



Ranking Your Values & Life Deviation Scores

 ACT

 Assessment

 25-40 min

 Client

 No

Values-based living is at the heart of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), guiding clients toward living a fulfilling life despite pain or psychological distress. ACT values clarification exercises support the development of psychological flexibility, defined as the ability to persist or change behavior in alignment with values, even in the presence of challenging thoughts and emotions [1].

The pursuit of values-based living is the foundation of thriving and flourishing, or positive mental health [1]. Values clarification is a core process of ACT that helps clients define and commit to what truly matters in their lives [2].

This “Ranking Your Values & Life Deviation Scores” tool helps clients to evaluate the gap between how much they value key life domains and how fulfilled they feel in each one. This gap indicates that the client is living out of alignment with their values, which the ACT model defines as a primary cause of psychological suffering [3]. If these gaps remain unaddressed, they can contribute to experiential avoidance, poor decision-making, and entrenched psychological distress [4].

Recent studies confirm the utility of values-based assessments in clinical and non-clinical settings. For example, ACT interventions that incorporate values ranking have shown promising results with client groups ranging from inpatient substance users [5] to caregivers [6], and even those struggling with insomnia [7]. Clarifying and ranking values and then comparing them to lived experience promotes actionable insights and facilitates committed action aligned with what matters most [1].

This tool promotes values clarification by ranking the importance of life domains to identify values that remain unfulfilled or are being neglected. This helps prioritize the areas of a client’s life that need further attention and work. It encourages reflection, acceptance, and value-based goal setting, ultimately helping clients pivot from suffering toward meaning [3].



Author

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Goal

The goal of this exercise is to help clients identify misalignments between their core life values and how fulfilled they feel in those domains using a Life Deviation Score. By doing so, clients can clarify their values, prioritize change, and make committed actions that bring their lives into closer alignment with what truly matters to them.



Advice

- The following tool can be explored with a client in a session, or group of clients in a workshop setting as required. The *Appendix A* contains a worksheet that can be printed out for the client's use or copied as a template into a journal.
- Before starting the tool, practitioners should frame the exercise according to the ACT approach, explaining that pain and discomfort are part of life, but suffering arises when we drift from our values. Encourage clients to engage with this exercise with self-compassion and curiosity rather than self-criticism judgment.
- To increase effectiveness:
 - Clarify that this is not about achieving perfection or comparing oneself to societal norms, it's about living authentically.
 - Support reflection by using open-ended questions to explore the meaning behind high deviation scores.
 - Don't stop at awareness. Encourage committed action by helping clients brainstorm small, value-aligned steps they can take to achieve greater fulfillment in valued life domains.
 - Normalizing discomfort is essential. Clients may feel guilt, grief, or anxiety when confronted with values they've neglected. Use the "The Mindful Check-In" tool as a grounding strategy as needed to stay present.
- This tool is a preliminary assessment for a follow-up exercise called 'Using Life Deviation Scores to Take Action'.
- Be prepared to revisit this tool to assess changes over time. Repeated use can enhance commitment to values-based living and support sustained behavior change.



References

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3. Hayes, S. (2019). *A liberated mind: How to pivot toward what matters*. Avery.
4. Reilly, E. D., Ritzert, T. R., Scoglio, A. A., Mote, J., Fukuda, S. D., Ahern, M. E., & Kelly, M. M. (2019). A systematic review of values measures in acceptance and commitment therapy research. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 12, 290-304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2018.10.004>
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Ranking Your Values & Life Deviation Scores

Introduction

This exercise will help you clarify which areas of your life are most important to you and how much you are living in alignment with your values. You'll rank the importance and fulfillment of each life domain and calculate a life deviation score. This helps you identify areas of life that you value, but that may be neglected and need more attention and action.

