	What to include
Moment	What was happening?	A short description of the situation.
Action	What did you do?	An action you took, a decision you made or a way you responded.
Outcome	What happened next?	A result, a change, something you learned or what became easier.
Meaning	What might this show?	A possible strength, skill or helpful condition.

You can begin with fragments, not polished writing. “Busy morning”, “checked the list”, “we left on time” is enough to work with. Keep the notes factual. If you are unsure about the result, say so rather than filling in a gap. An honest example is stronger than a perfect-sounding story that does not feel like yours.

Example: turning a few notes into a complete answer

Quick notes	A first-draft sentence
New person felt lost; I showed the steps; they could finish the task	When a new person was unsure what to do, I showed them the steps one at a time. This may show that I can explain practical information clearly and notice when someone needs support.
Several things to remember; I wrote a list; fewer things were missed	When I had several things to remember, I wrote a short list and checked it as I went. This helped me stay organised and reduced the chance of missing something.

The wording above is only a model. Edit it until it is accurate. If “showed them the steps” is not what happened, replace it with your action. If you cannot identify a result, leave that part out. You are the person who decides what the example means.

Examples from outside paid work count

If you are new to work, returning after time away or changing direction, you may have few recent workplace examples. Look at responsibilities you have held in daily life. Have you coordinated appointments, helped a group complete something, cared for a relative, repaired an object, learned a practical skill, supported a neighbour or kept a routine going? Explain the context honestly. A personal example can show a transferable action, although it is not the same as having done that task in a paid job.

If a question brings up no example, you can leave it and return later. Memory often works better when the prompt is specific. Instead of asking “What am I good at?”, try “When did I make something clearer?”, “What do people ask me to help with?” or “What is one task I have learned to do in my own way?” Ask someone you trust what they have noticed, but keep only the wording that feels true to you.

A small example can show care, accuracy, creativity, persistence or good judgement. The size of the event does not decide the value of your contribution.

2. Find words for the action

A strength is not always a single quality. It may be a combination of practical skill, knowledge, experience and the way you approach a task. Rather than searching for the “right” label, try describing the action first. Then choose a word that fits well enough for now.

What you did	Possible words to explore	Keep the description specific
You checked a detail before sending work	Care with detail, accuracy, responsibility	“I check important details before I send work on.”
You made a task easier to follow	Organisation, clear communication, planning	“I break a task into steps so I can keep track of it.”
You noticed someone was unsure	Awareness, empathy, attentiveness	“I notice when someone may need a clearer explanation.”
You tried more than one way to solve a problem	Problem-solving, flexibility, initiative	“I try a practical next step and review what happens.”
You practised until a routine became familiar	Persistence, learning, patience	“I learn well through repetition and practice.”
You helped a group share information	Teamwork, communication, reliability	“I share updates so other people know what is happening.”

Use words that feel true, not words that sound impressive

If “leadership” feels too strong, you might say “I helped the group agree on the next step”. If “excellent communicator” feels too broad, describe how you communicate: “I explain the practical steps clearly” or “I ask questions when something is not clear”. Concrete wording is easier for another person to understand and easier for you to support with an example.

You can also include knowledge gained through lived experience. A person who has managed changing routines may have developed planning strategies. Someone who has supported a family member may understand the importance of clear handovers. That experience can matter, while still being different from formal training or professional qualifications. Be precise about which is which.

Avoid turning one event into a permanent claim. “I solved a problem once” does not have to become “I am always great under pressure”. A balanced sentence might be: “In this situation, I stayed focused and worked through the steps. I would like to keep building confidence in similar tasks.” This recognises what happened and leaves room to grow.

Try these sentence starters

“One example of something I do well is...”

“When this happened, I...”

“The part I contributed was...”

“This may show that I can...”

“I am still learning how to...”

“I would find this easier when...”

Make invisible work visible

Many valuable actions happen before a visible result. Preparing materials, checking a schedule, noticing a missing detail, keeping a calm tone, making a backup plan or asking a clarifying question can prevent a problem. If you only describe the final outcome, another person may not see the thinking that helped create it. Name the action as well as the result.

