

# Assessing Ethical Skills

*Sensitivity*  
*Judgment*  
*Focus*  
*Action*

## INTRODUCTION

James Rest's (1983; Narvaez & Rest, 1995) Four Component Model describes the psychological that comprise an ethical or moral action. The model has been used for educational design and intervention for several decades (see Rest & Narvaez, 1994). The model has been used to identify skills that can be taught based on a novice-to-expert pedagogy (Narvaez et al., 2004; Narvaez, 2006). This document offers a way to assess skills related to each component.

The Four Component Model allows us to view moral behavior as a set of responses to particular situational features. Experts in the skills of Moral Sensitivity are better at quickly and accurately 'reading' a moral situation and determining what role they might play. Experts in the skills of Moral Judgment have many tools for solving complex moral problems. Experts in the skills of Moral Self/Identity cultivate an ethical identity that leads them to prioritize ethical goals. Experts in the skills of Moral Striving know how to keep their "eye on the prize," enabling them to stay on task and take the necessary steps to get the ethical job done.

Viewed as a set of skills, moral behavior is pried from the rigidity of personality temperament and put into the realm of learnable behavior. It appears more like behavior in other domains like football or chess, as a set of skills that can be learned. This is not a new idea. Repeatedly throughout *The Republic*, Plato draws analogies from professions and vocations as analogies of the just person—one who has certain skills that are cultivated to expertise. According to this perspective, the variability that we see in moral behavior across contexts can be explained as variability in schema development and skill application across contexts, not necessarily as poor temperament or a lack of virtue.

## PURPOSE OF THE ETHICAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

1. To provide a tool for assessing characters in stories, or real-life people
2. To provide a quick assessment of students as a means to inform what intervention might be needed.

Similar checklists were used in the Minnesota Community Voices and Character Education project (Anderson et al., 2003; Narvaez et al., 2004). Teachers used the checklist to inform decisions about which ethical skills to focus on during instruction.

For a broader view of how ethical skill development fits into a holistic approach to moral character development, see Narvaez (2007; 2008)

## VERSION

The ethical assessment tool is based on the items from the Rating Ethical Content Scale used to rate children's media.

## TO USE THE ASSESSMENT TOOL:

Please contact Darcia Narvaez and consult with her on whether or not this tool would be useful for your project: [dnarvaez@nd.edu](mailto:dnarvaez@nd.edu)

## References

- Anderson, C., Narvaez, D., Bock, T., Endicott, L., & Lies, J. (2004). *Minnesota Community Voices and Character Education: Final Report and Evaluation*. Roseville, MN: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.
- Narvaez, D. (2007). How cognitive and neurobiological sciences inform values education for creatures like us. In D. Aspin & J. Chapman (Eds.), *Values Education and Lifelong Learning: Philosophy, Policy, Practices* (pp. 127-159). Springer Press International.
- Narvaez, D. (2008). Human flourishing and moral development: cognitive science and neurobiological perspectives on virtue development. In L. Nucci & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education* (pp. 310-327). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Narvaez, D., Bock, T., Endicott, L., & Lies, J. (2004). Minnesota's Community Voices and Character Education Project. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 2, 89-112.

*Brief Description of* **THE FOUR PROCESSES OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

**I. ETHICAL SENSITIVITY**

*Interpreting the situation according to who is involved,  
what actions to take and what possible reactions and outcomes might ensue*

**Identify the interested parties (critical thinking)**

- Who are the people who will be affected by this decision (students, staff, parents, community, other groups)?
- Who should be consulted in this decision?
- Who has faced this problem before and how did they handle it?
- With whom could I talk about the problem?

**Weigh the possible outcomes (short-term and long-term) (creative & prospective thinking)**

- What the possible consequences to me & constituent groups for each possible action?
- What are the possible reactions of these interested parties?
- What are the potential benefits for me and these groups for each possible action?
- Who and what else might be affected? Have I thought of everything?
- How will my choice affect the rest of the world now and in the future?

