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WALDEN UNIVERSITY

Walden, Interview Strategies

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(Edited by Walden Career Services)

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Welcome to interview strategies. I am Denise Pranke, a Walden senior career services advisor and I will be presenting today’s session.

Our objectives for this session are to go over interviewing tips to help you have a successful interview. I will also point out resources on the career services website to help you prepare for interviews. We will also take time for questions.

To start, let's go over the big picture of the interview process. Moving from left to right, you want to research the organization, reassess the qualifications for the position and then prepare relevant stories and examples about your previous work and other experience such as community service that highlight your qualifications for the position. Prepare answers to some of the most common questions. Most important, practice.

During the interview show how you are the best candidate for the position. Finally, be sure to follow-up. You can see from this diagram that preparation is key. By following these steps, you can maximize your chance of receiving an offer.

Next, we will go over these steps in more detail.

The more prepared you are for the interview, the more confident and relaxed you will be. To begin your preparation, research the organization's history, mission, products, services, brand and strengths and their competition. Know the trends in your field, and the opportunities for you to contribute. Also, research the salary range for the position in your geographical area. You can use sites such as salary.com, payscale.com or glassdoor.com to research salaries.
Next, reassess your qualifications for the position. Know your strengths. Compare your skills, achievements, knowledge, experience, education and values against the job description and the mission of the organization. As a reminder, for each job you apply for, remember to keep a copy of the job description, notes from your research, and the application materials that you sent when you applied. Sometimes you may not hear back for a month or two. It will be easier to prepare for the interview if you stay organized and know what you sent when you applied.

After reviewing how you are a good fit for the position, prepare at least five relevant examples from your previous experience that illustrate your top qualifications. If you are transitioning to a new field, focus on your transferable skills and your academic work. Focus on the skills you have gained through your education. Next, craft your stories using the cart formula. Challenge, action, results and tie-in. Think of a professional challenge or problem you faced and the action you took to address the challenge. Did you take a leadership role in finding a solution? What was the result? Who or what was impacted? Quantify when possible: For example, number of people served, processes improved, goals met, risk reduced, money saved.

Finally, share what you can do for the organization in the future.

For example, a story that illustrates initiative to solve problems could be… the number of accidents in my department was increasing so I analyzed the accident data to find the root causes. I took the information I learned from my analysis and created a new safety training program, which reduced the number of accidents by 60% in a 12-month period.

Another example is: I increased my former employer’s social media presence, which resulted in an increase in sales at 15% over a three-month period.
Slide 7
Next, after you create your stories practice telling them. Practice will build your confidence. The interview prep feature in the optimal resume system on the career services website is a great tool to help you practice.
We will take a quick look at this feature before we conclude our session. Also, screening interviews and the main interview may be held over Skype. Be prepared and practice using Skype.

Slide 8
When responding to common questions such as tell me about yourself, keep your answer to less than three minutes. Focus on your relevant strengths and experience related to the position. Let your enthusiasm for the position show.
We have a question.
I don't know how to tell them about me.
Share your values, interests, and motivations and your qualifications for the job and why you are excited about that particular position.
Tie it to the position. You could include a statement about your academic program. If you are making a career transition, touch on why you are making the transition, avoid going into personal details.

Slide 9
If you are asked about salary, defer the discussion on salary until after you have had a chance to describe your qualifications. If pressed, give a salary range based on your research. Again, as mentioned, glassdoor.com and payscale.com, are common sites used for salary research.

Slide 10
When asked behavioral type of questions such as tell me about the process you used to solve a problem, use the cart formula: challenge, action, result, and tie-in to describe how you successfully solved a problem. Have a couple of stories prepared ahead of
time that illustrate how you solve problems. Also, prepare for difficult questions such as tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a colleague.

Always answer in a positive way and include how you successfully resolved the issue. Also briefly share what you learned from the experience.

**Slide 11**

With a question such as, what is an area you can improve? Describe an area that you feel you could improve that is not essential to the job and include what you are doing to improve or compensate.

*We have a question:*

*I cannot figure what weakness would have little or no impact on the job function.*

*That is going to depend on the specific job you are applying for. For example, it may be something like, when I have multiple projects going on, balancing the time on each project is a challenge. I tend to overly focus on one project. Because I know this about myself, I set up a project plan where I break down each project into steps and set deadlines for each step. I also schedule time on my calendar for each project. When you bring up an area to improve, you always want to add how you work around or are managing the area for improvement. Avoid describing something that would be major and eliminate you as a candidate, but something that shows you are self-aware and have a strategy to address it. Also, further in the presentation, I will show you how to make an appointment with a career services advisor if you are struggling with this question and would like to discuss it with a career advisor.***

**Slide 12**

As part of the interview, you may be asked to give a short presentation on an assigned topic or a topic of your choice. For example, if you are applying for a teaching
position in K-12 or higher education, be prepared to give a short teaching presentation on a relevant topic. You may know about the presentation ahead of time or you may be asked on the spot.