You do not have to present every strength as a finished skill. You can describe a developing ability: “I am building confidence in speaking to groups. Preparing a few notes helps me share my ideas.” This is honest and specific. It also gives a clearer picture of the conditions that support your progress than a broad label such as “not confident”.

When a word does not fit, try a plain sentence instead. “I remember small details”, “I like making a plan before I start” or “I can stay alongside someone while they work something out” may communicate more than a list of adjectives. The aim is language that a reader or interviewer can picture.

Your words can be modest and still communicate value. You do not need to claim more than the example supports.

3. Strengths need supportive conditions

A strength is not separate from the environment. Clear instructions, accessible tools, a manageable pace, respectful communication and the chance to focus can affect whether a person can use their abilities. If you struggle in a noisy, unpredictable or poorly explained setting, that does not erase what you can do in conditions that suit you.

Notice what makes a difference

After writing an example, ask: What made it easier? Was the task written down? Did you have time to prepare? Could you ask one person for clarification? Was there a quiet place, a predictable routine, a visual prompt, a movement break, assistive technology or a clear priority? Also notice what made the task harder, without blaming yourself for the environment.

Separate what you need from what you prefer

Some conditions may be essential for access or wellbeing. Others may be helpful but flexible. Some details may simply be unknown until you ask. You can keep these categories private or use them to plan a conversation. You do not have to disclose personal information before you are ready.

Category	Meaning	Example
Essential	A condition you need to do the work accessibly or sustainably.	“I need written instructions for multi-step tasks.”
Helpful	A support that improves the experience or helps you work more consistently.	“A brief check-in at the start of a new task helps me organise my questions.”
Unknown	Something you need to ask or test before deciding.	“I do not know how often the rota changes.”

Describe the support in practical terms

Try to name the work condition rather than apologising for needing it. For example: "I work best when priorities are clear. Could we agree which task comes first if new work arrives?" Or: "A written summary helps me remember the steps. Is that something the team can provide?" These are starting points for a discussion, not a guarantee that a particular adjustment is available.

Support can also change as the task changes. You might need more explanation when learning a process and less once it becomes familiar. You may work independently for some tasks and benefit from collaboration on others. Specific examples help you notice the difference.

Ask, observe and review

When you are exploring a role, look for evidence about how work is organised. A job advert may describe tasks but say little about how priorities are set, how changes are shared or how training works. You can write down questions before a conversation. For example: "How are new tasks explained?", "What happens if two priorities arrive at once?" or "Is there a quieter place for focused work?" A clear question helps you make a more informed decision.

If a support idea is not possible in one form, another approach may still help. A checklist, a scheduled check-in, a different communication method or a change to task order could address the same practical difficulty. You do not have to solve the whole issue alone. Record what you have tried, what helped and what you still need to ask.

Your needs may also vary across days or tasks. Planning for variation is part of understanding the job. Think about busy periods, recovery time, travel, breaks and what happens when plans change. You are not required to share every detail of your health or personal life in order to notice what conditions matter to you.

Needing a support or adjustment does not cancel a strength. It can be the condition that allows the strength to be used.

4. Use your map in a CV or conversation

A strengths map gives you material to shape for different situations. You do not need to include every example in a CV. Choose information that is relevant to the role, accurate and comfortable to share.

For a CV

Use a brief profile to connect two or three strengths with the kind of work you are seeking. In an experience section, describe the task and contribution. If you do not have paid work experience, examples from study, volunteering, community activity, caring or personal projects may help show relevant skills. Make the context clear so the reader understands where the example came from.

General note: "I am reliable and good with people."

More specific: "I keep track of agreed tasks and communicate clearly when someone needs an update."

Example with evidence: "During a community project, I kept a simple task list and shared updates with the group so everyone knew what had been completed."

For an application or interview

Choose one example that matches the question. Explain enough of the situation for it to make sense, spend most of your answer on what you did, then describe the outcome or what you learned. If the outcome was mixed, say that honestly and include what you would try next time. An example does not need to be dramatic to be useful.

