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What Are Product Management Case Study Interviews?



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What is a product management case study interview?

A case study interview, also known as a case interview, is a tool used by many companies to assess a candidate's analytical, creative, and problem-solving skills. Similar to coding interviews for engineers, they allow the interviewers to simulate a situation that allows your skills to be put into practice.

Quite simply, you'll be given a situation, and asked to make suggestions or come up with a hypothetical solution or improvement.

In product management, this can be about any number of things. The realm of product managers is vast, and covers many different aspects of product development. As product

managers sit at the intersection of business, technology, and design, you could be asked case questions under these umbrellas.

This means that you could be given a case question based on product design, monetization, market research, user segmentation, trends, data, technical development, go-to-market, prioritization...pretty much anything product managers are into!

Example case study interview questions

- What's your favorite product? How would you improve its design?
- Which company do you think we should acquire next?
- How would you go about launching our product in an emerging market, say, India?
- What new feature would you build for Instagram?

How to ace a case study interview



The product design case interview

No, the interview isn't going to hand you a Wacom tablet and ask you to mock up an entire product on the spot! Instead, you'll be asked to think through some solutions to pretty common design problems. Things like:

- **How would you improve our in-app messenger?**
- **If we tasked you with making our user interface more inclusive of those with disabilities, how would you approach that?**
- **How would you redesign our homepage to make it more appealing for X demographic?**
- **We're finding that X number of users don't make it through the entire onboarding process. What would you do/design to fix that?**

The key when being asked a question about how you'd improve the company's product is not to insult it too heavily. Remember, the people who built it are in the room with you, so if you come in hot with "well, for starters, your homescreen is absolutely hideous and needs a complete do-over", you're not going to endear yourself to them. A product manager is a diplomat, so be as diplomatic as possible.

Instead of focusing on how you'd fix what you see as glaring problems, try to come up with something that adds to the product. "I think a chatbot in your user onboarding process would help people to navigate through the process. Here's where I'd implement it..."

How to ace it

1. **Give your hypothesis:** Because everything in product starts with *why*.
2. **Lay out your approach:** Briefly summarize what your approach would be, given your hypothesis. Include things like the research you would need to do, and the preparation the team would need to make.

- 3. Identify the user:** Companies want user-driven product managers, so definitely make sure you know which user you're building for.
- 4. Describe the solution:** How would you actually build the solution? No need to get too technical if that's not where your skills lie. If that's the case, talk about how you'd lead the engineering teams to build the solution.
- 5. Suggest testing:** If you've got 2 ideas and you're not sure which one is better, describe both and talk about the test you'd run to discover which one to roll with.
- 6. Prioritize features:** Show off your prioritization skills if you're suggesting more than one feature.
- 7. Suggest features for an MVP and plans for a V1 launch:**

Finish off by helping the interviewers to visualize what the finished MVP would be like, as well as the plans you'd have for a full release later down the line.

The business-thinking case interview



Business thinking is vital for product managers, as you're the person that ties what's being built to the needs of the business. This is why you may be presented with a business problem, so that the interviewer can assess your thought process, and how you approach product strategy.

Business case questions may include things like:

- **Management wants to build X because a competitor has launched something similar. How would you respond?**
- **If we wanted to move more into the B2B market by launching X, what would you do first?**
- **How would you increase customer adoption for the feature we released last month?**
- **We want to become more product-led in our growth strategy. What recommendations would you make in terms of pricing structure/increasing customer adoption?**

How to ace it

- **Establish market characteristics:** This is especially important if your case question is a go-to-market question. If you're not sure what the market characteristics are, talk about what you would find out before starting the work.
- **Layout your approach:** Briefly summarize what your approach would be.
- **Prioritize your actions:** If you've been asked for a step-by-step approach, talk about why you're doing things in that order.
- **Provide analysis:** Business decisions require a heavy amount of analysis, so be sure to include some competitor/customer/market analysis.
- **Make recommendations:** Talk about the end result in a business sense. Instead of getting into the weeds of feature building etc, give a step-by-step approach of how

you'd take a new feature to market, or make business-oriented improvements to a product.

