

# A brief guide to the Strong Interest Inventory®



*the path to career discovery*

To be able to access the Strong Interest Inventory® (Strong) means to administer and interpret one of the most scientifically robust and widely used career interest inventories in the history of career assessment. The Strong helps individuals choose fulfilling career paths, by comparing their interests with those of people who are satisfied with their jobs or occupations.

## Research pedigree

The Strong Interest Inventory is based on the work of psychologist and Stanford University researcher Edward K. Strong Jr, whose commitment to continual improvement, refinement and updating of the inventory permeates every version. This means that the content of the inventory reflects current trends in interests and occupations. Uniquely, later versions of the Strong also combine E. K. Strong's empirical studies with Holland's Occupational Themes (RIASEC model).

Based on the theoretical premise that people's interests reflect what they do, the Strong compares respondents' interests to those of incumbents satisfied in their work. This inventory can therefore help individuals make informed occupational choices, whichever stage of their career or lives they are at.

Although the Strong does not assess knowledge, skills or abilities, it can be used along with such data in a complementary fashion. Strong's insights are organised so as to ensure objectivity, structure and focus in conducting a career counselling session, facilitating ease of communication and uncovering insights that can rarely be provided outside of a structured assessment.

*This resource aims to describe and provide information on the Strong, its applications, scales and scientific credentials. For further familiarisation with the inventory, its development, research and interpretation strategies, the Strong Interest Inventory Manual, available from OPP, is a must-have resource.*

This guide is for you if you are Level A qualified and would like to start using the Strong Interest Inventory.

## Why use the Strong?

In career development contexts, decisions can affect or even change a person's life. So, rather than leaving those decisions to chance:

- The Strong provides the necessary structure and focus in conducting the career development session.
- The Strong provides a standard of comparison for the individual: their interests are compared with the interests of people who are satisfied in particular job roles.
- When compared to other methods and techniques of observation, the Strong is significantly easier to administer and interpret. The practitioner does not need to be an experienced career counsellor to administer the inventory and interpret the results.
- Observations made through the Strong are more easily communicated than observations made through other methods of observation.
- The Strong, unlike other methods of observation, takes only 30–45 minutes to complete.
- The Strong can provide both the practitioner and client with insights that might not otherwise be recognised by the practitioner or the respondent themselves.
- The Strong has been specifically designed to provide individuals with the best possible data about themselves, enhancing self-understanding and helping them to make better decisions about the course of their lives.
- As far as career development is concerned, the Strong is the perfect companion to psychometric assessments such as the MBTI® and 16PF® instruments. Our personality, which has a lot to say about our preferred working environments, along with our interests, as assessed by the Strong, can help us make great career decisions.
- The Strong is based on a firm foundation of reliability and validity research, which means the practitioner and client can be confident that they are using trustworthy data to inform career decisions.

## The latest edition of Strong: from good to great!

The Strong has undergone a major revision over the past few years. As a result, the revised Strong can be administered online, contains fewer items and reflects a broader range of modern occupations, interests, and work/leisure activities. It also reflects the diversity of the modern workforce, and is accompanied by user-friendly electronic reports for both the practitioner and the client.

The latest edition assesses a respondent's level of interest in a wide range of familiar items, using short

phrases that describe different occupations, hobbies and types of people. All available options are Likert-type responses, and a five-point scheme has been chosen for all items in the inventory, with answer options of Strongly Like, Like, Indifferent, Dislike and Strongly Dislike.

## How can the Strong be used?

The Strong is suitable for clients from all walks of life and has a variety of applications in occupational and academic settings. Some of the inventory's key applications include:

- **Career planning:** Support and facilitate the development of talented employees by identifying jobs within a company that best fit their interests.
- **Mid-career coaching:** Help employees choose between management and technical career paths by determining where their interests lie.
- **Supporting 'plateaued' employees:** Cater for those who feel they have reached the limit of upward movement in an organisation by identifying alternative activities, projects or entire career paths that better fit their interests.
- **Career change:** Help people understand their job satisfaction and explore reasons for and obstacles to career change, as well as issues that can be associated with career/job dissatisfaction.
- **Outplacement:** Use the Strong to help individuals identify a fulfilling career path and prepare a career plan that utilises their transferable skills.
- **Career counselling:** Objectively identify your clients' interests, and provide them with a framework for organising their interests into general and specific categories within the world of work. Help them identify potentially relevant occupations that may not have been previously considered.
- **Retirement:** Help employees explore their interests and plan a fulfilling and meaningful life after work.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of applications. The Strong can be used by anyone who is involved in career coaching, planning, development and counselling.