If you find writing difficult, start with speech-to-text, bullet points, voice notes or a conversation with someone you trust. Ask them to help organise your words without adding claims that you did not make. Read the draft aloud or listen back. Replace any phrase that feels unfamiliar with language you would actually use.

Match a strength to a job task

Look at a real job advert and underline the tasks, not only the list of qualities. If the role involves recording information, an example of careful checking may be relevant. If it involves welcoming people, an example of helping someone feel included may be useful. Then compare this with your conditions map: what would help you carry out the task well and sustainably?

A job title alone cannot tell you whether the role will fit. Ask about the pace, hours, training, supervision, equipment, communication and how priorities are handled. Separate what the advert confirms from what you still need to find out.

Keep your CV focused

A CV is a short introduction, not a complete account of your value. Choose the examples most relevant to the opportunity. Use clear verbs and everyday language. If a task was shared with other people, describe your part accurately rather than taking credit for the whole result. If a result is difficult to measure, explain what improved, what was completed or what you learned.

Transferable strengths are useful clues, not automatic proof of fit. Planning a family event may show coordination, but a busy workplace may involve different systems, deadlines and support. Use the example to identify what you can already do, then find out what is new about the role. This keeps confidence grounded and helps you choose useful questions or training.

If you are practising an interview answer, say it aloud in your own words. A short answer with one clear example is often easier to follow than a long list of strengths. Pause between the situation, your action and the outcome. You can bring notes or ask for a question to be repeated if that would help you respond.

Use your examples to show what you can contribute, and your conditions map to ask what would help you contribute well.

5. Keep the map honest, flexible and yours

Your strengths can change with experience, confidence, health, support and opportunity. A map is not a final judgement about who you are. It is a working set of observations that you can revisit when something changes or when you discover a new kind of task.

A gentle review

Read each example and ask yourself: Is it true? Is the action clear? Did I add anything that did not happen? Does the strength word fit, or would another phrase feel more natural? What was hard about this moment? What support helped? Would I want to do this task regularly? You can keep, edit or delete an answer.

Notice effort as well as outcome

A successful outcome does not mean the task was easy. You might have used substantial energy, needed recovery or relied on a specific support. Record this if it helps you make a realistic plan. A role may suit your skills but not its pace or schedule. You are allowed to consider both contribution and sustainability.

Let examples support self-advocacy

If you are asking for support, a real example can explain the practical issue: “When several changes are given verbally, I can miss a step. Written priorities help me work accurately.” You can then describe the support you want to explore. Share only the detail you choose, and use an appropriate adviser if you need help understanding your rights or options.

A small next step

Choose one action that feels possible: add a moment to your map, ask someone who knows your work what they notice you doing well, practise one sentence for your CV, or find one question to ask about a role. You do not need to complete the whole map today. One clear example is a useful beginning.

Keep a record you can revisit

Save examples in a place that feels private and easy to return to. You could keep a short note on your phone, a printed page or a voice recording. Add the date or context if that helps you remember it. When you learn something new, update the map. A strength may become clearer after practice, feedback or experience in a different environment.

Before using a sentence in a CV or application, check that it is accurate, relevant and comfortable to share. You can ask another person to help with spelling or structure while keeping ownership of the meaning. If someone suggests a phrase that sounds unlike you, change it. Your examples should help you represent yourself, not create another standard you feel forced to meet.

A simple next-step plan

Today	Soon	Later
Write one moment and one action.	Choose one sentence for a CV or conversation.	Review the example after trying a task or learning more about a role.

Turn one strength into a practical next step

Look at one strength you have identified and ask how you could use it in a role you are considering. What tasks might involve this strength? What would you need to learn first? What working conditions would help you use it consistently? Write down one question rather than trying to answer everything at once. You can return to it after reading an advert, speaking with an employer or trying a new activity.

A possible plan might be: “I enjoy keeping information organised. I would like to explore roles that involve records or planning. I want to find out what system the team uses and whether training is provided.” This connects an example to a direction while leaving space for new information.

I know	I want to learn	I need to ask
A task I can already do	A task or system that is new	A question about pace, training or support

A strength is not a promise to perform without limits. It is one part of understanding what you can offer, how you can describe it in your own words and what helps you use it well.