How to answer: what are your strengths and weaknesses in a job interview

You're in a job interview, and all is going well – you're nailing these questions, and you're feeling confident. And then they ask, "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" While it's one of the most common interview questions, it's easy to be caught a bit off-guard.

It's a question that might be intimidating, but one you can prepare for. With a well thought-out answer up your sleeve, you'll be ready to talk about anything they throw your way.

In this article, we'll discuss why this question exists, how to answer it, and how to turn weaknesses into a positive!

Why are strengths and weaknesses important in interviews?

Asking about your strengths and weaknesses can feel like a trick question, but it does have a purpose. It gives the interviewer insight to where you may fit within the role and company. When answering the question, consider what the job is and how your skills are beneficial to the company. Your answers can also highlight opportunities for growth and professional development. From this information, new questions for the interviewer may arise. Do they need to provide training or upskilling? Where are your skills most valuable?

Remember, you can (and should) ask questions in an interview. This is an opportunity to learn how you can best use your strengths, or grow from your weaknesses, as well as find a business that suits what you need, too.

Framing your answer

Understanding how to frame your answer can help you feel more confident in your delivery, and you can also better understand how your strengths and weaknesses can be beneficial to the workplace.

Being prepared for any interview question with an answer in mind is a good way to set yourself up for success , while also allowing yourself space to think about any follow-up questions. But how do you provide an answer when they're asking about both strengths and weaknesses upfront? Does this change if they ask about strengths and then weaknesses? The answer is yes-with both situations needing their own answer framework.

When asked about strengths and weaknesses together

When answering this question, start with your weakness and end with your strength. This ensures the last thing the interviewer hears in your answer is positive, showing what you can bring to the role.

You will also want to show a balance between your strengths and weaknesses. While discussing your strengths, talk about how this is a benefit to what you do. For your weakness, talk about how it has helped you grow or led to another strength.

For example, if you say you're not so comfortable speaking in front of large groups of people, you could mention how it has made you aware of how strong your skills are in a one-on-one setting, or how you have developed your written communication skills.

When asked as separate questions

In some cases, the interviewer may break these points into two questions. This gives you a little breathing room between your answers, so you can delve into more detail in your response. Here, you can provide specific instances of using your strengths in everyday work life, and how they have helped yourself or your co-workers.

The same goes for weaknesses, take your time and loop it back to a positive. For example, misunderstanding a request led to uncovering an issue within company software, or made you realise there was a knowledge gap that you sought more training in.

How to identify your strengths

You'll mention your strengths throughout the interview, usually without even thinking about it. Often they'll naturally pop up in conversation as you talk about your experience and skills. For example, if you're interviewing for a customer-facing role, you may talk about how being around people has helped you learn how to effectively communicate. Or, if it's your first job, speaking about how particular classes have added to your skillset that relate to the role.

But what is your greatest strength? How do you pick the one thing that really makes you stand out in the interviewer's mind? One tip is to consider what others say about you.

In your past jobs, at school, or even at family events, what are the compliments you've received? What do people say in passing as you're working? These are the strengths that stand out and are typically not found in everyone. Start here and make a list as you think of them.

Highlighting your strengths

So, you've picked a strength (or two), but how do you present it as something the employer needs? A common strategy to answer interview questions about strengths is called STAR, or Situation, Task, Action, Result. STAR involves answering the question with an example of how you use that skill.

This is how it works:

- Situation: Start by highlighting the strength, then bring up a past situation where you needed to call on that strength.
- Task: Discuss the task that needed attention, and how you were involved.
- Action: Talk about how you decided on the action to take, and the thought process that got you to that solution.
- Result: Tell the employer how the situation was resolved by your idea and/or action.

In conversation, this may sound like:

I've always been told I am calm under pressure and can think on my feet (Strength). One time I had a customer come to me very distressed, needing a specific product (Situation). While we didn't have the exact match to the original request, I helped guide the customer to the closest product we had in stock (Task). They weren't interested in those, so I gave them advice on how they could mix two products to get a closer match to the original (Action). They were so happy with my recommendation, they called the next day to let us know they listened to my advice and were happy with the end product (Result).

The STAR method for interviews is highly adaptable to any role, and can be based around any strength.

What are your strengths? Examples & answers

If you're still having trouble coming up with your strengths, sometimes it helps to look at the strengths of others for inspiration. We've compiled a quick list of some of the most common strengths-use these as a springboard to help unearth your own, or use them if they resonate with you.

