

How to Answer the Weaknesses Question

Question - “so, what’s your biggest weakness?” You don’t want to talk yourself out of a job, but you also don’t want to be a cliché, so what do you do? Don’t panic! Here are a few tips to help you master this tricky situation.

Focus on improvement

The most effective way to tackle this question is to honestly address a shortcoming and mention how you’ve worked to overcome it. This shows the interviewer that you’re capable of accepting a fault and that you can improve on it. After all, self-awareness and problem solving skills are very valuable assets! For example, you might not be the world’s most organised person but you can mention that you now have a time-management system in place to help you stay on top of things. Or maybe you really struggled with confrontation but after taking on some training in the past, you feel more comfortable being assertive.

Mention a non-essential skill

Another handy approach to this question is to mention a weakness that is not necessarily relevant to your suitability for the role. It is honest and true, but doesn’t have any immediate repercussions to your chances of securing the role. You can also play up your strengths in contrast to your weakness to really highlight it. For example, if you were applying for an entry level finance position, you might mention that while you’ve always been very detail orientated, you aren’t particularly comfortable with public speaking situations like conducting presentations.

Turn that minus into a plus

You want to make sure that the interviewer doesn’t take your weakness to mean you’re unwilling to take on a job. Put a positive spin on that negative and turn it into something that could actually benefit the company. So if you think your weakness is to be really thorough and always triple-check everything, that could benefit a company that’s been playing a bit fast and loose with their attention to detail. Or if your obsessive neatness and love of organisation is your greatest fault, an employer that hasn’t had a filing system in place since 1987 might want that skill in an employee. It’s all about doing your research and knowing the industry you’re applying to work in, as certain qualities play very differently in different situations.

Keep it professional

You might be a terrible cook, but that's not really what your interviewer wants to know. Remember this is all about assessing your suitability for a particular working environment, so stick to business appropriate answers. Think about what you're going to say and make sure it fits the situation. Maybe you think that your greatest weakness is your inability to stop playing Candy Crush; you can rephrase that to say you get stuck on the details of tasks sometimes and, although you've never missed a deadline, you've implemented a strategy to help you implement your time more successfully. Make sure you review the job requirements before a role so you're aware of exactly what the employer is looking for. It's always a good idea to avoid using 'weakness' in your response. Even though that is the question, you don't want to pack in those negative connotations with your answer.

Finally, whatever you do, avoid these clunkers...

I'm a perfectionist / I work too hard

These are the two most common answers and interviewers hear them so often that it has lost all meaning. This doesn't give a true insight to your character and you will probably be asked to give another example. Don't waste time, show the interviewers that you're taking the question seriously and use it as an opportunity to really show how you've grown in a professional situation.

I don't have any / I can't think of anything

No one is ever going to believe that you don't have a weakness. It just screams arrogance and obstinacy. Of course you want interviewers to see you as a capable employee, but you must also come across as willing to learn and open to change. Jobs are constantly changing after all, so you have to be flexible. And if you simply dismiss the question out of hand because you can't think of anything, you just seem unprepared and oblivious to your own personal growth.

I don't like working with others / I struggle with deadlines

It doesn't matter what industry you work in, you will have to work with other people. It's an unavoidable fact of life so there's no point admitting you don't want to do it. Similarly, all jobs will require you to complete tasks within a certain time-frame. Time-keeping skills are a non-negotiable part of employment, so it's in your best interest to not mention your inability to get things done on time!