


## Interviews - What Are Your Weaknesses...?

This is one of the more common interview questions, so do some serious soul-searching beforehand to avoid mumbling your way through a poor response. Questions about your weaknesses assess your open-mindedness and willingness to accept constructive criticism about your professional performance. One of the reasons why interviewers use this question is to gauge how candidates handle the challenge of presenting their lesser qualities.


As common as this question is, many people are not prepared for it and fail miserably at their response.

Let's first understand how not to answer this question, then look at ways of finding pertinent weaknesses, and lastly learn how to prepare an impressive response.

### Wrong Answers

 DO NOT respond that you have no faults.


Regardless of how you see yourself, none of us is without fault, so responding that you have no weakness is definitely the wrong answer.

 DO NOT parade weaknesses disguised in the form of strengths.

*"I'm a perfectionist and a workaholic and that sometimes bothers my coworkers."* Responses like this will have the interviewer furtively rolling her eyes and starting to think about how to end the conversation and move onto the next candidate.

 DO NOT use non career-related weaknesses.


You can use an inability to break 95 in your golf game as an ice breaker when beginning your answer, but immediately move into the more relevant parts of your response.


 DO NOT use weaknesses that could be construed as detrimental to you.

No matter how trivial, offering examples of weaknesses related to teamwork, respect, ethics, integrity and other core skills will definitely send up a red flag.

### Finding Your Weaknesses

So how do you find your relevant weaknesses?

 Ask others. Once you work up the courage to ask, you may be surprised at how many people are willing to provide a list - sometimes a very long list. Ask coworkers, ask your spouse or partner, ask friends and family, ask fellow members in clubs and associations.

 Use your peer reviews / 360 feedback and performance reviews from your manager.

- ✓ Consider the aspects of your job that you feel others do better? *“Joe is a quicker learner than me; while I always get there, I have to do much more homework to reach his level of understanding.”*
- ✓ Reflect on where you prevaricate on the job. *“I often put off filing the final documentation until a later time.”*
- ✓ Think about which of your skills could be improved, or that you lack in relation to your job? *“If I knew Microsoft Access, I’d be able to create a more versatile database and reduce processing time by at least a third.”*

### Right Answers

These insights will form the basis of your reply, but don’t just blurt out a list when responding. **The unspoken part of the question is, “What are you doing about your weaknesses?”**

Consider this example:

- ▶ *“In last year’s performance review my manager felt that my writing skills were too literary instead of businesslike. Since that review I have taken an on-line business writing course to help me write more succinctly, and for several months afterwards I compared my draft documentation to what we considered best practice in the department. I think I’ve made significant inroads in improving my writing skills and will discuss this with my manager at this year’s performance review, but even to this day if I am still unsure, I ask colleagues to critique my drafts before submitting them as final.”*

You’ve now (1) admitted a weakness; (2) described efforts made to improve it; (3) expressed eagerness to learn follow-up feedback; (4) asserted continued awareness of this shortcoming; and (5) indicated ongoing remedial action.

Another good tactic is to offer an example of something that you are currently learning, or that you want to learn.

- ▶ *“I’m presently enrolled (or I plan on enrolling) in a public speaking class at a local university two evenings a week to help polish my presentation skills before large audiences.”*

Responses like this tell the interviewer that you are committed to furthering your skills by spending personal time and money.



Finally - practice, practice, practice. Rehearse replies for at least three developmental areas, but during the actual interview stop after offering one example and wait for the interviewer’s comeback. If you make a compelling impression with your one example, there is a good chance that the line of questioning will move to the next topic.

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