

## Using Strength-Based Strategies in your Course Design

Positive psychology has become popular within higher education as a way to increase student engagement and success in and outside the classroom (William et al., 2018). As a pedagogical approach, positive psychology places an emphasis on [strengths-based approaches](#) that encourage inclusive and equitable learning spaces for all students (Schreiner, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). For educators, empowering students to recognize and ultimately master their strengths begins with designing your course. Here are four strategies to help students recognize their strengths, learn the course content, and achieve the student learning outcomes in your class.



### 1- Set High and Attainable Expectations.

Academic research points out that setting [high expectations](#) is the most consistent factor of high student achievement and growth mindset (Dweck, 2016; Hanover Research, 2012). In a strengths-based classroom, faculty set high and attainable expectations, let students know they believe in their ability to meet those expectations, and provide students with the opportunity and support to meet those expectations.

## 2- Personalize Learning Opportunities.

When creating assignments for students, consider ways in which you might allow them to individualize the assignment to their strengths (Reinert Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.). For example, if you assign discussion board posts, give students the option to submit written responses, audio recordings, or videos. Another way to personalize learning is to [co-create rubrics](#) or assignments with students. Co-creation is highly valuable because it gives students agency in their own learning process, helps them to demonstrate mastery of learning objectives, and creates a student-teacher relationship of trust, respect, and inclusion (Bovill, 2019).

## 3- Intentionally Create Groups.

In addition to focusing on strengths during individual work, harnessing students' strengths for [collaborative work](#) can be a powerful tool in the classroom. Working collaboratively in groups or teams is an important transferable skill that prepares students for the workplace (NACE, n.d.). As you consider how to use collaborative learning in your class, also consider how to design groups in a way that allows students to use their strengths. Some strength-based approaches include assigning students based on (1) [roles](#), (2) [Clifton StrengthsFinder](#), and (3) [low-stakes activities](#). Intentionally creating groups reinforces the importance of individual strengths by giving everyone the opportunity to lead or teach their peers at different moments during the group work.

## 4- Use CliftonStrengths as a Tool.

One tool available to help UT students discover their strengths or “talent DNA” is the [CliftonStrengths Assessment](#). Gallup Inc. (n.d.) suggests that a strengths-based approach can increase student and campus engagement, improve well-being, promote greater academic success, help students reflect on career possibilities, and improve self-awareness and teamwork. The University’s Division of Student Services provides all first-year UT students with the opportunity to take the CliftonStrengths Assessment at no cost. Instructors who wish to take the strength assessment can [request a consultation](#) with the UT office of Teaching & Learning Innovation.

## References

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