

Basic Questions to ask for to UnderStand the business:

I. Business Understanding (1-15)

1. What exactly does this company do, in plain English?
2. What products/services does it sell?
3. Who are the customers?
4. Why do customers choose this company?
5. What problem does it solve, and how essential is it?
6. Is demand discretionary or non-discretionary?
7. How has the business evolved over 10 years?
8. What were the original core competencies?
9. What does the company do today that it did not do 5 years ago?
10. What adjacent markets can it expand into?
11. What portion of revenue is recurring?
12. What portion is one-time/project-based?
13. What are the main operating segments?
14. How does the company win contracts/deals?
15. Is the business easy or hard to understand?

II. Industry & Competitive Structure (16-30)

16. What is industry size?
17. What is industry growth rate?
18. Is the industry fragmented or consolidated?
19. Who are the top 5 competitors?
20. Market share of each?
21. Is the market growing faster than GDP?
22. Are industry returns above cost of capital?
23. If yes, why hasn't competition eroded them?
24. Are barriers regulatory, capital, brand, network, or scale?
25. Does the company have cost advantage?
26. Does it have brand power?
27. Does it have switching costs?
28. Does it benefit from network effects?
29. What happens if a well-funded global player enters?
30. Is the company gaining or losing market share?

III. Revenue Analysis (31-40)

31. Revenue CAGR (10 years)?
32. Revenue CAGR (5 years)?
33. Revenue CAGR (3 years)?
34. Is growth accelerating or decelerating?
35. Organic vs acquisition growth split?
36. Revenue mix by geography?
37. Revenue mix by product/service?
38. Revenue concentration (top 5 clients)?
39. Are revenues cyclical?
40. What are key macro drivers (rates, GDP, commodity, regulation)?

IV. Margin & Expense Structure (41-55)

41. Gross margin trend (10 years)?
42. Operating margin trend (10 years)?

- 43. Net margin trend?
- 44. Are margins stable across cycles?
- 45. What drives gross margin?
- 46. What are largest operating expenses?
- 47. Fixed vs variable cost breakdown?
- 48. Employee cost % of revenue?
- 49. Marketing/selling cost %?
- 50. R&D intensity?
- 51. Is there operating leverage?
- 52. If revenue grows 20%, how much can EBIT grow?
- 53. How do margins compare to peers?
- 54. Any recent margin compression/expansion?
- 55. Is pricing power visible in numbers?

V. Other Income & Quality of Earnings (56-60)

- 56. What is included in other income?
- 57. Is other income recurring?
- 58. Is core business dependent on treasury gains?
- 59. Any one-off accounting adjustments?
- 60. Is EBITDA converting into cash?

VI. Interest, Debt & Capital Structure (61-70)

- 61. Total debt outstanding?
- 62. Debt-to-equity ratio?
- 63. Debt-to-EBITDA ratio?
- 64. Interest coverage ratio?
- 65. Interest expense % of revenue?
- 66. Fixed vs floating debt mix?
- 67. Maturity profile of debt?
- 68. Is leverage increasing or decreasing?
- 69. Why was debt taken?
- 70. Could company survive 2 bad years?

VII. Asset Base & Depreciation (71-78)

- 71. Asset-light or asset-heavy model?
- 72. What % of assets are tangible vs intangible?
- 73. Nature of fixed assets?
- 74. Depreciation trend vs revenue growth?
- 75. Amortization driven by acquisitions?
- 76. Any goodwill impairments historically?
- 77. What is asset turnover ratio?
- 78. Is incremental capital required for growth?

VIII. Profitability & Capital Efficiency (79-85)

- 79. ROE (10-year trend)?
- 80. ROCE (10-year trend)?
- 81. ROA trend?
- 82. Return on Incremental Capital?
- 83. Is high ROE driven by leverage?
- 84. Does ROCE exceed cost of capital consistently?
- 85. How does company compare with peers on return metrics?

IX. Working Capital & Cash Flow (86-92)

- 86. Receivable days trend?
- 87. Payable days trend?
- 88. Inventory days trend?
- 89. Working capital cycle improving or worsening?
- 90. CFO vs PAT (5-year comparison)?
- 91. Free Cash Flow trend?
- 92. Is growth funded by internal accruals?

X. Capital Allocation & Shareholder Policy (93-96)

- 93. Dividend payout ratio?
- 94. Is retained earnings generating high ROE?
- 95. Any equity dilution history?
- 96. Has management created or destroyed value via acquisitions?

XI. Management & Governance (97-100)

- 97. Who is the promoter/management team?
- 98. Track record over last 10 years?
- 99. How transparent are annual reports & concalls?
- 100. Are incentives aligned with long-term shareholders?

