

Strengths-Based Interview

A Guide and Questions Booklet

What is a Strengths-Based Interview?

A Strengths based Interview (SBI) is a type of interview style becoming increasingly popular amongst many graduate level jobs and large organisations, including Barclays, Nestle, Ernst & Young, and Standard Chartered.

This type of interview is designed to look at what candidates enjoy doing and have a natural aptitude for, rather than what they can do, which is usually assessed during a competency based interview.

The enjoyment of carrying out a task is believed to lead to a state of consciousness known as a “flow”; in this state the individual is believed to lose a sense of time as they become thoroughly engrossed in the project they are completing, and in turn perform to a higher standard. Conducting SBI’s should result in the recruitment of those that enjoy doing the type of work necessary within their field, meaning that productivity for the company should be higher with this candidate than with one hired on their preference for teamwork or problem-solving skills.

By asking strength-based questions, an interviewer can really get a feel for who the interviewee is, and what personally motivates them. In this way the interview will feel more personal, and candidates are usually happier to talk about themselves and show a more natural side to their personality. As the questions are less likely to be practiced it is also a more accurate indicator of later job performance, and so is beneficial for both the company recruiting, as well as the candidate.

Below are a list of the top 10 strength-based questions asked during job interviews; although they may be phrased differently at interviews, they are covering the same general topics. There are no right or wrong answers with these types of questions; although recruiters will be looking for individuals whose strengths match their company values. At the end are hints & tips that may be helpful when preparing for, and undertaking, a strength-based interview.

Strengths-Based Questions

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Tell me about something you are particularly proud of.

What do you find is always left until last/un-done on your to-do-list?

What would you say is your biggest weakness?

When would your friends & family say you are at your happiest?

Tell me about an activity or task that comes easily to you.

What were your favourite subjects at school?

What unique qualities could you bring to the company?

Describe a situation in which you feel most like 'yourself'.

What would you say is a successful day?

Hints & Tips

Unlike other types of interview, such as competency-based, there is no way of rehearsing your answers to strengths-based questions; they are unique only to you, and may even differ on the day of the interview. However, by looking over questions, such as the ones listed above, you should have a better idea of what is expected of you and so be able to prepare for the topics that may come up. It is a good idea to go over the strengths you feel you have, as these can be quite difficult to think of on the spot; similarly, have in mind activities or tasks you enjoy, as well as your weaknesses. If asked about your weaknesses stay away from clichés such as, “I am a perfectionist, and spend a long time going over my work”; interviewers hear this all the time, and know it to be a safe answer. Instead, think of some weaknesses you do have, but balance these out with strengths that you are using to counter-act them.

Although it may seem daunting, not being able to practice for a strengths-based interview, it is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers, and that the interviewer is simply looking for you to be yourself. It is therefore crucial that you answer these questions honestly, as when you have a real enjoyment for the topic you are discussing it will be obvious. Faking your way through the answers will just result in you being rejected a job offer, or worse, given a position within a company that you are entirely unsuitable for and will most likely hate. Reactions from candidates after having a strengths-based interview tended to be more positive than for the previous styles of interview. SBI's are generally preferred as they show the candidate that they are valued for qualities unique to their personality, whilst also giving the candidate a chance to find out more about the company.

As with all job interviews, make sure you research the company you are hoping to secure a position with; although your strengths are individual to you, there are certain strengths that companies value above others. By finding out the strengths that a company holds valuable you are in a better position to decide if this role is really a good match for you; similarly if you feel that your strengths would be an ideal match to a company, finding these out will give you the foresight to let these qualities shine through in the interview. Be prepared to answer a lot more questions than in a usual interview; as the interviewer is trying to find out about you they will be asking many questions to gain the greatest picture of you that they can. Going into the interview with confidence, and having a good background knowledge of experiences and strengths you can draw from, will allow you to use the time most effectively, and ultimately land the job.