Here is a list of personal strengths most heard in interviews:

- Adaptable
- Attentive to detail
- Excellent communicator
- Natural leader
- Great in teams
- Problem-solver
- Positive
- Time-oriented

So, if you're looking at the most common strengths heard in job interviews, pick one that you have that is relevant to the role.

Choosing your strength to suit your role

Now, let's say you're going for an entry-level administration job. Being a natural leader wouldn't be as valuable as, say, being an excellent communicator or an amazing

problem solver. However, if you were going for a [management role](#), working well in teams and being a natural leader would be more suited to the needs of your potential employer.

If you're a more experienced applicant, you'll likely have a longer or specific list of personal strengths to draw from. But again, when you're answering the question, "What are your key strengths?" consider the role and which strength will help you show you're a fit for the position.

Understanding weaknesses for job interviews

It can be uncomfortable sharing your weaknesses, especially when a job you want is on the line. However, [interview questions about weaknesses](#) aren't about baring your soul. They're asked to see if you're self-aware, proactive in your own development and where the business may need to adjust any onboarding or training to suit.

What are weaknesses?

Weaknesses in the corporate sense are skills, attributes or habits that may impact you or your coworkers during the workday. It may be a difficulty in focusing, or having an ongoing sense of urgency (which makes everything feel like a priority). A weakness could also be something like a lack of experience in a specific role, or the need to upskill in a specific area.

Knowing your weaknesses is also incredibly important for your own development. Without knowing what you bring to the table and where you're lacking, it can be more difficult to improve and develop professionally.

The difference between a weakness and a strength

Would you believe that strengths and weaknesses go hand in hand? We are all human, so it's expected that we can't get everything right all the time. The main difference between a strength and a weakness is that strengths are something that comes naturally to you, while a weakness is something that challenges you.

Self-reflection and assessment: what is your weakness?

Digging deep and finding your weaknesses can be hard, we know. But shining a light

on these areas can help you rebuild those skills to become strengths. Self-reflection and assessment is something we should all do to measure where we're at, where we'd like to be, and how we can get to the next point in our journey.

Helpful questions for self-assessment

When you're reflecting on your weaknesses, ask yourself these questions:

- What do you find the most draining in your daily activities and work life? Is there something you are doing or could do to make these more enjoyable, or is this not the path for you?
- When you have made a mistake, what led to this mistake? Did you leave things to the last minute, did you not pay attention to details or were you hesitant to work by yourself or with others?
- How do you respond to negative situations? Do you stay positive or slip into a negative mindset? Are you someone who is quick to be defensive when given constructive criticism?
- Are you not where you thought you'd be at this stage in your life? What could you have done differently? What can you do differently?

These are just some questions to measure how we feel and present ourselves, and can impact us in our jobs. Knowing our weaknesses is the first step to overcoming them and turning them into a positive.

Different methods of self-assessment

The above is just one method of self assessment. Some other methods can include:

- Periodical goal setting and analysing your progress
- Finding a mentor who can help give you an outside view on your self-assessment
- Reflecting on where you may have had your biggest challenges

Find the method of assessment that feels right for you. Perhaps asking your colleagues for their perspective works best for you, or maybe quietly reflecting by yourself is best.

Tools and resources for self-assessment

There are many tools and resources to help you self-assess your strengths and weaknesses, and help you prepare for a job interview. You can even find tools, like practice interview builders, to help you find weaknesses in where you may not be

prepared for particular questions, or where your answers may not be as strong as you like.

A popular tool for finding your personal and professional strengths and weaknesses can be a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. All you need to do is write four lists, one for what strengths you bring to a role, another for where you may have weaknesses that challenge you, opportunities to better yourself for the role, and any potential threats (or hurdles) for attaining the role.

There are also many online worksheets for finding and working on your weaknesses, helping you not only prepare for an interview, but better your skillset too.

Overcoming your weaknesses

Once you have identified your weaknesses, now you can start making them work for you! For example, if you know you find it difficult to work in a team, look at what the specific cause is, and how you can turn it around. You may find it hard to trust others with your workload, or perhaps coworkers have let you down in the past. All these things can help you move forward and enjoy your time at work more.

Deep diving into your weaknesses

Now, weaknesses can't be changed overnight. However, taking them one step at a time can make a big difference in the long run. Once you know your weaknesses, pick one and assess why this is your weakness. What is it that makes it a challenge for you, and not for others? Could it be something easily overcome, like reading up on the latest best practices or software in your industry, or something more complex, like learning to work well in groups?