**II. ETHICAL REASONING (Selecting the most ETHICAL action)**

*Reasoning about the possible actions in the situation and judging which action is most ethical*

**List all possible options (creative thinking)**

How could the problem be solved?  
What are the choices I have for solving the problem?  
How would my affiliative groups solve the problem?  
What are the choices my (professional, personal) code allows?  
Should I consider other options?

**Make a decision (logical thinking)**

What is the best action to take?  
What choice should I make?

***THREE SCHEMAS AND SIX STAGES OF CONCEPTIONS OF COOPERATION***

Personal interests

- Stage 1: The morality of obedience to avoid punishment: Do what you're told
- Stage 2: The morality of instrumental egoism and instrumental exchange--Let's make a deal
- Stage 3: Interpersonal concordance: Be considerate, nice and kind and you'll make friends

## Maintaining Norms

Stage 4: Law and duty to the social order: Everyone in society is obligated to & protected by the law


## Postconventional

Stage 5: The morality of consensus-building procedures: You are obligated by the arrangements that are agreed to by due process procedures

Stage 6: Non-arbitrary social cooperation: How rational/impartial people would organize cooperation


### III. ETHICAL FOCUS/ MOTIVATION

*Prioritizing the ethical action over other goals and needs (either in the particular situation, or as a habit)*

<u>ETHICAL FOCUS</u>	
<b>Value identification (motivational thinking)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the values of my family/religion/culture/community?</li><li>• How should these values influence what is decided?</li><li>• How does each possible option fit with these values?</li></ul>	
<b>Prioritize the action (practical thinking)</b>	
I put this action at the top of my 'to-do' list. Am I willing to forego the benefits of NOT taking this best action?	

### IV. ETHICAL ACTION

*Implementing the ethical action by knowing how to do so and following through no matter what*

<u>ETHICAL ACTION</u>	
<b>Judge the feasibility of the chosen option (critical thinking)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is my attitude about taking this action?</li><li>• Do I believe it is possible for me to take this action?</li><li>• Do I believe that it is likely I will succeed?</li></ul>	
<b>Take action (practical &amp; prospective thinking)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What steps need to be taken to complete the action?</li><li>• Whose help do I need from my colleagues and friends?</li><li>• What back up plan do I have if this doesn't work?</li></ul>	
<b>Follow through (practical thinking)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do I help myself follow through on this action?</li><li>• How can others help me follow through? How do I resist giving up?</li><li>• How do I muster the courage to do it?</li></ul>	
<b>Reflect (ethical judgment, critical thinking)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What were the consequences of my decision?</li><li>• How did the decision affect the constituents and other groups?</li><li>• Did the results turn out as I planned?</li><li>• In the future, should I change the decision or the decision process?</li></ul>	

<b>ETHICAL SENSITIVITY</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Cares about other people's feelings			
Notices what other people's needs are or Notices things that are wrong or that hurt others			
Expresses emotions in a way that doesn't hurt other people or things			
Shows care for others			
Listens to and takes to heart what other people say Tries to understand others' thoughts and opinions			
Tries to understand people who are different or from different cultures			

<b>ETHICAL JUDGMENT</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Tries to understand a problem before deciding what to do			
Thinks about doing the right thing			
Thinks about how others might be upset by his or her choices, actions or decisions			
Wants things to be fair for everyone			
Tries to follow the rules			
Is positive or optimistic about solving a problem			
Tries to do things that help the classroom, school, neighborhood or community			
Thinks about his or her decision afterwards			

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>ETHICAL FOCUS/MOTIVATION</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Focuses talents and energy on good ends			
Cooperates with others for good ends			
Shows good self control and discipline over his or her own impulses and behaviors			
Is committed to helping others			
Follows through on promises and agreements			
Tries to be good and do the right thing even when it is easier to not be good			
Is a good steward of resources			
Focuses on positive meaning in life			

<b>ETHICAL ACTION</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Tries to fix problems or conflicts without hurting other people or things			
Makes a plan to solve a problem or conflict			
Tries to help other people			
Tries to change rules that are unfair			
When someone is picked on, tries to stop it			
Follows through on a moral goal even when something gets in the way and plans are changed			
Does not give up on solving a problem or conflict when it is hard			
Puts self at risk when helping others or solving a problem or conflict			