In addition, the Strong can be used alone but also in conjunction with other assessments that look at personality in more depth, such as the MBTI and 16PF instruments. However, practitioners should not rely solely on psychometric tools for answers. The respondent, in collaboration with the practitioner, is the ultimate judge of their present and future.

## Who can take the Strong?

The Strong is suitable for:

- Employees at all levels
- Students aged 13–14 and above. However, the practitioner should bear in mind that interests start to crystallise between the ages of 16 and 18.

Respondents must also have a good command of the English language.

## How is the Strong administered?

The Strong is available online through OPPassessment, OPP's platform for administering psychometric questionnaires and generating expert reports.

The practitioner should:

- Invite the respondent to complete the Strong in a quiet environment where they will not be interrupted
- Remind them that the Strong can take 30–45 minutes to complete
- Reassure them that there are no right or wrong answers: the Strong does not assess skills or abilities, only interests
- Reassure them that the results belong to the individual and that they are confidential. The respondent may share the results with their line manager or similar only if they wish to do so.

## How does the Strong Interest Inventory work?

The Strong gives the practitioner five main types of information:

- Scores on six General Occupational Themes (GOT), based on Holland's Occupational Themes, which reflect the respondent's broad occupational interests
- Scores on Basic Interest Scales (BIS), which identify specific interest areas within the six General Occupational Themes, indicating the work activity areas likely to be most motivating and rewarding for the client
- Scores on Occupational Scales (OS), which compare the respondent's likes and dislikes with those of people who are satisfied in various specific occupations, indicating their likely compatibility of interests
- Scores on five Personal Scales (PS), which describe differences related to work style, learning, leadership, risk-taking and teamwork, providing insight into work and education environments most likely to fit the client best
- A Response Summary, which summarises a client's responses within each of the above sections, providing interpretative data useful to the career practitioner.

In the Profile and Interpretive Report, the information is organised in a way that helps the respondent develop a general strategy towards approaching career and educational decisions, with the results displayed graphically, and tips and action steps throughout on practical ways to use the results.

## General Occupational Themes (GOT)

The General Occupational Themes are based on John Holland's theory (Holland, 1973, as cited in Donnay et al., 2005) and represent an important milestone in interest measurement. The GOT are divided into six general themes: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. Depending on

their interests, each respondent is described by one or more of these themes in order of preference (eg Artistic, Social). In addition, each of the Basic Interest areas and Occupational Scales is also described by one or a combination of themes.

The GOT provide a global view of the client's interests and occupational orientation. This makes the GOT particularly useful for the following reasons:

- They can help younger clients or clients who are unclear about their general vocational direction.
- They can help clients understand their Basic Interest Scales and Occupational Scales. For example, somebody may express interests similar to people who work in the marketing industry. However, they might be more attracted to the artistic rather than the enterprising side of marketing.
- They are global concepts. Numerous resources (eg websites and books) make use of the same themes, thus rendering them useful inside or outside the Strong framework.

## Basic Interest Scales (BIS)

The 30 Basic Interest Scales can be seen as subdivisions of the six General Occupational Themes, each GOT containing three to five BIS grouped under it in the Strong profile. For example, three of the available BIS, Research, Science and Mathematics, are grouped under the GOT to which they relate the most, the Investigative theme.

Each of the available BIS covers a specific interest domain. However, the BIS are more focused than the GOT but less targeted than the Occupational Scales (OS), thus making them ideal for:

- Assisting clients in understanding the underlying interests measured by the GOT
- Highlighting a client's 'likes' and 'dislikes' within each GOT
- Shedding further light on major themes in the individual's interests, when used in conjunction with the Occupational Scales
- Providing a comprehensive and directly interpretable representation of the client's interests.

## Occupational Scales (OS)

Originally developed by E. K. Strong (Donnay et al., 2005), the 122 Occupational Scales have proven very effective over the years because they provide information about how an individual's responses compare with those of people actually employed in and satisfied with a particular occupation.

The OS are highly specific and they generate a large amount of detailed information about and for each respondent.

The OS are ordered on the profile in the six categories represented by the GOT classification system. Each

OS is represented by a theme code (one, two or three letters that represent the GOT most closely associated with each scale), thus making OSs compatible with the O\*NET™ database at <http://online.onetcenter.org>.

The OS are particularly useful in situations where:

- A client is ready to take a more focused approach
- A client is facing an imminent occupational decision (entry-level occupational choice, career change, occupational adjustment beyond entry level).