Remember that a business-thinking case question requires an answer that would make C-suite happy. Try to think through your answer for the eyes of management. Think about what brings most business value, and tailor your answer around that.

The technical interview

Here, by technical interview, we don't necessarily mean the tech interviews that engineers can expect to go through. It's very rare for product managers to be asked technical questions in an interview, unless they're specifically applying for a technical product manager role. You'll usually get some warning in advance that your technical prowess will be tested, either by the recruiter or a hiring manager.

The chances of being given an in-depth technical case interview (aka, a coding interview) are rare, so you're more likely to be asked a few general questions to gauge your technical ability.

Things like:

- **What's your experience with X or Y technology?**
- **Do you feel comfortable managing a team of engineers?**
- **Can you explain the most technical project you've worked on?**

These are questions that you should be able to answer in the room, because they're based on your direct experience. So you don't need to put any special level of preparation into their answers.

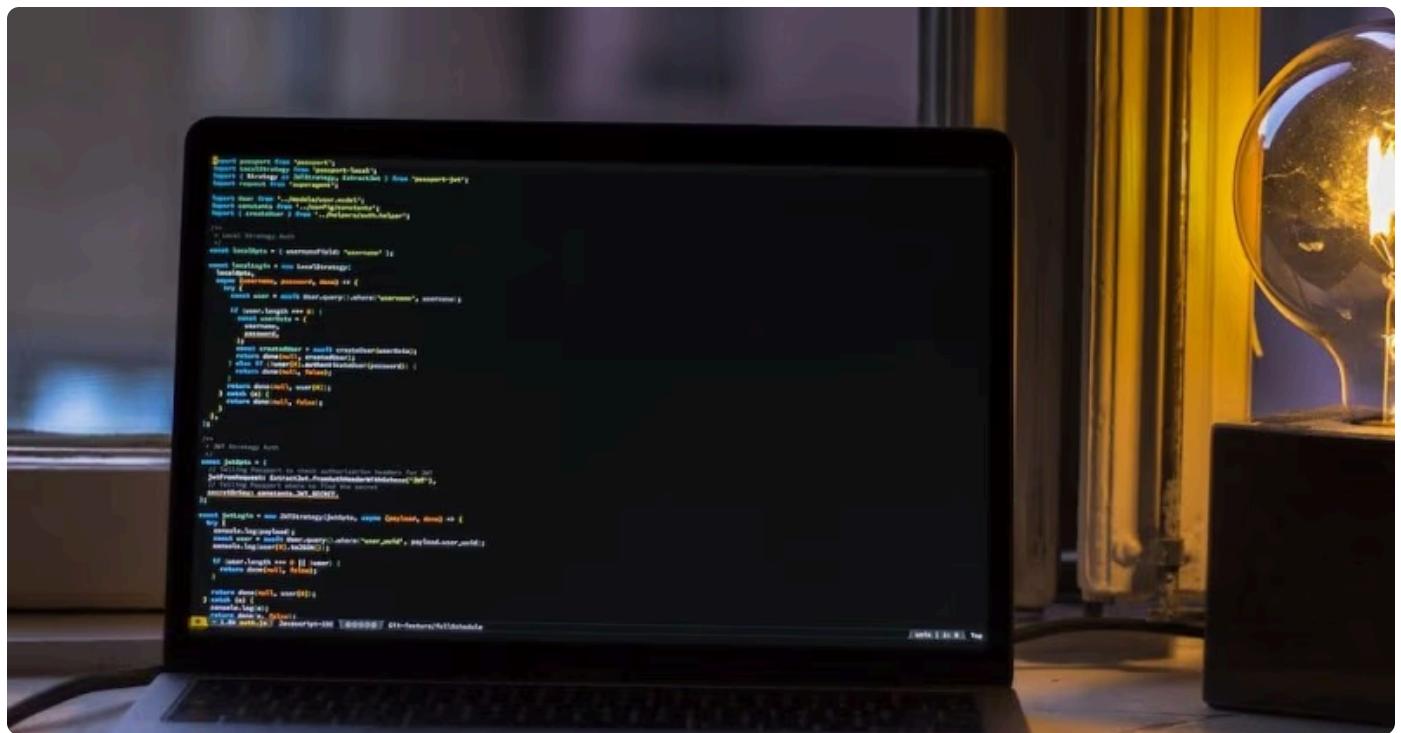
You may also be asked some technical questions that allow you to show off your technical knowledge, but are open-ended enough that you can still answer even if you're not very techy. The goal is to gauge how much technical know-how you already have, not to embarrass you and put you on the spot for not having a computer science degree.

