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Help Your Students Assess Their Ideas Using a SWOT Diagram

What is SWOT?

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

These are the four dimensions which entrepreneurs consider when assessing their ideas. The ultimate goal of a SWOT analysis is to provide a clear indication of what changes need to be made to an idea in order to maximize its benefits and minimize its drawbacks.

Why is it Valuable?

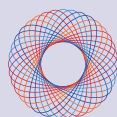
- It considers both internal factors (the merits/limitations of the idea itself) and external factors (the audience for the idea, the resources available to support it).
- It organizes these factors in a simple, highly visual manner.
- It helps to generate new ideas by clearly outlining the factors that can lead to success, and the factors that can prevent it.

SWOT in Your Classroom

A SWOT diagram can be used to structure activities that involve brainstorming, goal-setting, or peer/self-assessment. It works best as a collaborative activity involving lots of discussion, but it can also be used individually.

Here are some specific applications to get you started (where you take it from here is up to you!)

- Use it at the start of a project that requires students to formulate an argument or create/design something. Then have the students conduct another SWOT analysis half-way through the project to help them consider ways to refine their idea.
- Help students form their own groups for collaborative projects by having them consider how their strengths/weaknesses intersect with their peers' skillset, and the larger goals of the project. This same approach could be used to help students design their own seating plan.
- Conduct regular self-assessment in which each student considers how their strengths/weaknesses relate to the opportunities available to them at their school.



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Sample SWOT Analysis

Create a chart like the one below.

- This works best on a large piece of chart paper or a whiteboard, where ideas can be added to, modified, and rearranged.
- Start by describing your idea and your audience. As you add to the remaining boxes, adapt your initial idea to highlight its benefits and minimize its drawbacks.

		BENEFITS	DRAWBACKS
INTERNAL FACTORS	DESCRIBE YOUR IDEA HERE:	<h3>Strengths</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What problems does this idea solve?• What is unique about the idea?• What skills do you have that will allow you to execute this idea?	<h3>Weaknesses</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What problems are not addressed by the idea?• How is this similar to existing ideas?• What skills do you need to acquire to execute this idea?
EXTERNAL FACTORS	DESCRIBE YOUR AUDIENCE HERE:	<h3>Opportunities</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why would your target audience be receptive to this idea?• What key resources do you have access to which could help develop this idea?• What further opportunities could result if this idea is well received?	<h3>Threats</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What might your target audience dislike about your idea?• What key resources are you missing?• What consequences could result if the idea doesn't work?

What Success Looks Like

The initial idea changes throughout the activity

- Students clearly explain how and why they changed their initial idea.
- Students are able to clearly explain the internal and external factors that influenced their thinking.

Specific goals are generated

- At the end of the activity, students are able to describe and justify the course of action they will take to execute their idea.