I recently heard that an applicant was asked during an interview to choose any topic related to the knowledge needed for the position and explain it on the spot to the interview panel. You could also be asked to prepare a presentation ahead of time for presentation during the interview. Employers want evidence of an applicant's communication skills and ability to think under pressure.

**Slide 13**

Another situation that is becoming common during interviews is being given a hypothetical problem or scenario and asked to provide recommendations.

For example, an applicant for a business position may be given a scenario such as costs related to product X are going up and revenue is going down. What steps do you recommend we take? Employers use these questions to get an idea of your problem-solving ability and how you think on your feet. In these situations, you want to carefully listen to the description of the scenario and realize that it is okay to ask questions to clarify the situation. Then, organize your approach and describe your thought process as you think through the problem. The interview panel is more interested in how you approach the problem then in an exact right answer. Manage your time, be enthusiastic and close with a summary.

**Slide 14**

You might be asked about Walden University or about your online education. Be prepared to communicate the benefits of your Walden education including the social change mission, accreditation, quality of faculty, curriculum, extensive writing and global perspective.

You can find information about accreditation by going to the main Walden U website at www.waldenu.edu and click on ABOUT in the navigation bar. You want to
know if your program has any specific accreditation as well as the overall Walden accreditation. Sometimes members of an interview panel are not familiar with Walden University so they may ask you some questions about Walden University.

Be prepared to talk about your academic program, especially if you are making a career transition. Be prepared to briefly talk about your research, papers you have written, and topics you have studied.

**Slide 15**

Next, be sure to plan logistics ahead of time such as attire, directions, transportation, and parking. Dress one step up from the professional attire of employees in the field. Be sure you know how to get to the location and the time it will take you to arrive ten to 15 minutes early.

If it is a Skype interview, check your camera and simplify what is visible in the background.

**Slide 16**

Now it is time for the interview. Prior to the interview, breathe deeply and visualize yourself in your future role. We have heard back from students who shared that visualizing themselves and the role helped them build confidence which led to successful interviews and job offers.

Your goal is to educate the potential employer on what you have to offer and how you add value.

Keep in mind that you have been invited for the interview, so they are interested in you. They want you to be successful. You are there to share information about your experience and education and how you are a good fit.
Slide 17
Bring copies of your application documents and references. Pay attention to your body language and remain positive and enthusiastic throughout. Avoid any negative type of answers.

Slide 18
Also, be prepared to ask meaningful questions during the interview. This is your opportunity to engage your interviewers in a conversation. Show genuine interest in learning more about the organization. The interview is also a chance for you to determine if the organization is a good fit for you. Use your judgment to determine what questions are appropriate for a specific interview.

I worked with a student in a job search who had a number of interviews, but no offers. She decided she would engage her interviewers in a conversation by asking more questions. Shortly after making the change, she received three offers and had to decide which one to accept.

An example of a question may be: if I am chosen for this position, what would be my priorities for the next three to six months? Do research about the organization to help you determine appropriate questions. Do not ask questions you can simply find the answer to on their website.

Slide 19
After the interview, send a thank you to all interviewers within 24 hours expressing your interest and briefly restate your major qualifications. Allow yourself time to reflect on the interview experience and reward yourself for your efforts.

Slide 20
Next, let’s take a quick look at the interviewing resources on the career services website.

There are three main areas we have information to help you with the interview
process. We have the OptimalResume system, archived webinars, and resources on the interviewing tab on the upper right-hand side of the homepage that include information on phone, virtual and panel interviews along with tips for all stages of the interview process.

Slide 21

Next, we will take a closer look at the Interview Prep feature in OptimalResume.

The Interview Prep feature allows you to practice interviewing by holding mock interviews and recording yourself. This is a great tool for preparing for interviews. You can record and then watch yourself answering questions so you can perfect your answers. If you don't have an OptimalResume account, you will need to set up a free account using your Walden e-mail address. Click on the Optimal Resume link on the career services homepage and then click on the small button that says set up an account. There are some short video tutorials within the OptimalResume system that will illustrate how to use the different features. You will need to scroll down to see the link to view the tutorials. We have received excellent feedback from students who have used the Interview Prep feature to prepare for interviews.

Slide 22

After you set up your account, you can enter the interview prep feature and select the type of interview questions you would like to practice answering. Here it shows that the user selected Behavioral Questions.

Slide 23

Here is a view of a candidate, the mock interviewer, and a mock coach who provides advice. You can see the current question for this example is, can you give an example of your problem-solving ability?

I spoke with a student who had six interviews with no offers and he started practicing using the Interview Prep feature and he received an offer on his very next
interview after practicing. I encourage you to use this feature. It is excellent for practicing.

