



Using Schoodles SFMA as part of a Strengths-Based Assessment

What does a 'strengths-based' assessment mean to you? In the past, it may have simply involved listing a student's strengths and then moving on to their needs. However, a strengths-based assessment can be a powerful tool in promoting self-confidence, motivation, and independence. This type of assessment highlights areas for growth and improvement, while simultaneously showcasing a student's positive attributes. By utilizing a strengths-based approach, parents, staff, and students can all view the student in a more positive light.

Using a criterion-reference tool like Schoodles, you can effectively locate areas where a student excels, as well as areas that require further support. Unlike standardized tools, Schoodles offers the flexibility to provide verbal prompts, visual demonstrations, task grading, or other aids to help students complete challenging tasks.

Assessment

When gathering information, it's best to start with a series of questions for parents and teachers. This will help identify effective strategies for the student and areas of strength to build on. Consider asking the following questions:

- What does the student excel at? What do you enjoy about the student?
- What strategies have worked best for this student in the past to help them complete tasks?
- Are there any standard interventions, such as a wiggle seat or pencil grip, that don't work for the student?
- What does the student enjoy? Understanding their interests can help motivate them.
- What do they see as the student's biggest challenges? Parents are often the best source of this information, and asking these questions can save valuable time during the assessment process.

To give a student the best advantage within the assessment setting:

- Acknowledge the student may need verbal prompts, visual demonstration, help from us, and task grading. Include those types of supports in the assessment and the narrative, present levels needs statements AND goals
- Write down things about the student that help him be successful. 'Good attention to task', 'interested in everything', 'loves to handle materials', 'budding mechanic', 'very social', 'hums to self-regulate', 'very creative', 'outside the box thinker' or 'loves to move'.
- Gather info about student likes, interests, and preferences, this creates a more personalized narrative and potential for themes for intervention
- Frame needs and challenges as areas of potential growth or accommodation.

SCHODLES

- **Include parents and teachers in the assessment process to gather strategies that have been effective for the student, use them, and build on them.**

Here are some strengths/needs we can observe during testing:

- **Good attention to task/ may need support to move from activity to activity**
- **Demonstrates interest and curiosity about all of the materials/may need a limited amount of materials in front of him to work to his potential**
- **Highly sociable/may need some social time before beginning hands-on tasks**
- **Quick learner/excellent candidate for 6-10 week burst of service to improve skills**
- **Easily understands and follows visual versus verbal directions/may benefit from visual supports to move through the day.**
- **Loves to use hands/ may benefit from fidgets or may need to be presented with one task at a time and given extra time to explore hands-on activities.**

To effectively support students, we must shift our attention from their limitations to their capabilities. It is a common misconception that a strengths-based focus disregards student's challenges. We can describe a student's skills in neutral or positive terms, highlighting attributes that help them succeed. While we do not ignore struggles or weaknesses, we strive to reframe them constructively.

Documentation

To initiate a shift towards strengths, start by reviewing previous reports. Highlight all the positive statements in green, all neutral statements in yellow, and all negative statements in red. With this review, we aim to minimize negative statements and ultimately eliminate them. Deficits are not ignored, they are reframed.

Examine all judgment-based statements and negative remarks and substitute them with objective observational descriptions. For example, instead of saying, 'Jonny ran around the room taking all of the toys off the shelves and had a limited attention span,' rephrase it to, 'Jonny moved from one toy to another, removed them from the shelves, and showed brief interest in each.'

When writing a report, there are a few things to do to create a more positive summary, while including challenges.

- **Include all the things you enjoyed about the student**
- **Include neutral(observation-based) or positive statements about testing behavior**
- **Consider word choice, 'excels at', 'prefers to', or 'diligent at'**
- **Place all test scores at the bottom of your report.**



When writing goals,

- **Make the goal individual to the student.**
- **INCLUDE supports the student's needs to be successful**
- **Understand fading supports might not be appropriate for certain students**
- **Include the 'who' of who will be supporting the student**

Benefits of a SBA

- **Empowerment:**

By highlighting individual strengths, students feel more capable and confident in their abilities to achieve goals, leading to increased motivation and self-esteem.

- **Positive focus:**

Instead of dwelling on limitations, the focus shifts towards the positive aspects of a student's functioning, fostering a more optimistic outlook for students, parents, and staff. This approach moves from a 'fixing' viewpoint to 'facilitating growth'.

- **Personalized goals and interventions:**

Tailored treatment plans, needs statements, and goals can be developed by leveraging individual strengths to address challenges.

- **Improved relationships:**

It encourages open communication and collaboration between the therapist and student, allowing for better rapport, goal-setting, and decision-making.

- **Suitable for diverse populations:**

This approach can benefit students with a variety of challenges and needs.

Barriers

- **Compliance with insurance and organization standards/ perceived lack of needs in documentation**
- **Lack of time to make the shift**
- **Own and others' professional bias**
- **Confusion about terminology to use**

Mueller, C. E., Xu, J., & Winsor, D. L. (2024). Positive psychology and strengths-based interventions (SBIs): Implications for uses with special student populations (special needs, P-3, gifted). *Education Sciences*, 14(7), 753. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14070753>