Writing a list of what you want to work on could help. Goal setting is a great way to be proactive here. If it's a practical weakness, like software or upskilling, set a goal to spend 10 minutes a day or an hour a week building that skillset. If it's something like working with people or feeling overwhelmed, think about how you would like to act or react in certain situations, and follow through with them. After those situations, assess how you went and the response you received. Continue to practice, adjusting to any challenges you find as you go.

Discussing your weaknesses in the interview

Now, job interview weaknesses - how do you make them sound better?

A good start is to identify how your weaknesses have helped you or how you're working on correcting them. It not only shows you're self-aware (and human), but you're proactive in your own personal development, which is always a good sign for potential employers.

Tips for phrasing your weakness in a positive light

Words are extremely powerful, particularly when going for a new position. For instance, did you know there are some words you want to avoid in an interview? One of the key things to keep in mind when speaking about your weaknesses is staying positive. See your weakness as an opportunity for growth or building it into a strength. Speak in a matter-of-fact way, and end with the positive of how you're working to turn it around or what this weakness has taught you.

For example, if you're not into a team work environment, you may say, "I often find working in large groups a challenge, as I find others can be unorganised. I have been working on this and found by providing some task structure and being more approachable, others now come to me for guidance and have even adopted my methods."

You may have noticed the example didn't include the word 'weakness'. Replacing the word with a more positive alternative, like challenge, helps you frame the 'weakness' as something that can be worked on and improved.

Example list of weaknesses & answers

Acknowledging our weaknesses is part of growing as a person, but it doesn't mean it's easy to identify them. Here are the most common weaknesses for job interview examples:

- Public speaking anxiety or nervousness
- Difficulty prioritising tasks or managing time effectively
- Struggling with delegating tasks or relying too heavily on doing things independently

- Tendency to take on too much at once, leading to feeling overwhelmed or burned out
- Difficulty adapting to change or being flexible in work situations
- Struggle with accepting criticism or feedback gracefully
- Inability to say "no" or set boundaries, leading to overcommitment or stress
- Struggle with learning new technology or software quickly
- Difficulty working in a team or collaborating with others effectively
- Tendency to be overly critical of oneself or others, leading to negative self-talk or conflict in the workplace

Strengths and weaknesses are often categorised as either a personality or habit/skill-based trait. As you can see, many of the most common weaknesses are around communication, whether that's in public, one-on-one, responding to feedback or even to ourselves, which is a personality-based weakness. This means while it is a weakness, it is not a hard-skill that can make or break your job.

Example answers for weaknesses

When speaking about any weakness, whether communication-based or a hard-skill, always add specifics about how you're working on that skill. For example, if you have a tendency to be overly critical of yourself or others, you could say, "I find it a challenge to not be overly critical of myself and others, but I have realised I simply want the best result. So, I have been working on assessing results or options based on their suitability for the project itself, and in response to where I see a weakness, posing how we can build out that idea to benefit the team and business as a whole."

Or, if your weakness is having a tendency of taking on too much work, you may phrase your response similar to, "I find it challenging to say 'no' to new projects, but I am realising I am human and simply can't do it all. What I have been doing is prioritising where my skills are best used, and discussing this with my boss. I've also realised communication on task deadlines is important, and asking for some flexibility on deadlines helps ease the pressure."

Common mistakes to avoid

While you should be honest when [answering an interviewer's question](#) about your strengths and weaknesses, there are some things you'll want to avoid. For instance, don't pretend you have no weaknesses, but don't 'gloss' over them either.

Avoid ingenuine responses

A trend in recent years has been to use 'positive' weaknesses, like "I work too hard" or "I am an overachiever." However, interviewers have come to see through these answers, and you'll instead appear closed off to criticism. The solution is to be comfortable admitting where you have things to improve, and how you're working on it.

Avoid being too self critical

One of the key mistakes to avoid when answering this question is to go too deeply into detail. By being too critical (perhaps due to nerves), you may end up accidentally discussing a weakness that is actually a key component of the role. While you don't want to brush over anything that would impact you being able to perform the role, the weakness question isn't the time to do so.

In short, avoid:

- Pretending you don't have any weaknesses
- Jumbling over your answering or giving too much 'gloss'
- Trying to beat the question with a 'positive' weakness that feels ingenuine
- Discussing a weakness that could be a key component in the role

Dealing with follow-up questions

While you want to be ready to answer the question about your strengths and weaknesses, you also want to be prepared to answer [follow-up questions](#). This can help you feel calm and confident with any questions they may ask, be sure to prepare yourself with:

- Specific examples about your strength or weakness, where you have applied your strength or where your weakness has interfered with your work
- Other strengths and weaknesses you possess (even having a top 5 or 10 list can help)
- Strengths or weaknesses your boss or colleagues have noted about you
- Your goals for the future and how your strengths and weaknesses will get you

        there
- A list of areas you'd like to improve

If you feel you're not prepared for a question, take a moment to breathe, think and respond slowly. Remember, you're a STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result). Don't rush your answer or 'um' and 'ah' your way around the question.