**Slide 24**

If you are a Walden student or alumnus who needs additional assistance, we invite you to schedule a 45-minute individual career advising appointment. The most popular advising topics are developing a strong resume or curriculum vitae, job search strategies, building your professional network, and preparing for an interview.

Directions on how to schedule an appointment are on the Career Services website. Appointments are scheduled in Eastern time so remember to adjust your appointment time to your time zone on your personal schedule if you are not in the USA Eastern time zone. The Career Services advisor will call you at the time of your appointment. We recommend that you have Internet access for your advising session if possible because we will often guide you to additional web-based resources.

**Slide 25**

Let's check and see if we have any questions.

*We have a question: I started asking the interviewer if they have any reservations with moving forward with me as a potential candidate. I have received good feedback on why they will not move forward, but most times the interviewer said no, however, no one has moved forward with me. Do you think this question is hurting my chances?*

*It will depend on the circumstances. Career advisors have differing opinions on the use of this question. Some think that is a great question and others are hesitant. There is no direct right or wrong answer, but if you feel there may be a reason they would be hesitant, it may be wise to directly approach and address that issue in the interview. I suggest making a one-on-one appointment with a career advisor to go more in-depth about your individual circumstances.*
Another question is about how to say the reason for leaving a previous job is being terminated. This is another question you may want to make a one-on-one appointment with a career advisor to discuss. Keep in mind many people are terminated for a variety of reasons and find another job. You can say it wasn’t a good fit and briefly add what you learned from that position or experience. The interview panel would be looking for you to be reflective on the termination and what you gained from the experience and how the position you are applying for would be a better fit.

Another question, In the interview, how do I address gaps and short-term employment on my resume due to a difficult family situation. This is also a question has I would suggest making a one-on-one appointment with a career advisor to discuss.

You don’t want to disclose personal information in the interview. If asked about the gaps or short term positions, you could state that you had some short-term positions due to a family issue that has been resolved. Sometimes if you have had a lot of jobs that were very short-term, you don’t have to include every single job on your resume. Make a career services appointment, to go over your resume and look at ways to minimize the job starts and stops. Unless you are applying for a USA Federal job, you don’t have to include everything. Keep in mind a number of people step in and out of the workforce. You want to be prepared to quickly address this question with confidence if it comes up

We have a comment from another attendee regarding this question. She shares that she addressed a gap in her employment during an interview by stating that she was taking care of her family. Again, you don't want to dwell on it, just have a really short answer and move on.

Another question, my job goal is to be a professional professor. My weakness is
writing and communication so what do I do to improve my skills and get a chance to practice?

The Writing and Academic skills Center have a number of resources to help you improve your writing skills.

Also, consider taking some of the non-credit writing courses called CAEX writing courses offered through the Walden Academic skills Center. The courses are listed on the Academic Skills website. There is a minimal cost not covered by financial aid. If they are affordable, this is an excellent way to improve your writing skills. A way to get your foot in the door is to look for an adjunct teaching position to start gaining teaching experience and have a really strong curriculum vitae as well.

We have another question, How do I answer the question how do you define success in two to three years?

Think about what you would want to accomplish in two to three years. State the kinds of problems you would like to work on and resolve in two to three years or how you would like to be contributing to the organization. Consider what is important to the organization. Make it realistic and make it related to that position and that organization. Avoid saying something like I would like to use this position as a steppingstone to another position.

Another question: Do you suggest the use of note cards during a phone interview or should you go about it without assistance as you would in a standard face-to-face interview? I suggest that you have a copy of your resume in front of you. If during a phone interview, you have some short notes that is fine, but have examples of your qualifications prepared to discuss. If they call you at an inconvenient time, ask if you could please schedule a time for the phone interview.

Also, a few notes would be fine, but you do not want to sound like you are reading off of note cards.
Definitely be prepared to take that initial phone screening interview very seriously. You have to really shine in that initial phone interview to move on to the next stage.

Another question: I noticed that interviewers started asking me what would your favorite boss say are your best qualities, is this question different than telling them what your strengths are? Why are they framing this question like this?

This would not be an unusual question. To help you prepare, you could go back and look at your performance reviews for ideas on what to share and it could be very similar to asking you what your strengths are, but they are asking you to share what someone else is saying are your strengths.

It looks like that is our last question.

Slide 26

As we wrap up, I want to remind you to get connected with career services. Join Walden Career Services on LinkedIn, follow us on Twitter and Facebook, subscribe to our YouTube channel and read student success stories on our blog. Do not forget you can tap into additional resources on the career services website. You can also ask questions by e-mailing career services. Again, if you want to go more in-depth you’re your unique situation or review your resume or your CV, please make an appointment.

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Again, thank you so much for attending today’s session and participating with your questions as I really appreciate the questions and the comments that you shared. Be sure to take advantage of all that Career Services has to offer. We serve Walden students at any point in their program, bachelors, Masters, doctoral level students, certificate students and alumni. We are here to support you in reaching your career goals. So again, thank you for joining the session today.