Series 4 : Strengths

Ebook 2 : Communicating your strengths



COMMUNICATING YOUR STRENGTHS

DEMONSTRATE HOW YOUR STRENGTHS GAINED THROUGH HAVING A DISABILITY RELATE TO THE ROLE AND SET YOU APART FROM COMPETITION.

myplusstudentsclub.com

MyPLUS STUDENTS' CLUB

INTRODUCTION

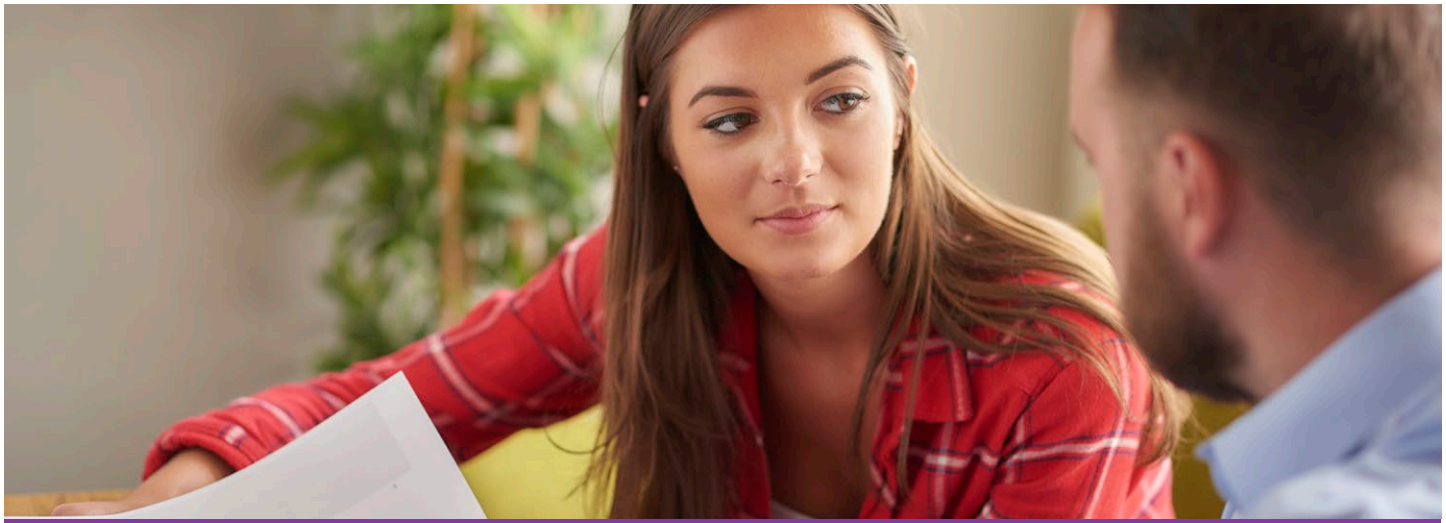
If you have applied for a graduate job or internship, you may have encountered questions either on the application form or during an interview such as "Why should we hire you?" or "Tell me about a time where you had to demonstrate (a specific competency)".

The purpose of these questions is to find out where your strengths lie and whether or not you have the relevant skills and aptitude to excel in the role. Employers will also be assessing your profile against the other candidates to see what unique skills and experiences you can bring to the organisation.

In the first part of this ebook, we will share tips to help you prepare for an interview and plan your response to questions. By ensuring the strengths you have identified are relevant and that you have examples of past achievements to support these, you can demonstrate how your strengths, including those developed through managing a disability, can be utilised in the role you have applied for and why these strengths make you the ideal candidate for the job.

In the second part of this book, we will provide examples of how graduates across different industries have chosen to relate the strengths they have gained as a result of managing their disability to their professional roles. We hope these will help you to recognise the types of strengths that are critical to career success and give you an idea of how you can bring your 'plus' to work.

This is the second book of the Strengths series. You can download our first book on *Embracing Your Strengths* to learn how you can identify strengths and make your disability a 'plus' when applying for jobs. Visit www.myplusstudentsclub.com for careers advice and more information on applying with a disability. By becoming a member of the MyPlus Students' Club you can download more ebooks on topics such as informing an employer about your disability and requesting workplace adjustments. Membership is free.



COMMUNICATING STRENGTHS: MAKE YOUR CASE

We all develop skills and strengths as a result of our experiences, whether it is studying for a degree, volunteering for charity, or working part time during the summer. If you have a disability or long term health condition, you will have gained additional strengths as a result of having to adapt to, and manage, your condition. By communicating these strengths in an interview and discussing the disability-related challenges you have overcome to achieve success today, you can begin to really stand out as a candidate with a 'plus'.