Interviewers don't ask about your strengths and weaknesses to trip you up. While there are questions interviewers can't ask, this is a perfectly normal one to hear. They are simply looking for the right people for the role, who are proactive in their growth and would be a great culture fit. So, it's important you're honest and positive, as at the end of the day, you want to ensure they're a great fit for you, too.

And as for your interview to come, good luck! Remember, stay calm, confident and positive. You are not your weaknesses and your strengths are something to focus on.

FAQs

Why do interviewers ask about strengths and weaknesses?

Interviewers ask about an applicant's strengths and weaknesses to assess their suitability for the role, business and team they're joining. The applicant response also helps them see if the person is proactive in their self-development and is aware of how they present themselves. It can help them make any amendments to onboarding or training to accommodate for any upskilling you may need (or training you don't need).

How do I identify my strengths and weaknesses?

To identify your strengths and weaknesses, it's important to self-reflect and assess your personal and professional life. A good way to find your strengths is to reflect on what colleagues, bosses, friends or family have said you're good at, as this often identifies what they see as something out of the ordinary and is more than likely something they don't see in others. While to find your weaknesses, look for what drains you, makes you feel challenged, how you respond to negative situations or even how other people react to you.

Should I focus more on my strengths or weaknesses in my answer?

While you should address both your strengths and weaknesses if asked about both, your weakness should be communicated positively. You should also highlight how you're working on your weakness/es to become better.

Throughout your interview, you want to be highlighting your strengths, as well as demonstrating them where you can. For example, it's easy to demonstrate communication skills, positivity and empathy in interviews. What you do is just as important as what you say!

Should I be completely honest about my weaknesses?

You should not lie about your weaknesses. However, the weakness you share should be one that is not detrimental to the job or be overinflated. It's common to pose a strength as a weakness, such as working too much or too hard, but this is not recommended as you're not identifying a weakness or showing how you're bettering yourself.

Can I use the same answer for every job interview?

You can use the same answer to job interview questions for multiple businesses, but your responses should be tailored to the role and business, if relevant. For example, the strengths and weaknesses you mention at an interview for a receptionist role should not be the same if you were applying for a graphic designer position.

What if I don't have any weaknesses to talk about?

Everyone has weaknesses, even if they may feel small or irrelevant. If you feel you have no weaknesses, sit down with someone you see as a mentor and ask them what they feel may be a weakness of yours and situations where they have seen this. We are often too close to see it from another person's perspective, so asking a mentor can be invaluable to seeing both sides.

Another tip for identifying your weaknesses is to self-reflect and assess what may make you feel negative or drained of energy. We often feel negative or drained because we lack a skill, whether that's in a type of communication, working with others or even problem-solving. These are all areas we can work on to better ourselves.

Should I mention weaknesses that are not relevant to the job?

It's best not to speak about weaknesses that make you appear incapable of performing the role. You don't want to be too left-of-field that the interviewer can't relate to the weakness or see how you're improving, or how that improvement is valuable. For example, if you're changing industries, you wouldn't want to mention weaknesses specific to your previous industry. You want your talking points to be relevant to the role you're going for.

How do I avoid sounding arrogant when talking about my strengths?

If you're concerned about sounding arrogant while talking about your strengths, focus on being honest, genuine and humble. While you may bring that specific strength to the table, speak about how you came to have or know about the strength, and how you want to work on that strength even further. It shows you may be good, but you acknowledge you're always learning, something that's very important in life in general!

Is it better to provide examples or just talk in general terms about my strengths and weaknesses?

Where you can, always use examples. Providing an example of how you used your strength in a situation (and the outcome of it) can help show you not only possess a strength, but you know when and how to use it, too.

You may also wish to use examples when discussing your weaknesses, or challenges, particularly to show how you're working on bettering yourself. Examples can also help lessen the severity of a weakness if you feel it sounds bad. For example, if you say you find it challenging to take feedback, but you're working on it, you may give an example for your preferred feedback style.

Can I ask for more time to think about my answer to this question during the interview?

Yes, of course! It's fine to ask for a moment to think about a question or to take a pause to consider your response. Taking a moment shows the interviewer you're genuinely taking their question on board, and actively listening. When you're feeling nervous in an interview, breathe! Don't rush – you've got this.