

What Not to Do

While solving the guesstimate question, remember the following:

- Do not assume that you have fully understood what needs to be calculated as soon as you hear the question. Take a few seconds to gather your thoughts and ask preliminary questions.
- Do not guess the answer as soon as you hear the question. Keep in mind that the interviewer is more interested in hearing your approach towards the problem rather than the end result. The idea is to convince the interviewer that you can think rationally and logically.
- Do not make assumptions in your head. Making assumptions is an important part of solving the guesstimate question and it is important that you cross-check them with the interviewer.

For example,

If asked to calculate the number of hair salons in New York, you could assume that every person in New York gets a hair cut at least once a month. This means that you are not taking into account the small percentage of people in New York who do not get their hair cut at all.

It'll be wise to let the interviewer know of any assumptions you make and ensure that he/she is convinced about them.

- Do not assume that the interviewer is a mind reader! Remember that you are presenting a solution to someone who cannot read your mind. Therefore, it is very important to keep the interviewer on the same page by sharing your line of thought i.e., your assumptions, approach, logic, break-down of the problem, calculations etc.

The advantage of doing so is that you give the interviewer an opportunity to correct you if he/she feels that you are going off track! It's better to stand corrected earlier in the game than later on.

- Do not turn each aspect of the problem into an entirely new guesstimate itself! It's easy to get swayed by your own intelligence and analytical abilities. Focus on simplifying the question and not complicating it.

Final Thoughts

The following skills are sure to significantly increase your chances of cracking a guesstimate problem and getting another step closer to your dream job!

- **Structured Thinking**

To be able to structure your thoughts lays the edifice for cracking guesstimates. Its value and importance can't be stressed enough. It is a trait which is highly appreciated by employers.

- **Sharp Communication**

The three Vs of communication – Voice, Veracity, and Vocabulary when brought into play by you will certainly leave the interviewer impressed and convinced of your good fit for their organization.

- **Smart Creativity**

Use your creativity in making small assumptions using the things that you observe in your daily life. But don't forget to be logical!

It can be a little intimidating to solve guesstimates in front of someone for the first time knowing you're going to be judged, but at the end of the day, it's like any other interview question, one designed to see what your mental capacity and approach is.

With all the aforementioned things in your mind, you are now ready to start practicing and acing guesstimates!

Guesstimate #1

"How many filling stations are there in India?"

Candidate:

Are we talking about filling stations for vehicles?

Interviewer: Yes.

Candidate:

Should I take into account CNG stations as well?

Interviewer:

No, just petrol and diesel stations.

Candidate:

The population of the town where I was born and brought up is approximately 12 lakhs.

And it has about 50 – 60 petrol/diesel stations. Let's go with 55.

This means that each station serves about 22,000 people. $(1,200,000 / 55)$

The population of India is approximately 1.3 billion.

I will just divide 1.3B with 22K. $(1,300,000,000 / 22,000)$

This gives me about **60,000 petrol/diesel stations** in India. That's my final answer.

Guesstimate #2

"How many mowers were sold in India last year?"

Candidate:

To be sure, I want to confirm that we are talking about lawn/garden mowers?

Interviewer: Yes.

Candidate:

Should I take into account only the domestic ones, or commercial ones as well?

Interviewer:

Garden mowers for domestic use only.

Candidate:

The population of India is approximately 1.3 billion (1,300,000,000).

About 6% of the Indian population is below poverty line.

This leaves us with about 1.2B people. $(1.3B - 6\% * 1.3B)$ who do not have access to a private garden.

In India we have mix of nuclear and joint families. I am assuming that the average number of members in an Indian family is approximately 4.

Dividing 1.2B by 4 will give me about 0.3B households. $(1,200,000,000 / 4 = 300,000,000)$

I am assuming that 30% of Indian families stay in urban or sub-urban areas.

Out of this 30%, I am assuming that 10% stay in apartment buildings.

So, we are down to $20\% * 0.3B$.

This gives us approximately 60M (60,000,000) family units which stay in houses with gardens and are most likely to buy a garden mower.

A very small percentage of these 60M households do not buy a garden mower. Instead, a *maali* (a professional gardener hired to tend the garden) mows gardens with his own machine which he carries from one house to another. May I ignore this figure?

Interviewer:

Yes, you may ignore it.

Candidate:

A garden mower is a pretty sturdy product. Keeping that in mind, my assumption is that it is replaced once every 10 years.

To get my final answer, I will divide 60M by 10.

This gives us **6 million garden mowers** sold annually in India.