**Preparing for High School Interviews**

Putting your best foot forward during high school interviews is a critical step towards landing an offer of admission. These ten tips will provide you valuable skills that can be for future interviews too.

1. **Prepare answers for common interview questions**
2. **Anticipate not knowing an answer to a question**
3. **Develop meaningful questions to ask the interviewer**
4. **Arrive early/log-on to your Zoom at the appropriate time**
5. **Dress appropriately**
6. **Manage your nerves**
7. **Maintaining the proper tone**
8. **Conclude the interview**
9. **Notes for talkative/extravert students**
10. **Notes for shy/introvert students**

**Preparing answers for common interview questions**

* Prepare for basic chit-chat questions like
  + How is your day going?
  + How is the semester going?
  + Did you find the Office of Admission easily?
  + Wow, this weather is really (i.e. hot, cold, windy, rainy), right?
* Develop thoughtful answers to the following questions that reflect who you are (and not who you think they want you to be):
  + What do you enjoy most about WES?
  + What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses as a student?
  + What subject do you enjoy most? Why?
  + What subject do you like least? Why?
  + How do you like to spend your free time?
  + If I asked your friends to describe you, what would they say?
  + What have you read recently?
  + What has been your biggest challenge?
  + What is your definition of a good teacher?
  + What would you like to accomplish, academically or in extracurricular activities, during high school?
  + Why did you decide to apply to this school?
* Answer every question with an “and” or “because” statement that complements your response. Replying to questions with compound sentences turns an interview into a conversation.
* Practice your answers out loud and time your answers. Your answers need to be more than one word answers and should take less than a minute or two to share.
* Highlight how you anticipate contributing to the school. This could be in the areas of student government, sports, community service, after-school clubs, academics, fine arts, and/or performing arts.
* Mention any awards and/or accolades you have received in a humble fashion. For many students this is hard to do, but it is important for the admission officer to get a complete picture of who you are.
* Be sure to mention any unique (and positive) hobbies, interests, and/or background. These will help you to stand out among the applicants. Do you collect stamps? Do you volunteer in soup kitchen? Do you go fishing each summer with a grandparent? Have you lived in multiple countries? Do you speak another language at home?

**Anticipating not knowing an answer to a question**

* Don’t let yourself be taken off guard. You may get questions like, “If I gave you a driver’s license and $100 for a day, what would you do with them?” or “If you could have any two people to dinner, living or deceased, who would they be and why?” You can’t prepare for all possible questions but you can prepare for how to respond to a question that surprises you.
* Buy yourself a bit of time to think about an answer by telling the interviewer one of the following things:
  + “Great question! I need a moment to think about that.” Please note, an awkward silence is awkward and uncomfortable for all involved. Don’t take more than 5-10 seconds to prepare an answer. Even if you don’t have a great answer to give, give the best possible short answer you can give.
  + “Good question, let me think about that for a minute and get back to you. Is there another question you would like to ask me while I think about this?” Be sure to follow up on this question, even if to say, “To go back to the question about X, I am going to have to get back to you. That was a really great question.”

**Developing meaningful questions to ask the interviewer**

* Research each school’s website.
* Develop three school-specific questions related to programs of interest that they offer to ask during your interview.
* Prepare a few generic questions. Examples include the following:
  + How are new students included or mentored in their first year?
  + Are there are any new or changes to programs or curriculum that the school is looking to implement in the next couple of years?
  + What is the work/life balance for a XXX student at XXX?

**Arriving early**

* Being on time in reality means being five minutes early. Do not be late!
* If in person, take into account parking and finding the admission’s office. Many high school campuses are large with several parking lots and buildings to manage. Allow for an additional 10-15 minutes once you arrive at the campus entrance to find the specific location for the interview.
* If remote, ensure that you have the link ready beforehand so that you are not searching for it one minute before your interview. You want to arrive early to the link, to a wait being let in, early as well.

**Dressing appropriately**

* Not sure what is appropriate dress for the school at which you are interviewing? Research the uniform or attire requirements for students at the school and use that as a guideline.You can always wear your WES dress uniform.
* Stay away from distracting jewelry, hair styles, make-up, and clothing. You want the interviewer to get to know you as a person and not get distracted by something you are wearing.
* If you know you fidget with shoelaces/bracelets/ necklaces, then don’t wear them.

**Introducing yourself**

* Speak clearly.
* Give a firm handshake, or deliver a great smile and say hello.
* Introduce yourself and thank them for the opportunity to meet with you.
* Make consistent eye-contact. Do not look down or away from your interviewer.
* Give a genuine smile—the interviewer wants to get a sense if you are really interested in attending the school.

**Managing your nerves**

* Get a good night’s sleep.
* Be sure to have a good breakfast and/or lunch. Stay away from caffeine and excess sugar.
* Be prepared for someone to walk you to a room and leave you for a minute or two before the interview begins.
* Take a deep breath and settle in. The interviewer wants to like you. Believe it or not, they want to impress you as much as you want to impress them.

**Maintaining the proper tone**

* **BE POSITIVE**. Schools want constructive and engaged students. Even when answering a questions like, “What is a weakness of yours?” find a way to make your answer end on a positive note. In this example, discuss how you are working to improve in the area.
* Let the interviewer set the tone and follow their lead. If the person is formal, then answer his/her questions in a formal manner. If they are relaxed and friendly, then reflect that tone back to them.
* Do not say negative comments about family members, teachers, classmates, school, or extra-curricular activities, it only makes you look like a poor candidate.
* You should never really make sarcastic jokes in an interview — a misunderstood comment may ruin your chance for admission.
* Maintain good posture during the interview.

**Concluding the interview**

* Know that your introduction and conclusion are the most important times of the interview. These are two moments of the interviewer will remember the most. Even if the interview goes poorly, if you can successful start and conclude an interview, you will greatly help yourself.
* When your interview is over, stand up and shake their hand. Again, make consistent eye-contact. Do not look down or away from your interviewer.
* Thank them for their time and tell them something you learned about the school.
* Once you are home, write your interview a Thank You note and include any mutual interest or connection you both may share. Thank Yous will help your interviewer remember who you are when they are reviewing your file months later.
* If after the interview you are 100% sure that a school is your first choice, be sure to tell that Admission Officer this information. High schools want to offer admission to students who they think are also interested in attending the school. This single piece of information could make the difference between you and another student receiving an acceptance. But do not say this, if the school is not your top choice. You are representing WES. You don’t want to jeopardize other WES students’ chances at the school by saying something that is not true.
* If you met any teachers you connected with, write them a Thank You note as well.

**Notes for talkative/extrovert students**

* Be sure to listen to each question asked, take a moment to think about your response, and then concisely and succinctly reply. Think first before you speak.
* Do not ramble or go on tangents. Stay focused on each question, one at a time.

**Notes for shy/introvert students**

* At the beginning of the interview, mention that you’re introverted. This will help the interviewer to have a better expectation about how communitive you may (or may not) be in there interview. The interviewer also won’t misinterpret your quiet demeanor for a lack of interest.
* Highlight how being an introvert helps you be a good listener and collaborator with others.

**Evaluation Form**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Areas** | **Score  (1-weak to 4-strong)** | **Comment** |
| 1. **Prepared answers for common interview questions** |  |  |
| 1. **Anticipated not knowing an answer to a question** |  |  |
| 1. **Developed meaning questions to ask the interviewer** |  |  |
| 1. **Arrived early** |  |  |
| 1. **Dressed appropriately** |  |  |
| 1. **Managed nerves** |  |  |
| 1. **Maintained the proper tone** |  |  |
| 1. **Concluded the interview** |  |  |
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