At the interview stage, employers will be looking for you to demonstrate strengths and talents in addition to your basic degree and education experience, such as problem solving or interpersonal skills. You should think broadly about your experiences including those related to managing a disability or long term health condition to identify transferrable skills that will enable you to add value in the role you have applied for.

Concentrate on bringing your five best strengths to the interview. You should think positively about your experiences of disability and articulate a couple of strengths that your disability has forced you to develop that will enable you to achieve results in the future.

Example

Eleni Papadopoulos is a trainee solicitor at Macfarlanes; she has cerebral palsy and epilepsy. **Here, she talks about how her disabilities led her to develop resilience and embrace adaptability.**

"A personal strength I have developed as a result of my disability is my mental strength to persevere. Throughout my life I have been diagnosed with numerous disabilities and many different illnesses. I've always been proud of my ability to stay calm and work out what to do next when something 'goes wrong' and I think I have transferred this into my career in law because things do go wrong and you need to be able to deal with that stress and still produce a great piece of work for the client."



RELATE YOUR STRENGTHS TO THE JOB

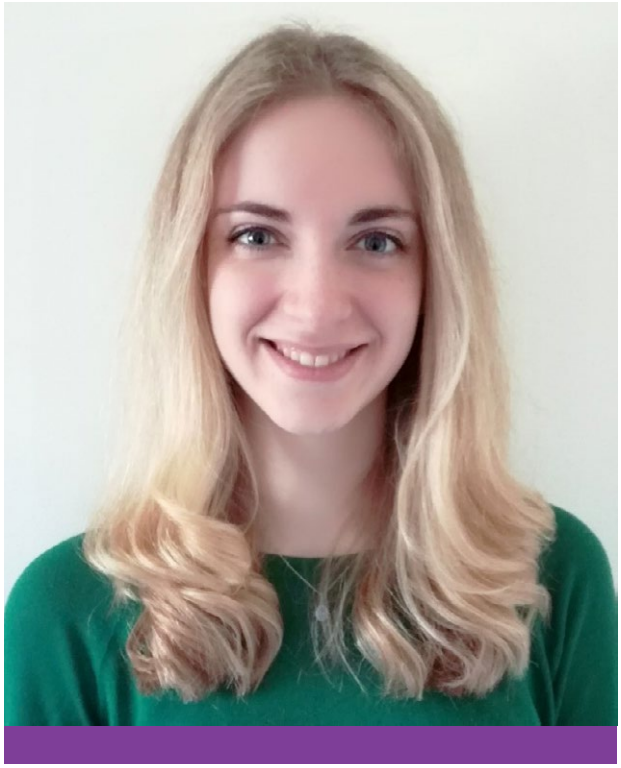
As you choose your strengths, remember that the aim is to show the employer that you have the relevant competencies and attributes to succeed in the role. Read the job description carefully and refamiliarize yourself with the requirements of the role. You can then match your strengths to the job and explain how these will enable you to achieve the best results in the organisation.

For example, if the job requires you to interact with multiple parties to execute a sale or conduct an audit, you may want to focus on strengths such as communication and team collaboration which you will have developed through university group projects or leading a society. Likewise, if the job requires you to conduct independent research or analysis, you should demonstrate strengths such as the ability to take the initiative, attention to detail and accountability which you may have gained from managing a disability.

Obviously, you must choose strengths you actually possess rather than just because it is in the job description. If you do decide to talk about strengths relating to your disability, you will need to explain their relevance to the role. Otherwise you will look like you are 'playing on' having a disability.

Example

Kathy Goodwin is a treasury analyst at Morgan Stanley; she has dyslexia. **She explains how she is able to utilise her numerical abilities and visual communication skills developed through dyslexia, in her daily work.**



"I think that due to my dyslexia, I have developed my numerical skills and visual communication skills. Through studying mathematics I have improved my numerical and logical thinking skills….The numerical skills have been hugely beneficial as I run stress tests, analyse variances and calculate ratios and requirements. The visual communication skills have helped me create impactful and effective PowerPoint presentations."

DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF FROM THE COMPETITION

Once you have chosen your strengths, you can prepare one or two supporting examples to demonstrate how the strengths you have developed through a disability have enabled you to excel or why this strength will be an asset to the organisation. By drawing upon personal experiences to illustrate your strengths, you can set yourself apart from the competition.

A great way to structure your answer is to use the STAR technique:

- Situation (disability or long term health condition, dyslexia, poor mental health etc.)
- Task (impact or challenge presented by your disability)
- Action (steps you took to overcome this challenge)
- Result (what was the outcome? How has the experience equipped you with the right skills / mindset to excel in your role?)

