

Here are some example responses to the all-important weaknesses question. Remember – you are asked to show your ability at honest self-assessment and your initiative in taking responsibility for your own growth and development.

1. Critical thinking

As a decision maker, I can tell you that I have always made an effort to improve my critical thinking skills. I find that critical thinking demands constant vigilance and persistent work to overcome our mental biases. To improve my skills, I attended a conference sponsored by the Foundation for Critical Thinking. There I purchased a copy of their “Guide to Critical Thinking.” It has a checklist to target intellectual standards, and I refer to it regularly now. I’ve found it helps me make sounder decisions and communicate those decisions to my direct reports. So much so that I’ve decided to attend a workshop with them in October.

2. A technical skill

I have to admit that I am not a born statistician; I find some of the concepts from probability counterintuitive and frankly hard to grasp. But I watched a TED talk recently by Arthur Benjamin, a professor at Harvey Mudd College. He calls himself a mathematician. His TED talk is titled “Teach Statistics before Calculus”, and it made a big impact on me. I resolved to deepen my understanding of probability and statistics and have enrolled in an online class to do so.

3. Presentation skills

I have confidence speaking in front of a group, and actually I enjoy it. But I have to admit that my presentation skills are far from being perfect. I feel I rely too much on PowerPoint and end up reading half my slides. I decided to join a local Toastmasters club to enhance my skills. I was fortunate to work with a mentor there who introduced me to a presentation coach. I met with her, and she’s given me some valuable tools to avoid what she calls ‘Death by PowerPoint.’ I’m continuing to work with her and just gave a presentation last month that several people complimented me on afterwards.

4. Time management

I used to have trouble with procrastination. I received feedback from my boss that my tendency to put things off until the last minute was affecting colleagues. I realized what he said was right. I went on Amazon and searched for “stop procrastination.” I found a book by Brian Tracy called “Eat That Frog - 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastination and Get More Done in Less Time”. What really helped me was two ideas – first the 80/20 rule – that 20 percent of what I do will account for 80 percent of my results. And second, the idea of “creative procrastination” – putting off trivial tasks to be able to focus on the really important ones. I started to put his ideas into practice. Now I plan every day, week, and month in advance. It’s made my life much less hectic and given me a real sense of being in control of my time. And on my last review, my boss

5. Dealing with Conflict

I hate confrontation and in the past found myself at times compromising what I wanted or needed in order to keep the peace. This was a real problem, especially in team situations or when I was supposed to be leading a group because there are times when you need to tell people things they might not necessarily want to hear. Since then I've realized this is a weakness of mine and I've worked very hard to overcome it. A key step was when a mentor suggested I change my thinking from "criticizing" to "evaluating." I went online and searched for 'becoming a better evaluator' and found lots of ideas – from tips to Effective Evaluation from Toastmasters International to a website called <http://betterevaluation.org>! After working through these materials, I realized that instead of looking at these as "conflict situations," I could take them as an opportunity to practice constructive evaluation. Now I take the time to listen to each side of the situation and make sure that I offer factual statements that focus on the work, and the requirements. I leave "You-Statements" out of my evaluations. Now I can offer concrete ideas for actual solutions that actually make the team members look better.

Other Ways of Asking About Weaknesses

A hiring manager can phrase the weaknesses question in various ways, but however the question is phrased, it asks you to demonstrate your ability to honestly assess yourself and to show how you can take responsibility for your own growth and development. That is how you show strength through talking about a weakness. Communicate that you do not see yourself as a finished product, but as an evolving talent committed to lifelong learning and development of your skill set.

- Tell me about something you have found difficult at work.
- What kinds of decisions are difficult for you to make?
- What did you dislike about your last job?
- What do your supervisors tend to criticize most about your performance?
- What are the skills you most need to develop?
- Tell me about the worst decision you have ever made
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be and why?
- Tell me about something you have found difficult at work.
- What kinds of decisions are difficult for you to make?
- Are you currently working on any sort of developmental goals?
- If I called your last supervisor, what areas would they say you could improve on?