

# Using SWOT for Self-Assessment

## Objective

To use the SWOT approach to analyze internal and external factors and resources to increase clarity in decision-making.

## You Should Know

Challenging situations, including sudden change, make it difficult to think clearly. To decrease the likelihood you will be overwhelmed by fear and self-doubt, you can do a SWOT analysis to take inventory of your inner and outer resources to develop a plan.

SWOT analysis was designed by business leaders looking for ways to evaluate their companies and make good decisions on how to move forward. It is just as effective when applied to other kinds of groups, projects, individuals, or even relationships.

A SWOT analysis is a visual matrix that evaluates the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities,** and **Threats** of a situation. It is helpful for any decision you need to make, such as when:

- You are preparing to apply or interview for a job.
- A responsibility or goal feels challenging (parenting, completing a degree).
- You have two or more choices and are having a hard time deciding between them.
- You have an opportunity and you are unsure if you should go for it.

A SWOT analysis is helpful because it is easy: you do not need any prior knowledge or technology to get benefit from it. It brings clarity; writing slows down your thoughts. It looks at the whole picture, including the strengths and weaknesses you bring to the situation, as well as the opportunities and challenges in your environment.

There are three steps: gathering data, evaluating it, and creating an action plan based on the results. This worksheet will help you use the SWOT approach to analyze internal and external factors and resources to increase clarity in your decision-making.

## What to Do

Describe a decision you are having difficulty making. Be as detailed as possible.

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1. **Gather data.** Use the chart below or divide a piece of paper into four quadrants.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>

Considering the decision you described on the previous page, fill in each box.

- **Strengths.** What qualities, knowledge, skills, and experience do you have that are useful in this situation?
- **Weaknesses.** What qualities might keep you from success in this circumstance? Where do you lack confidence? What could you improve about yourself that would help?
- **Opportunities.** What external factors are on your side? Examples: new technology that can help; trends you can take advantage of; needs you can fill; contacts who can be a resource or mentor you, etc.

- **Threats.** What external factors hurt your chances or block your success? One way to identify threats is to ask yourself what worries or stresses you. Obstacles, competition, and change can all be threats to getting where you want to be.

#### Tips

- **No need to complete the chart all at once.** Jot down some notes and come back to it later. Sleep on it and see what insight you have in the morning. Let the process stretch out over days.
- **Try looking at yourself and the situation as if you are watching a movie.** Do not let your inner critic take over, but do not shy away from taking a good hard look at yourself, either.
- **Unsure of your strengths or weaknesses?** Look at a list of personal qualities on the Internet for ideas.
- **Come up with examples as evidence for each strength and weakness.** This will help you be concrete and realistic.
- **If you are working on a particularly difficult or complex challenge, consider asking others for input.** Ask people who know you well and can be honest with you.
- **You do not need to fill in the boxes in order.** If you get stuck defining the opportunities, focus on threats first.

#### 2. Evaluate the data.

- Look at Strengths and Opportunities to leverage your positives into action and reinforce your confidence.
- Look at Weaknesses and Threats to find areas you can work on or circumstances to avoid.
- Consider what you can do change your weaknesses into strengths or transform threats into opportunities. For example, planning to get the license or certificate a job demands converts a threat into a strength. If you are shy and consider that a weakness, deciding to apply for a job that does not require a lot of interaction turns your weakness into a strength.

#### 3. Plan. Use your reflections to guide you into action or implementation.

- Write down your conclusions and ideas on how to proceed.
- Define any goals you have developed to respond to your weaknesses or threats.
- Break them down into measurable steps and milestones.
- Identify any support you need (equipment, knowledge, support from others).
- Calendar your action steps and track the results.

If this process has been helpful to you, you may want to keep a record of it. Next time you do a SWOT analysis, you can compare the two exercises for additional insight and to remind yourself of your previous accomplishments.

## Reflections on this Exercise

Did anything you discovered surprise you?

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How have your feelings or energy level about the situation shifted due to this exercise?

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What is your first action step and when will you take it?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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