These questions might include:

- What feature do you think we should build next? How should we approach building it?
- Would you build X solution in-house, or would you outsource development elsewhere?
- What partners do you think we should integrate with next? (eg. Slack, Trello)

These are questions that you can approach in your own way, from a technical perspective if you come from that background, or from a people-management/design/business perspective if you don't.

Product managers and tech skills...what's the deal?



It's highly unlikely that you'll be asked to go through a technical interview, as product managers aren't the ones who physically build the product. They provide the direction

and the insights, and the engineers provide the solutions and the finished product. So what's gained by seeing how well you can code?

Well, some roles are more technical than others, so obviously in these roles you'd need either a computer science degree or a proven record of technical work, like an engineering background.

But for a regular product manager, you're less likely to be given a technical case interview, and more likely to just be asked a few very general questions to gauge your knowledge.

Top tips:

1. Give yourself time to think

The worst thing you can do is panic, and rush in with an answer. It's OK to give yourself time to think. An interview is not a first date, and silences don't have to be awkward! So pause, and give yourself time to consider your answer before you start.

That's much better than giving a sub-standard answer that you can't take back. The interviewer will expect you to need a moment to gather your thoughts, so don't stress.

2. Hack: The McKinsey case study

Now, you're bound to go off and do plenty more research on case study interviews, wanting to find out everything you can. So let us give you this secret hack: check out materials for [McKinsey case interviews](#).

"But I want to work at Facebook/Google/Amazon!" we hear you say. *"Why would I prep for McKinsey?"*

McKinsey is one of the most difficult interviewers out there. Reviews by some previous interviewees makes it seem like the process was designed to help choose the next ruler

of Westeros. Their standards are incredibly high, and their case interviews are something that people prep weeks, even months in advance for.

This has a double result for you. One, there are swathes of resources out there specifically to prep for this behemoth of a case interview. Two, if you can give a McKinsey-standard answer to a case interview, you'll outshine the competition easily!

3. Practice ahead of time

While you can't be totally sure what you'll be asked in a case interview, you can still prepare.

The smart thing to do is to practice case interview questions ahead of time. The way to do this is to pick apart the job posting you're interviewing for, and identify what the main responsibilities are.

Case interview preparation is absolutely essential for acing product manager interviews, as you're bound to be asked a hypothetical question sooner or later in the interview process.

4. Don't feel pressured to give a perfect answer

Companies know how much time, research, and information goes into making informed product decisions. So if they've asked you to propose a new feature for their product as part of your interview, they're not looking for something they can actually implement from you. They just want to see how you think, and what your analytical and problem-solving skills are. It's also a test of your communication skills, seeing how you present yourself and your ideas.