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>ETHICAL INSENSITIVITY</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Cares only about own feelings and needs not others'			
Ignores things that are wrong or that hurt others			
Expresses emotions in a way that hurt other people or things			
Disregards what other people say or think or the way they think			
Disrespects people who are different or from different cultures			
Acts like a bad friend or enemy			

<b>UNETHICAL JUDGMENT</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Acts on impulse without thinking about complications			
Disregards how others might be upset by his or her choices, actions or decisions			
Thinks about doing the wrong thing			
Does not reflect on decisions afterwards			
Breaks or tries to break the rules			
Is negative about solving problems			
Chooses goals and things to do that hurt the classroom, school, neighborhood or community			
Wants things to be fair only for him or herself or family and friends			



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>UNETHICAL FOCUS/MOTIVATION</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Shows poor self control and discipline over his or her own impulses and behaviors			
Cooperates with others for bad ends			
Is committed to hurting others			
Focuses talents and energy on bad ends			
Breaks promises and agreements			
Chooses to do the wrong thing even when it was easier to do than the right thing			
Wastes resources			
Focuses on negative meaning in life			

<b>UNETHICAL ACTION</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NOT PRESENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Tried to fix problems or conflicts by hurting other people or things			
Encouraged other people to hurt others			
Hurt or tried to hurt other people or things			
Changed or tried to change rules to help him or herself			
Ignored a problem or conflict			
When trying to solve a problem, gave up when things got in the way and stuck to a bad plan even when it wasn't working			
Gave up on solving the problem when it was hard			
Was cowardly when helping others or solving a problem or conflict			

## TOOLS FOR Researchers, Educators and Parents

**Most of these you can download from:**

<http://www.nd.edu/~dnarvaez/> Or from <http://cee.nd.edu>

### TOOLS FOR TEACHERS: ETHICAL SKILL INSTRUCTION

Free from [cee.nd.edu/curriculum](http://cee.nd.edu/curriculum)

Narvaez, D. with Endicott, L., Bock, T., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Action*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Narvaez, D. & Bock, T., with Endicott, L., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Judgment*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Narvaez, D., & Endicott, L., with Bock, T., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Sensitivity*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning.

Narvaez, D. & Lies, J. with Endicott, L., Bock, T., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Motivation*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

#### Updated versions for purchase (each \$10 or all four for \$30):

*Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 4: Ethical Action*. (Narvaez) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

*Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 2: Ethical Judgment*. (Narvaez & Bock) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

*Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 1: Ethical Sensitivity*. (Narvaez & Endicott) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

*Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 3: Ethical Motivation*. (Narvaez & Lies) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

*Integrative Ethical Education: Guide* (Narvaez)

### TOOLS FOR RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

**Citizenship Scale** *For Elementary and Secondary School Students: Guide*. Laboratory for Ethical Development and Education, University of Notre Dame

**Ethical Goodness Scale** *For Elementary and Secondary School Students: Guide*. (Narvaez, Bock & Vaydich) Laboratory for Ethical Development and Education, University of Notre Dame

**Community Bonding Scale: Guide**. (Narvaez) University of Notre Dame: Center for Ethical Education.

**Attitudes Towards Human Rights Inventory: Guide**. (Narvaez, Thoma, Getz) University of Notre Dame: Center for Ethical Education.

**Positivity Scale: Guide.** (Narvaez) University of Notre Dame: Center for Ethical Education.

**Moral Theme Inventory (MTI): Guide.** (Narvaez & Bock) South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University.

**Assessing Ethical Skills: Guide** (Narvaez)

**Checklist for an Ethical Classroom: Guide** (Narvaez)

**Checklist for an Achieving and Ethical Classroom: Guide** (Narvaez)

**Tuning into Ethical Behavior: Guide** (Narvaez)

**Multicultural Experiences Questionnaire (MEQ)** (Narvaez, Endicott, & Hill)

**Rating Ethical Content System (RECS)** for children's media (Narvaez)

## TOOLS FOR PARENTS

**Tuning into Ethical Behavior: Guide** (Narvaez)

**Nurturing a Peaceable Child** (Warren, Vaydich & Narvaez)