Succeeding at strengths based interviewing

What is Strengths Based Interviewing?

A strengths based interview focuses on your strengths and what you enjoy doing, rather than a competency based interview that focuses on asking you to give examples of what you can do based on your experiences so far. Everyone has strengths whereas not everyone has the necessary previous experiences to draw upon to answer competency questions. Strengths based interviewing is regarded to be a fairer and more inclusive method, allowing candidates to be selected as a result of their natural talents and interests. Many employers are using strengths based questions as part of their recruitment process e.g. EY, Barclays, Aviva, Nestle, BAE Systems, Cisco, Royal Mail, Unilever and Standard Chartered.

What can you do to prepare?

As strengths based questions are not asking for examples it is less easy to pre-prepare answers. However there are a few things you can do:

Before the interview:

REFLECT: on your own strengths and weaknesses- know yourself and what motivates you. Strengths are things you enjoy, pick up quickly or look forward to using. You can assess your own strengths on GraduatesFirst. Ask yourself questions such as
• ‘What do I do well?’
• ‘When am I performing at my best?’
• ‘What activities get me energised and why?’
You could also take one of the many online tests that can help you identify your strengths e.g. https://icould.com/buzz/

REVIEW the job description and RESEARCH the strengths or values the company is looking for. Check their website, job description, person specification and collate any knowledge you have from speaking with their representatives.

Become familiar with the format of strengths based questions and practice your responses whilst looking in the mirror, or by video, remembering that interviewers will also be looking at your body language.
Once you have identified your strengths and those the company is looking for, you then need to think about what approach you would take to show these in an interview situation.

During the interview:

➤ **RATIONALE**: Remember there are no specific wrong or right answers. For questions such as, ‘Do you prefer starting or finishing projects?’ either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ could be a perfectly valid answer - as long as you support your answer with sensible reasons for your preference. e.g. that you find it energising to start a project because you like to be involved from the beginning to help shape the project, or that you get a sense of satisfaction when something finishes because you’ve been involved in completing something successfully.

➤ **REVISIT** your CV and prior experience. It may be appropriate to draw on examples from your past. However, this certainly shouldn’t be the focus of your answers. For example the interviewer may ask ‘Do you enjoy working in a team?’. If your answer to this is yes, you should firstly respond with **why** you enjoy working in a team and then back this up with an example of a time you have enjoyed doing so.

➤ **REFRAME**: Although the focus of a strengths based interview will be your strengths, it’s not uncommon to be asked a question about your weaknesses. If you are, remember to be honest about your ‘weakness’ (no one is perfect!) but you should also talk about what steps you are taking to address/mitigate this.

➤ **REMEMBER**, if you have an interview coming up, you can book a 30-minute practice interview with a careers consultant over Careers.

**Do you have any more examples of strength-based questions?**

Yes we do!

- How do you know your strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you feel when you are presented with a problem?
- Do you prefer working on your own or in a team?
- Have you ever wanted to quit something?
- What do you feel you are good at?
- Have you ever put the needs of a team before your own?
- Have you ever done something differently second time round?
- What do you love to do in your spare time?
- How would a lecturer describe you?
- What are you most proud of?