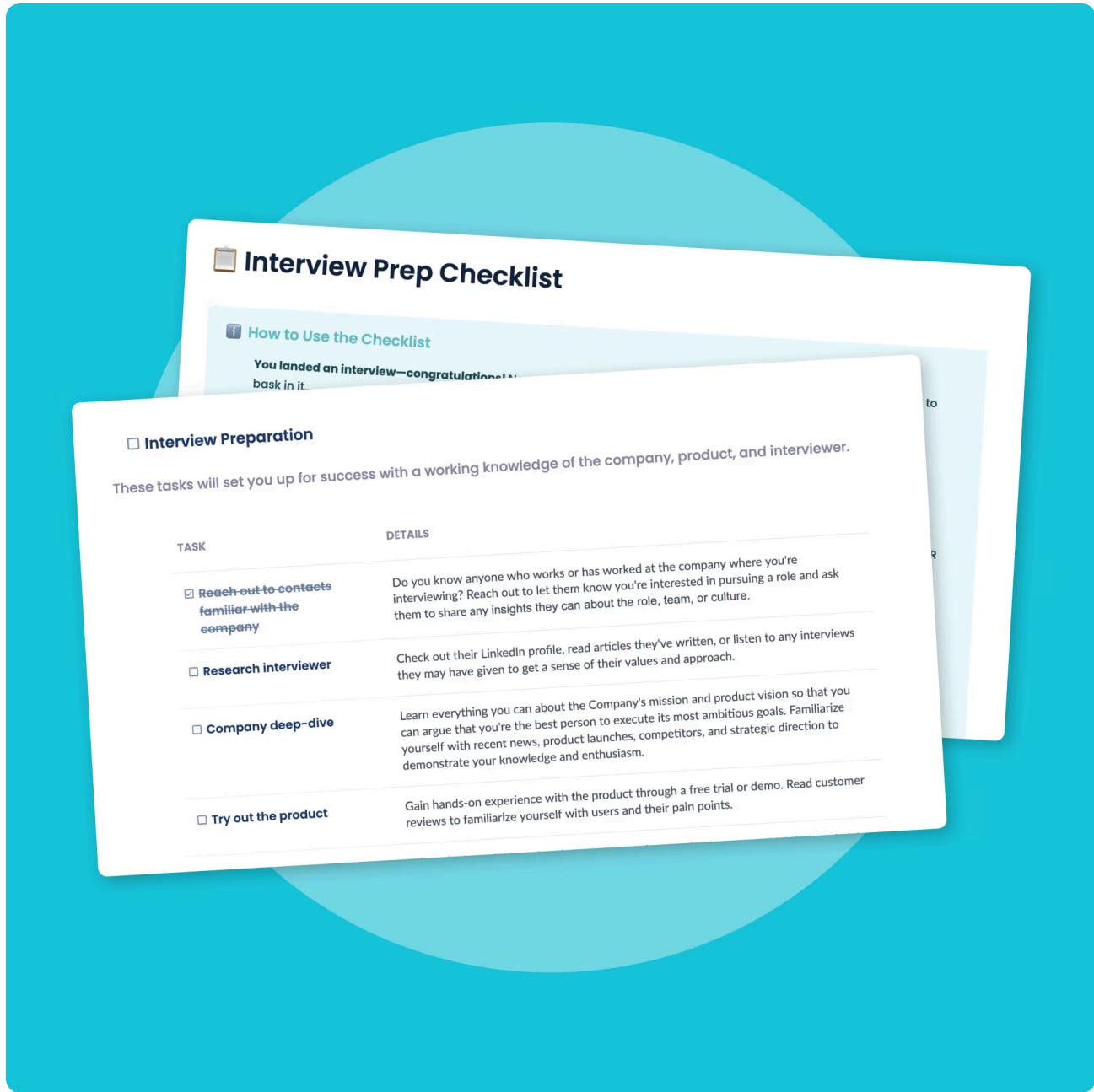
So don't pressure yourself into giving an answer that's on par with the work their existing product managers do. That's like beating yourself up for not running as fast a Usain Bolt when you do your first ever 5K.

Prepping for product manager interviews?

We've got you covered! Check out these great resources:

- **Master The Product Manager Interview Playlist:** We've collected together our best talks on acing the Product Management interview, from a look behind the scenes of recruitment, to how to break into the industry. [Check out the entire playlist here](#), or enjoy this sample from Google's Product Manager...
- **The Ultimate List of Product Manager Interview Questions:** Prepare yourself for every kind of question you could ever hope to be asked in a product manager interview!
- **Product School resources:** If you really want to deep-dive into the best interview techniques, and become the master of any interview you walk into, you should check out the resources we have in our community. We've got cheat sheets, templates, and more!
- **Hired – How to Get a Great Product Job:** Tailored guide-to-go for product manager positions in top tech companies. As this book will show you, some of the most successful product transitions originated from people in music production or finance, with full-time jobs or with no prior experience. The collection of stories of Product Management transition will show you how it's done.

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