Step 1: Review the life domains

Using the worksheet attached (*Appendix A*), look at the following 10 valued life domains:

1. Romantic relationships/partnerships
2. Leisure and fun
3. Job/career
4. Friends
5. Parenthood
6. Health and physical wellness
7. Social citizenship/environmental responsibility
8. Family relationships
9. Spirituality
10. Personal development and growth

Step 2: Rate each domain for importance

On a scale of 1–10, rate how important each domain is to you. (1 = not at all important, 10 = extremely important)

Step 3: Rate each domain for fulfillment

Now, on a separate scale of 1–10, rate how fulfilled you currently feel in each domain. (1 = no fulfillment, 10 = totally fulfilled)



Step 4: Calculate life deviation scores

Subtract the fulfillment score from the importance score for each domain:

$$\text{Life Deviation Score} = \text{Importance} - \text{Fulfillment}$$

Write these next to each domain.

Step 5: Identify areas of concern

Look at the scores. The higher the Life Deviation Score, the more that life domain has been neglected, which indicates living misaligned with your values. This is a source of potential suffering, such as languishing or surviving rather than flourishing or thriving. When valued life domains are neglected, our lives can feel unfulfilling.

Highlight or circle any domains with a score of 3 or more.

Step 6: Reflect and prioritize

For your top 2–3 highest Life Deviation Scores, answer the following:

- Why is this domain important to me?
When answering this question, think in terms of the values this life domain might fulfil, for example: if the life domain 'friends' has a higher score, think why friends are important to you. Some values friendships fulfill include sharing, fun, companionship, and love. Each person's values are unique, and there are no right and wrong answers. You can use the values mapping guide (*Appendix B*) with your worksheet for ideas.
- What's preventing me from feeling fulfilled here?
Taking the above example, when we reflect, we might realize that we're prioritizing work over social activities and leisure pursuits, or we might be caring for family members like children, or a partner, or a parent, and have no time to see friends.
- What's one small, value-aligned action I could take in this domain?
Again, taking the example of friendship, you could make time to stay in touch with friends by texting or calling at least one friend once a week and making time to meet them for a catch-up.



Step 7: Track your total deviation

- Add up all the importance scores.
- Add up all the fulfillment scores.
- Then subtract the fulfillment total from the importance total.

This is your total life deviation score. It provides a snapshot of how misaligned your life is with your personal values.

This assessment has a follow-on exercise called 'Using Life Deviation Scores to Take Action' that uses your life deviation scores to take committed action by setting goals that realign you with values-based living.

**Appendix A: Life Domains Worksheet**

Valued Life Domain	Importance 1-10 (A)	Fulfilment 1-10 (B)	Life deviation (A-B)
1. Romantic relationships/partnerships			
2. Leisure and fun			
3. Job/career			
4. Friends			
5. Parenthood			
6. Health and physical wellness			
7. Social citizenship/Environmental responsibility			
8. Family relationships			
9. Spirituality			
10. Personal development and growth			
TOTALS			

Appendix B: Values

In ACT, clarifying your values helps you to become the person you want to be. This list below is not exhaustive- they are just prompts to give you some ideas. The list of personal values is potentially endless.

Here are some examples.

- **Love:** Being a loving partner, parent, or friend.
- **Compassion:** Treating others (and myself) with kindness.
- **Honesty:** Speaking truthfully, even when it's hard.
- **Loyalty:** Standing by those I care about.
- **Forgiveness:** Letting go of resentment.
- **Sharing:** Enjoying spending time or doing activities with others.
- **Curiosity:** Exploring new ideas and experiences.
- **Growth:** Becoming a better version of myself.
- **Wisdom:** Learning from life's experiences.
- **Openness:** Being willing to consider new perspectives.
- **Resilience:** Adapting to and accepting the hard times as they help me grow.
- **Courage:** Doing what matters, even when I'm scared.
- **Authenticity:** Being true to who I really am.
- **Responsibility:** Owning my choices and actions.
- **Perseverance:** Staying with what's important, even when it's tough.
- **Fairness:** Standing up for justice or what's right.
- **Vitality:** Feeling alive and energized.
- **Self-care:** Taking care of my mind and body.
- **Balance:** Making space for rest, fun, and effort.
- **Sobriety:** Living free from addiction.
- **Safety:** Protecting myself and others.
- **Commitment:** Sticking with something important.
- **Contribution:** Making a positive difference.
- **Creativity:** Expressing myself in unique ways.
- **Excellence:** Striving to do things well.