



Tips for interpreting **challenging** profiles on the **Strong** assessment

Have you ever come across a “challenging” Strong Interest Inventory® profile? Two of the most common types you encounter are “elevated” and “flat” profiles. They don’t occur often, but can be even more challenging because you aren’t as experienced interpreting them.

What is an “elevated” profile?

Scores on the General Occupational Themes (GOTs) and/or Basic Interest Scales (BISs) are either all or mostly “very high” or “high,” often with a large number of “similar” scores (40+) on the Occupational Scales (OSs), make it an elevated profile. They have unique interpretation challenges because students don’t have a differentiated pattern of likes and dislikes – it seems they like almost everything. The goal here is to help students sort what they like most since they can’t pursue a career of all six interest themes.

Problem: Having a range of viable career options

Strategy: Sometimes with lots of work experience and success in multiple fields, students have difficulty sorting which work best matches their values and interests. Explore their past work experiences. Focus on prioritizing which ones they liked the most. What did they like the most from each experience? How does that correlate with the highest of their highest Strong scores?

Problem: Diverse interests

Strategy: Explore career areas with opportunities to meet different kinds of people and perform many types of tasks and that offer variety in daily routines. A values card sort could also help prioritize the types of interests that’re most important to focus their career direction.

Problem: Keeping all options open

Strategy: Some students want to continue the exploration process longer than others. They don’t want to shut down any career possibility until they are sure it isn’t for them. In this case, focus on career fields that offer many options. This shows them how choosing one career doesn’t mean one single job for the rest of their life. Discuss the value of setting priorities. Also, explore the downside of not committing. Emphasize how any career path opens up even more new opportunities to explore.



What is a “flat” profile?

Scores on the GOTs and/or BISs are either mostly or all “very little” or “little” are a flat profile. You can’t see a pattern. Even when most of an individual’s GOTs and BISs are low, there’s usually at least one standard score above 40 on the OSs. This is a good place to start looking for the hidden pattern. In addition, it’s often useful to begin by reviewing the Personal Styles Scales (PSSs). Unlike the other Strong scales, the PSSs are bipolar, which makes it likely students will score toward the pole of at least one scale. This could be enough to begin a discussion of likes and dislikes.

Problem: Little knowledge of the world of work

Strategy: Look for ways to learn about and experience the Themes, like interviewing people in various jobs, pursuing volunteer opportunities, taking on internships, etc. Additionally, school career libraries or www.onetonline.org are great resources to learn about careers.

Problem: Low self-esteem

Strategy: Even when students are interested in a field, they might indicate dislike for it because they don’t have enough self-confidence or self-esteem to believe they could be successful. Schedule individual counseling to help them explore and enhance their self-esteem. Then have them take the Strong again later.

Problem: Family or peer pressure

Strategy: Identify external forces at play and how they’re affecting responses to the Strong items. Did they answer according to their interests or as what they felt was expected of them? Are they being reassured to pursue only certain types of career fields? It’s also possible students haven’t been exposed to all six interest Themes due to their culture itself. Like if all family members pursued a career in medicine. Also, see options listed above for the first flat profile strategy.