## Personal Style Scales

The five Personal Style Scales (Work Style, Learning Environment, Leadership Style, Risk Taking, Team Orientation) complement the traditional occupational interest scales. They are bipolar scales, with a distinctive style associated with both the left and right pole of each scale, and they provide information about how clients go about working, learning, leading others, taking risks and accomplishing tasks.

The Personal Style Scales can help clients:

- Refine their choices based on information about their personal style
- Identify the style they will feel most comfortable using when working in their chosen career
- Increase job satisfaction
- Determine how alternatives for further learning or training may fit with their learning style
- Identify their interest in assuming a particular leadership style
- Identify how much risk they are willing to take in choosing or changing careers.

## Response Summary

The Response Summary is a useful overview of an individual's results, providing the practitioner with information on:

- The consistency with which the client completed the inventory. The range of possible scores for the typicality index is 0–24; scores of 17 or higher are considered to be reflective of consistent responding.
- Unusual response patterns. For example, what if a client is not interested in any occupation or leisure activity, or, on the other hand, what if they are interested in all jobs and leisure activities?

The Response Summary, far from being a 'lie scale' can help the practitioner generate useful hypotheses to explore with the client.

## Normative data

The Strong Interest Inventory is a norm-referenced instrument. The norm sample used is the General Representative Sample of the US population and consists of 2,250 individuals (50% men, 50% women).

It is generally representative of the racial and ethnic make-up of the US workforce.

The General Representative Sample supports the administration of the Strong in the UK for the following reasons:

- The Strong measures global concepts, such as occupational interests and leisure activities.
- There is evidence that the interests of people in a particular occupation are extremely similar across cultures (Harmon et al., 1994).

However, along with an individual's results, the practitioner should take into account a number of factors when providing career advice, such as their cultural background, experiences, and any other data that will help practitioner and client alike to make sense of the information.

## Reliability and validity

The Strong demonstrates excellent reliability and validity. The following data reflect only a small proportion of the available research:

<b>General Occupational Themes</b>	<i>Reliability:</i> All six revised GOT possessed internal consistency reliability of at least 0.91.
<b>Basic Interest Scales</b>	<i>Reliability:</i> The median reliability estimate of internal consistency for the 30 BIS was 0.87. <i>Validity:</i> Initial validity studies of the 30 BIS show that as a group they explain 68–78% of the variance in broadoccupational groups, and 92–93% of the variance in college major groups.
<b>Occupational Scales</b>	<i>Reliability:</i> The median test-retest reliability for the revised OS was 0.86 across an interval of two to seven months.
<b>Personal Style Scales</b>	<i>Reliability:</i> Internal consistency reliabilities ranged from 0.87 to 0.82.

### Bibliography and references

- Donnay, D., Thompson, R., Morris, L. and Schaubhut, N. (2004). *Technical brief for the newly revised Strong Interest Inventory assessment, content, reliability and validity*. California: CPP Research Department.
- Donnay, D., Morris, R. and Schaubhut, N., Thompson, R. (2005). *Strong Interest Inventory Manual: Research, Development, and Strategies for Interpretation*. California: CPP.
- Harmon, L., Hansen, J., Borgen, F. and Hammer, A. (1994). *Strong Interest Inventory, applications and technical manual*. California: CPP.

## Next steps and resources for the practitioner

The Strong can yield rich and enlightening data that can help your clients make informed career choices. In order to get the most out of the inventory, practitioners should consider familiarising themselves with the contents of each scale, as well as interpretation strategies and techniques. The following resources are highly recommended for new users as well as experienced practitioners:

- **Strong Interest Inventory Manual:**  
*Research, Development, and Strategies for Interpretation*

The most comprehensive guide to administering and interpreting the Strong. It provides the practitioner with breadth and depth of information on the reliability, validity, development, and interpretation strategies, as well as detailed descriptions of the scales.

- **Strong Interest Inventory User's Guide:**  
*Practitioner's tool for understanding, interpretation, and use of the Strong Profile and Interpretive Report*

An overview of the Strong and general strategies are just the beginning in this powerful tool. This practical guide goes deeper, to discuss interpretation strategies for especially challenging profiles, and client-specific approaches that work. Answers to frequently asked questions and a set of reproducible masters round out this indispensable tool for new and experienced users of the Strong instrument.

To order the above resources call 0845 603 9958.

- **Product datasheet**
- **Sample reports on the OPP website**

## And finally...

Despite its power and versatility, the Strong is not designed to prescribe career paths. It is a vehicle for discussion and exploration. When used alone or in conjunction with a client's preferences, as assessed by the MBTI instrument, and behaviours, as assessed by the 16PF instrument, the Strong can facilitate career choice and transition in a targeted, cost- and time-effective, and user-friendly way.

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