Example

"Before leaving university I was offered a place at Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, to begin in January 2016. However, in September 2015 I contracted a rare and aggressive form of bacterial meningitis which subsequently left me severely disabled. I was told that I would be paralysed from the neck down for the rest of my life.

Today, after much hard work, I have regained significant use of my upper body and continue to regain strength in my legs. It was this recovery that encouraged me to take a Masters to prepare myself for a return to work. I wish to achieve the same goals from work as I did prior to falling ill and feel that I have much to offer not only in an academic and intellectual capacity, but also through my interpersonal skills and strength of character."



BRING YOUR 'PLUS' TO THE APPLICATION

Aside from excellent critical thinking and communication skills, if the work that you have applied to is intellectually challenging or physically demanding, i.e. in law, teaching or medicine, you will need to demonstrate that you have the **resilience and motivation** to succeed. If you have a disability or long term health condition, your experience may have equipped you with strengths to overcome obstacles and **adapt** to various challenges.

Example

James Phoenix is a trainee solicitor at Linklaters; he has a chronic pain condition and dyspraxia. When a potential employer asked for a time where he had shown resilience or independence, **James was able to talk about the experiences and challenges he faced as a result of his disabilities.**



"I averaged around 15-40% school attendance in my GCSE and A-level years due to my pain condition and ended up staying back a year. I knew that in order to achieve what I wanted in life I had to pass my exams despite my absence from school, so I did a lot of independent study to keep up with my peers. The process taught me self-reliance and self-motivation as well as a healthy measure of optimism and independence of thought. This experience of independent study set me up well for university and my legal training and ensured that I got the most out of both."

In fast-moving industries like consulting, manufacturing and finance, be prepared to demonstrate key competencies like **problem solving** and **analytical skills,** great **attention to detail,** as well as the **ability to listen** and learn quickly. Roles in these industries are competitive and recruiters look for candidates who can **work well with clients** and their team to deliver the best possible results. If you have a learning disability or a visual impairment, you may have learnt to express yourself differently or become more sensitive to your environment – these are strengths that can be valuable at work.

Example

Andrey works in Sales and Trading in J.P. Morgan; he is hearing impaired. **Instead of focusing on his disability, Andrey takes pride in the talents he has gained from his disability such as, a good listener, body language skills which are valued by clients.**

"I was born severely hearing impaired and I have developed important positives for my career based on my inherent need to overcome obstacles presented on a daily basis by my hearing impairment….
I have developed the expertise to perform effectively in my chosen area – finance.
I am very detail oriented which is important in this area. My sensitivity helps me manage risks successfully and it is also a huge benefit in client relationship and interacting with colleagues….I developed body language skills and ability to manage high level of pressure from my life experience, which I apply to my work environment."



If you are working with clients to solve problems in industries like consulting and engineering, you will need to demonstrate strengths like **intellectual curiosity** and the ability to think out of the box. You will also need to show your future employer that you are **organised**, have good **time management** and are able to communicate solutions clearly to clients. If you have a learning disability, you will have an awareness of how you work best so use that to your advantage and seek the adjustments you need to perform your best on the task.

Example

Sam Shires is a management consultant at Accenture; he has ADHD and dyslexia. **Sam believes having ADHD and dyslexia has given him a great reason to explore ways he works best and this lets him be the best he can be at his job.**



"I am very organised and I always receive good feedback on the way I work and manage my time - something which I (as a dyslexic) find difficult. This helps me to focus on what is most important and to provide a clear picture of where I am with my work to my managers… Problem solving and verbal reasoning are two things as a dyslexic I am good at and have become known for. I love working with my clients in workshops to get to the route of their issues and enjoy working to solve these problems."

TOP TIPS

- Make sure the strengths you have identified are relevant to the role you are applying for.
- Communicate your strengths effectively by using the STAR method and examples to illustrate your past achievements.
- Differentiate yourself from other candidates by identifying unique strengths.
- Draw on different strengths, don't use all examples related to your disability.

CONCLUSION....

We hope that you demonstrate your 'plus' by relating relevant and unique strengths gained through disability to the role you have applied for. Employers will be looking to hire candidates with a positive attitude, so you should feel confident to talk about your strengths and willing to share positive examples from your experience of disability with the employer.

This is the second book of the Strengths series. You can download our first book on *Embracing Your Strengths* to learn how you can identify strengths and make your disability a plus when applying for jobs. Visit **www.myplusstudentsclub.com** for careers advice and more information on applying with a disability.