



Tips for Interpreting Challenging Profiles on the Strong Assessment

While interpreting students' (or other clients') results from the *Strong Interest Inventory*® assessment, have you ever come across a "challenging" profile? Two of the most common types we encounter are "elevated" and "flat" Profiles. Even though they don't occur often, they seem even more challenging because we aren't as experienced in interpreting them.

What Is an "Elevated" Profile?

An elevated Profile is one in which a student's scores on the GOTs and/or BISs are either all or mostly "very high" or "high," often with a large number of "similar" scores (40+) on the OSs. Elevated Profiles have unique interpretation challenges due to students not having a differentiated pattern of likes and dislikes—they answer as if they like almost everything! The goal with these types of Profiles is to help students sort what they like most since they cannot pursue a career that reflects all six interest Themes.

Common causes of students' elevated Profiles and strategies to suggest:

Possible cause:

Having a range of viable career options

Strategy to suggest: Proven success in multiple fields, sometimes seen in older students with extensive work experience, could result in difficulty sorting which types of work best match their values and interests. Explore their past work experiences with a focus on prioritising which ones they liked the most. What did they like the most from each experience, and how does that correlate with the highest of their highest Strong scores?

Strategy to suggest: Explore career areas that offer opportunities to meet many different kinds of people and perform many types of tasks, and that also offer variety in the daily routine. The addition of a values card sort could help students prioritise the types of interests that are most important in order to focus their career exploration process.

Possible cause:

Having diverse interests

Possible cause:

Wanting to keep all their options open

Strategy to suggest: Since some students want to continue the exploration process longer than others—not wanting to shut down any career possibility until they are sure it isn't for them—focus on career fields that offer many options. This will illustrate how choosing one career does not mean being pinned down to a single job for the rest of their life. Discuss the value and benefits of setting priorities, and also explore the downside of not committing. Emphasise how any career path will open up even more new opportunities to explore.

What Is a "Flat" Profile?

A flat Profile is one in which a student's scores on the General Occupational Themes (GOTs) and/or Basic Interest Scales (BISs) are either all or mostly "very little" or "little." At first glance, no identifiable pattern of interests is discernible, although by looking at the highest of the low scores, we can often uncover one. Also, even when most of an individual's GOTs and BISs are low, there is usually at least one standard score above 40 on the Occupational Scales (OSs), which could be a good place to start looking for the hidden pattern.

In addition, it is often useful to begin the interpretation by reviewing the Personal Styles Scales (PSSs), because unlike the other Strong scales, the PSSs are bipolar, which makes it likely that students will score toward the pole of at least one of these scales. This could be enough to begin a discussion of likes and dislikes and how they relate to career interests.

Common causes of students' elevated Profiles and strategies to suggest:

Possible cause:

Having little knowledge of the world of work

Strategy to suggest: Look for ways to learn about and experience the Themes, such as interviewing people in various jobs, pursuing volunteer opportunities, taking on internships, and so on. Additionally, school career libraries or www.onetonline.org are excellent resources to learn about careers that represent each of the six Themes.

Strategy to suggest: Even when students are truly interested in a particular career field, they might still indicate dislike for it simply because they don't have enough self-confidence or self-esteem to believe they could actually be successful at it. Schedule individual counselling to help them explore and enhance their self-esteem and then have them take the Strong again later.

Possible cause:

Having low self-esteem

Possible cause:

Experiencing family or peer pressure

Strategy to suggest: Identify the external forces at play and how they are affecting students' responses to the Strong items. Did they answer according to their interests, or to what they felt was expected of them? Are they being ressured to pursue only certain types of career fields as identified by their family? It's also possible for students not to have been exposed to all six interest Themes due to the family culture itself; for example, family members who have all pursued a career in education or some other career field. See also options listed above for the first flat Profile strategy.

For more on interpreting challenging Profiles, check out the ***Strong Interest Inventory® User's Guide***.

