



OFFICE OF CAREER & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Interviews - Case Interviewing Tips – for Consulting Firms

What is a case interview?

Case interviews are used by management consulting firms to measure your ability to deal creatively with complex and ambiguous business problems and determine how you employ structured thinking to reach logical and intelligent conclusions. Firms want to know how you identify, organize, and approach problems.

Why do firms use case interviews as part of their hiring process?

Case interviews allow you to demonstrate your skills as they relate to a career in management consulting. The case study allows consistent evaluation of candidates, as it does not favor any particular background or educational experience. The case interview allows the firm to see how you think about business problems and if you are able to reach a well-supported and logical conclusion. The case interview also allows the firm to assess your ability to attack a problem with a logical structure and an intelligent approach. Practicing with friends and colleagues is ideal as is practicing early. If you are unfamiliar with the case interview, begin preparing when you decide to interview with management consulting firms. View the case interview as an opportunity to show off your skills, as they relate to the type of support the firm delivers to clients.

CASE INTERVIEW TIPS:

- **Practice.** There are many resources to help you practice case interviews.
- **Listen to the case problem carefully.** Take notes if you would prefer, ask questions and be sure you answer the question(s) that are being asked by the interviewer. It never hurts to paraphrase the question to the interviewer to confirm your understanding.
- **Begin by setting a plan.** If you need a minute or two to collect your thoughts, do so. You should also think of three to five sub-questions that you need to ask before you can address the overall problem.
- **Create a framework.** This would guide you through your thought process and help keep you on track. Remember to keep a broad framework so that you don't hit a dead end.
- **Stay organized.** When discussing a specific point, keep in mind the reason you are discussing it and how it fits into your initial framework.
- **Think out loud.** Communicate your train of thought clearly. Even if you have considered, but rejected, some alternatives, tell the interviewer what they were and why you rejected them. The interviewer is looking as much for evidence of a logical thought process as for a solution to the case.

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- **Ask for additional information as you go.** The case interview is meant to be interactive, so feel free to seek out applicable data. Be sure the information is pertinent and the interviewer knows why you might consider it.
- **Listen carefully to the interviewer.** Information given by an interviewer during the case interview might be given to help you along a path. Listen carefully and follow the interviewer's lead.
- **Don't focus on "nailing the case."** It is far more important that you demonstrate a logical thought process and structured analysis than to simply arrive at a case solution.
- **Use your business experience and common sense.** Your experience and insight are key items to help you logically navigate your way through the case interview. Be mindful of the resources required for the solution you are suggesting.
- **Establish rapport with the interviewer.**
- **Relax and enjoy.** You should think of the interviewer as your collaborator in this exercise. Pretend this is a real client situation that you need to explore and solve. Use your personal arsenal of skills and experience to help you along the way.

Common mistakes:

- **Not understanding the original question.** Heading down the wrong path or deviating from the original question posed in the case.
- **Proceeding with the case in a random manner.** Failing to identify the major points that need to be addressed, or simply dancing from one issue to another without outlining the approach.
- **Asking too many questions.** While it is important to ask vital questions to approach the problem, asking superfluous questions without letting the interviewer know the reason for such questions should be avoided.
- **Failing to present a clear point of view.** It isn't uncommon to run out of time. Be sure to emphasize a point of view based on your ending point.
- **Not asking for help.** If you get stuck, ask for help. This is an interactive experience. Asking for help in tough spots might just get you to an effective conclusion.

Before the interview: practice, practice, practice

Preparation

- Know the firm
- Know your resume
- Know the consulting industry
- Read the newspapers

Enthusiasm

- Enthusiasm in practice shows through in the interview

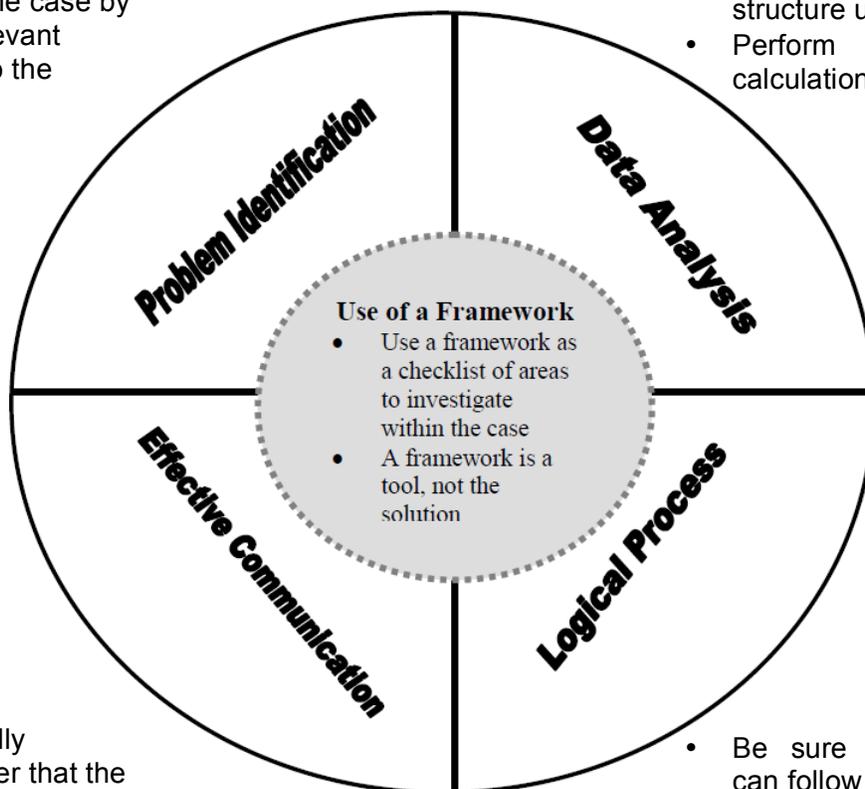
Confidence

- Practice will increase your comfort level in the interview and improve your ability to think under pressure

Cases give you the opportunity to demonstrate four critical skills:

- Listen as the case is given to you and take notes
- Be sure you know what the actual question/problem is
- Confirm that you clearly understand the case by repeating relevant information to the interviewer

- Figure out which facts you have and which ones you don't
- Ask clarifying questions
- Determine your response structure upfront
- Perform the appropriate calculations/analysis



- Listen carefully and remember that the case should be a conversation, not a monologue
- Speak clearly and concisely
- Support and defend your points
- Don't get flustered; even if you get off on the wrong foot, you can still come back with a strong ending
- Be sure to listen to your interviewer—they may offer you clues to try to help out

- Be sure your interviewer can follow your logic
- Think out loud so the interviewer hears your analysis
- Build a sequence to your solution that addresses the key questions/issues
- Cover as much ground as you can, realizing you probably can't cover everything in 30 minutes³

Columbia School of Social Work
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Reference Books:

- Case in Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation (Cosentino)
- Vault Guide to the Case Interview (Asher and Chung)
- Vault Case Interview Practice Guide (Slepicka)
- Vault Case Interview Practice Guide 2: More Case Interviews (Vault Editors)
- WetFeet.com Insider Guides Series:
 - Ace Your Case: Consulting Interviews
 - <http://smgworld.bu.edu/clubconsulting/files/2010/09/Ace-Your-Case.pdf>
 - Ace Your Case II: Mastering the Case Interview
- The Harvard Business School Guide to Careers in Management Consulting (Wong)
- Management Consulting: A Complete Guide to the Industry (Biswas and Twitchell)

NOTE: This information was taken from Deloitte's Recruiting Sheet, "Case Interviewing Tips and Common Mistakes." © Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved