

Job Interview Question: What is Your Greatest Weakness? How to Answer Questions about Your Weaknesses

When you're asked what your greatest weakness is there are several different ways you can answer, including mentioning skills that aren't critical for the job, skills you have improved on, and turning a negative into a positive.

Non-Essential Skills

An alternative approach is to analyze the key skills and strengths required for the position you are interviewing for and then come up with an honest shortcoming which is not essential for success in that job. For example if you are applying for nursing job, you might share that you are not particularly adept at conducting group presentations. In this case it will be critical to underscore your strength in one to one communication with patients while providing an example of your difficulty with presentations to large groups.

Skills You Have Improved

Another option is to discuss skills that you have improved upon during your previous job, so you are showing the interviewer that you can make improvements, when necessary. You can sketch for employers your initial level of functioning and then discuss the steps you have taken to improve this area and then reference your current, improved level of skill.

If you use this strategy be sure not to mention anything that you improved upon that is related to the job for which you are interviewing. You don't want your qualifications for the job to be questioned.

Turn a Negative into a Positive

Another option is try to turn a negative into a positive. For example, a sense of urgency to get projects completed or wanting to triple-check every item in a spreadsheet can be turned into a strength i.e. you are a candidate who will make sure that the project is done on time and your work will be close to perfect.

Note that the term "weakness" isn't used in the sample answers - you always want to focus on the positive when interviewing.

Sample Answers

When I'm working on a project, I don't want just to meet deadlines. Rather, I prefer to complete the project well ahead of schedule.

Being organized wasn't my strongest point, but I implemented a time management system that really helped my organization skills.

I like to make sure that my work is perfect, so I tend to perhaps spend a little too much time checking it. However, I've come to a good balance by setting up a system to ensure everything is done correctly the first time.

I used to wait until the last minute to set appointments for the coming week, but I realized that scheduling in advance makes much more sense.

Sometimes, I spend more time than necessary on a task, or take on tasks personally that could easily be delegated to someone else. Although I've never missed a deadline, it is still an effort for me to know when to move on to the next task, and to be confident when assigning others work.

I had difficulty with calculus during college, but I persevered with tutoring assistance and extra effort and completed 2 levels with a B minus average.

I've learned to make my perfectionism work to my advantage at work. I am excellent at meeting deadlines, and with my attention to detail, I know my work is correct.

I used to like to work on one project to its completion before starting on another, but I've learned to work on many projects at the same time, and I think it allows me to be more creative and effective in each one.