

Case Interview Preparation



The case interview has been utilized in the management consulting industry for decades. Recruiters use it to evaluate your capability to resolve real-world challenges. An invitation to sit for this critical interview is presented to those candidates whose application, resume, and cover letter pass the pre-screening stage.

What is a Case Interview?

A case interview is a job interview that forces you to think under pressure. It usually begins with a presentation of a business case, estimation drill, or brain teaser. You are then given some time to analyze the given information and develop sensible recommendations. In most cases, you will be making some basic calculations and assumptions and using your intelligence and common sense to support your answer. This entire process is stressful because you have limited time and you are facing the person who has the final say about your application.

The case interview measures your communication, presentation, and business skills and determines if you have the ability to understand complex scenarios, analyze each affecting factor, and generate solutions in a logical manner. The good news is there is no right or wrong answer. Interviewers focus on the process; your approach indicates your problem solving skill level.

What to Do Before the Interview?

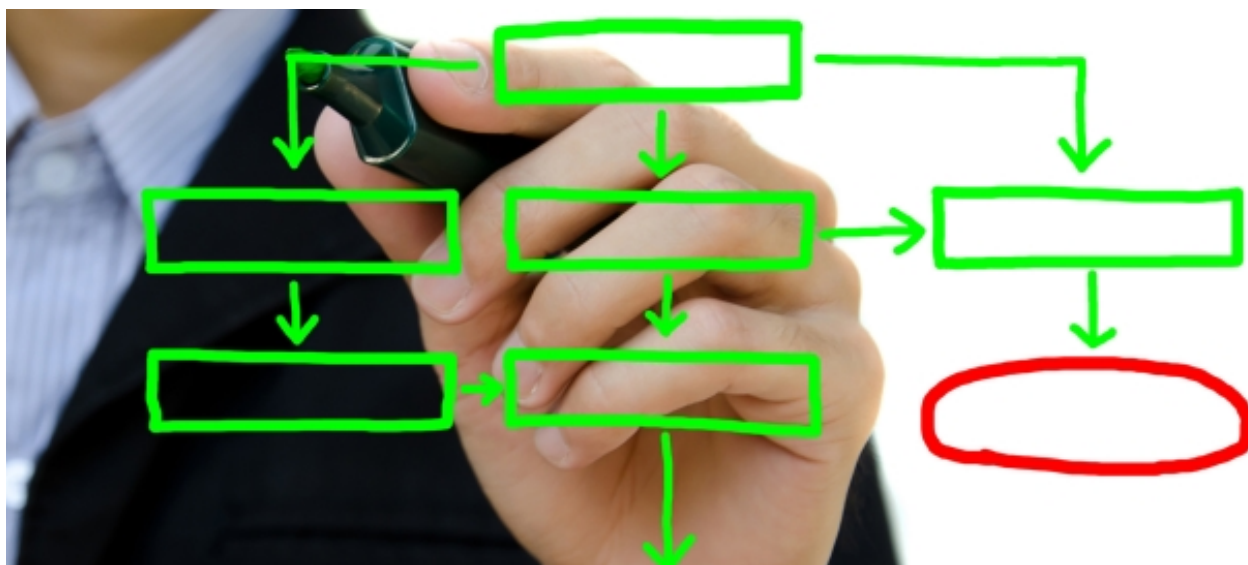
In order to ace the case interview, many applicants allot three months to sharpening their analytical skills. The following are common but effective preparatory activities to consider:

Familiarize Different Cases

You will lose the war if you don't know your enemies. The same principle applies to management consulting case interviews. Familiarizing yourself with cases that might be thrown at you will enable you to devise multiple strategies to finding effective solutions. Some of the common cases relate to product development, pricing, mergers and acquisitions, market analysis, and market segmentation.

Fortunately, there are many [readily accessible and free practice cases](#) available. Management consulting firms post free exercises on their website and if you're a student, your management consulting club will most likely have a compilation of business cases from different resources. If you're willing to spend money for the more pragmatic cases, there are reasonably priced consulting materials and programs you can purchase online.

Master Consulting Frameworks



The business cases are usually ambiguous. In order to approach them in an organized manner, it is advisable to use [detailed consulting frameworks](#). They specify step-by-step guidelines for how to break down the problem into separate components and logically arrive at an answer. Remember that this interview has time constraints, which can cause anxiety if you're not sure how to construct your thoughts.

Some management consulting firms have conceptualized their own frameworks. For instance, **McKinsey** is well known for its **7S model** and **BCG** for its **Growth-Share Matrix**. If applicable, use the structure of the interviewing firm to subtly convey your **keen interest in the company**.

