



DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS AND TALENTS

"Hide not your talents. They for use were made. What's a sundial in the shade."

—Benjamin Franklin

OVERVIEW

Students send emails to five trusted adults, asking them what they think are students' strengths, talents, unique contribution to the world, and how to go about achieving their goals. (Purpose Challenge Practice #1)

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year, but especially at the beginning of the year to help students make a connection between their purpose (or search for one) and academic content
- To help students develop content for college entrance essays. Visit www.purposechallenge.org for more information.

TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes + 30-minute follow-up in two weeks

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- Internet access and monitor to watch a video: "[Purpose in Life Video Introduction](#)"

- Email access for each student
- Handout of email message for each student

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify their strengths with the help of trusted adults
- Reflect on how they might use their strengths in a meaningful way
- Ask for and reflect on advice on achieving their goals

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on your own strengths. How do you use your strengths in a meaningful way to contribute to the world?

INSTRUCTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. This practice can be used on its own, but is meant to be the first in a series of practices that help students discover or begin their search for purpose.
 2. Students can also do the entire series of practices online for free at www.purposechallenge.org. Have them click on "Toolkit" and then register for an account. When they finish the practices, they will receive a digital record of their written answers for each exercise in addition to instructions on how to take these answers and turn them into a college entrance essay.
- Begin by telling students that this practice (and subsequent practices, if possible) will help them answer the questions: What am I meant to do? What gives my life meaning? How do I want to contribute to the world? In other words, it will help them identify or put them on the road to discovering their purpose.
 - Tell students:

- *Having a sense of purpose means being committed to something that is meaningful to you, but also makes a difference to something bigger than yourself. How you want to leave your mark on the world and make it a better place, how you want your life to have mattered...that's what purpose is.*
- Show students the [Purpose in Life Video Introduction](#) (9:08). As they watch the video, ask students to think about who they know or perhaps current or historical persons who have a strong purpose in life.
- On their own, with a partner, or in a small group, ask students to identify two or three people whom they believe have a strong sense of purpose and what each person's purpose is. They could be people they know, famous people, or people from history. Share with the class.
- Tell students:
 - *As you think about what is most meaningful in your own life, it may be helpful to get some insight from people who know you well.*
 - *They may help you see things about yourself that you did not recognize, or solidify things you already knew.*
- Distribute the handout to each student and explain to the class that they will send the email on the handout to five adults they respect and who know them well (if students have a hard time identifying five adults, let them know that fewer is okay). Encourage them to send the emails to a variety of people, such as a coach or mentor, a close friend, or a family member.
- The text for the handout is as follows:

Hello _____,

I'm participating in a project designed to help me figure out what I want to accomplish in my life. As a part of this project I am looking for feedback from people who know me well and whose opinion I value.

Will you please read the questions below and email your responses to me right away so you don't forget? No need to spend lots of time on this, just tell me the first thing that comes to mind as you read each question. I don't need you to take more than 5 minutes completing the questions.

1. What do you think are my strengths and talents?
2. How do you think I can use my talents in a meaningful way?
3. How do you see me contributing to the world in the future?
4. What advice would you give to help me achieve these goals?

Thanks for your help. I really appreciate your time and input.

Best,

- Let students know that they may not receive a response, or may receive a response that they do not agree with--both of which are okay. The goal is for them to reflect on what is meaningful in their lives.
- Tell students that they will do a follow-up reflection with the responses in a couple of weeks.

TWO-WEEK FOLLOW-UP

- Ask students to write a short reflection synthesizing people's responses. Do they agree or disagree with what people told them? Did they learn anything about themselves or were they surprised by something?

Did they receive any helpful advice on how to achieve their goals? Overall, how might they use this information to help them discover their purpose?

- Ask for student volunteers to share.
- Closure: Ask students to reflect on this process. Was it helpful? Would they recommend this practice to other students?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did you notice a change in students' attitudes or optimism after receiving their responses? Did students begin to make the connection between their academic work and their potential sense of purpose?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Studies find that pursuing one's purpose is associated with psychological well-being. For example, compared to others, [people with purpose](#) report they are happier, more satisfied with their lives, and more hopeful about the future.

For teens, purpose is related to indicators of academic success, such as [grit](#), [resilience](#), and a belief that one's work is [feasible and manageable](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In spite of the benefits, only about [20% of adolescents](#) lead lives of purpose. Granted, the developmental task of teenagers is to discover who they are (identity) and what they want to accomplish that benefits the world (purpose); however, students who have a sense of purpose or are actively looking for one are propelled by a personally meaningful and highly motivating aim--they know what they hope to achieve and how academics can help. Hence, they are more likely to work hard and excel in school.

SOURCE

The Purpose Challenge Toolkit was created by [Dr. Kendall Cotton-Bronk](#) in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center and [Prosocial](#). For more information, visit www.purposechallenge.org