Enhance Your **Mental Math**

Learn to **treat numbers as your best friend**. Consultants use numbers on a day-to-day basis, therefore interviewers will want to assess how you use your mental math to solve problems. The following tips will improve your quantitative skills in a consulting interview:

- Review arithmetic operations. Focus on multiplication and calculating percentages as these are often

utilized in the interview.

- Learn shortcut methods in adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing numbers. Do you know **the end-five and transfer shortcuts**? Learn how to employ techniques such as these.
- Practice interpreting charts and tables. Interviewers may present you with slides that contain graphical information for analysis.
- Set up a mathematical routine. Before you go to bed, calculate all your expenses for the day. When you go grocery shopping, try to add the prices of the goods in your cart before proceeding to the checkout counter.
- Play Sudoku and other mathematical games during your free time. You will have fun and exercise your brain.

Learn from the Experienced

You will never learn everything you need to know from reading guides and manuals. There is a fountain of valuable information and tips that can only be shared by experienced insiders. It is recommended that you attend various networking events to acquire first-hand knowledge about the interview process. Management consulting clubs often invite professional consultants and university alumni in the industry to talk about their firm and experience. In some organizations, those who possess consulting or interview experience are paired with first years for one-one-one instruction and coaching.

Design Your Comfort

The following are part of the non-technical aspect of your case interview preparation and should be done in the days leading up to the actual interview:

- Plan your interview clothes. Choose a well-ironed business suit you are comfortable in. Don't wear dangling earrings or other distracting accessories.
- Determine the distance between the firm and your residence. Give yourself enough time to arrive no later than 15 minutes before the interview. Tardiness is intolerable.
- Print the cover letter and resume that helped you land the interview. Bring your copy to the interview; you never know what the interviewer will ask of you.

It is extremely important to get enough rest the night before the anticipated day and eat a healthy breakfast. If you're tired and have a grumbling stomach, you will lose focus.

How to Do Well During the Interview



In order to deliver your best performance during the interview, you must remember to follow these steps:

Understand the Problem Thoroughly

After the case presentation, do not immediately conclude that it's similar to a problem you've once resolved. Listen carefully to the interviewer so you don't miss any significant details. You may write down notes to remember specifics; paraphrasing is also another technique to confirm your understanding. Clarifying areas you don't comprehend and probing questions is also acceptable. At times, recruiters won't relay all the case details unless asked.

If this step isn't done right, you'll ruin the rest of the process. You will fail to identify the [appropriate case framework](#) and your final answer will be inaccurate.

Think Aloud

As you think of a solution, speak what's on your mind. Verbalize how you came up with your assumptions. Share your reasons for rejecting or supporting ideas and state how you made your calculations. This way, you are able to convey your methods and strategies and the interviewer can guide you in the right direction should you get off track. Most of all, thinking aloud lets you showcase your problem solving and organizational skills. As mentioned above, the process of arriving at an answer has more bearing than the actual answer.

Mind Your Projection

Your gestures are as powerful as your words. Actions have a loud voice so mind the way you project yourself to the interviewer. Sit up straight; slouching affects your confidence. Make eye contact; not doing so conveys insincerity and inattention. Moreover, respond to your interviewer by nodding and smiling, this shows you are actively listening. These non-verbal cues are indicators of your professionalism and sociability. Your interviewers have long realized that these actions are requisite to conducting productive meetings with your clients, interviewing the front liners, and **engaging in**

constructive teamwork with your colleagues.

Maintain a Calm Composure Throughout the Interview

When panic takes over, you will forget everything you've practiced. Thus, it is important to stay calm throughout the entire interview. If the case presented is complex, step back, gather your thoughts and take a deep breath. You can then regain your focus and make recommendations for a viable solution. Interviewers understand that the interview can cause anxiety. Taking a few seconds to relax is understandable, but do not abuse their empathy. Remember that they also gauge how you handle stress.

Enjoy the Process and Learn from your Experience

Finally, be confident that you can ace the case interview and enjoy the entire process. Having the right mindset is the key to an excellent performance. If you don't believe you are capable of cracking the case, you never will. But if you believe in yourself and work your fingers to the bone, you can land your dream job.

After the interview, assess your own performance. Do you think you arrived at a pragmatic solution? Did you communicate your thoughts carefully and comprehensively? Were you able to convey your analytical, logical, and problem solving skills? From these honest self-observations you will know whether you will be scheduled for another round of interviews.

If things don't go as planned, learn from your experience. Most management consulting applicants are rejected after the case interview. However, those who are serious in pursuing their career never give up. They continue to improve their skills until they eventually receive the most sought after job offer.

Learn More

For additional techniques on how to land a job in the management consulting industry, download this [management consulting guide](#) for free. It discusses common attributes firms look for in applicants, the three types of case interview questions, and simple steps to resolving a case. It also includes an interview script to illustrate the ideal way of answering questions.