XII. Valuation & Intrinsic Value Framework (Bonus Analytical Layer)

Once these 100 are answered:

- Estimate future revenue growth
- Estimate sustainable operating margin
- Forecast EBIT
- Compute FCFF:

$$FCFF = CFO + \text{Interest} \times (1 - \text{Tax Rate}) - \text{Capex}$$

- Estimate WACC
- Forecast 5 years
- Calculate terminal value
- Discount to present

$$\text{Firm Value} - \text{Net Debt} = \text{Equity Value}$$

Divide by shares → Intrinsic Value

Compare with market price → Margin of Safety

If answers are clear – conviction increases. If answers are vague – risk is higher than visible.

This checklist is not for speed. It is for eliminating ignorance. When 80% of these questions are answered confidently, you no longer "own a stock." You understand a business.

Basic Questions to ask for to UnderStand the Country:

I. National Identity & Structural Foundations (1-8)

1. What is the country's economic model (export-led, consumption-driven, commodity-based, financial hub, etc.)?
2. What are its 3 primary structural strengths?
3. What are its 3 structural weaknesses?
4. What share of global GDP does it represent?
5. Has that share increased or declined over 20 years?
6. What defines its competitive identity globally?
7. Is it capital importer or capital exporter structurally?
8. Is it geopolitically aligned with major economic blocs?

II. Demographics & Human Capital (9-25)

9. Total population size?
10. Population growth rate (10-year trend)?
11. Is population accelerating or decelerating?
12. Median age?
13. % working-age population (15-64)?
14. Dependency ratio?
15. Youth population % (under 25)?
16. Elderly population % (65+)?
17. Is demographic dividend still ahead or already consumed?
18. Net migration rate?
19. Is immigration policy open, selective, or restrictive?
20. Is there brain drain (skilled emigration)?
21. Urbanization rate?
22. Urbanization trend (fast or plateauing)?
23. Are megacities overburdened or productive hubs?
24. Labor force participation rate (male vs female)?
25. Female participation trend – rising or stagnant?
26. Informal sector size?
27. Youth unemployment rate?
28. Structural vs cyclical unemployment?
29. Literacy rate?
30. Secondary & tertiary enrollment ratios?
31. Quality of education vs global peers?
32. STEM output per year?
33. Vocational training penetration?
34. Are skills aligned with industry demand?
35. Life expectancy?
36. Healthy life expectancy?
37. Public health expenditure % of GDP?
38. Out-of-pocket health burden?
39. Malnutrition or obesity concerns?
40. Is health a constraint to productivity?

III. Political System & Governance (41-55)

41. Political system type (democracy, hybrid, centralized, federal)?
42. Stability of governance over 30 years?
43. Policy continuity across governments?
44. Rule of law strength?
45. Property rights enforcement?

- 46. Contract enforcement time?
- 47. Corruption perception trend?
- 48. Bureaucratic efficiency?
- 49. Judicial independence?
- 50. Media freedom?
- 51. Civil unrest frequency?
- 52. Regional separatist tensions?
- 53. Defense posture and stability?
- 54. Is policymaking reactive or strategic?
- 55. Are reforms incremental or crisis-driven?

IV. Fiscal Structure & Government Strength (56-65)

- 56. Government size (% of GDP spending) ?
- 57. Fiscal deficit trend (10 years) ?
- 58. Primary deficit or surplus?
- 59. Revenue-to-GDP ratio?
- 60. Tax structure (direct vs indirect) ?
- 61. Capital expenditure % of total budget?
- 62. Welfare/subsidy burden?
- 63. Defense expenditure %?
- 64. Interest payments % of revenue?
- 65. Fiscal credibility vs peers?

V. Sovereign Debt & Financial Stability (66-74)

- 66. Debt-to-GDP ratio?
- 67. External vs domestic debt mix?
- 68. Average debt maturity?
- 69. Currency denomination of debt?
- 70. Credit rating trend?
- 71. Cost of borrowing trend?
- 72. Contingent liabilities (state-owned enterprises, pensions) ?
- 73. Can the country withstand 2 years of slowdown?
- 74. Is debt funding growth or consumption?

VI. Economic Structure & Growth Engine (75-85)

- 75. GDP growth rate (20-year trend) ?
- 76. GDP per capita growth rate?
- 77. Productivity growth (TFP trend) ?
- 78. Sector contribution (agriculture / manufacturing / services) ?
- 79. Share of high-value exports?
- 80. Manufacturing complexity index ranking?
- 81. Domestic savings rate?
- 82. Investment rate (% of GDP) ?
- 83. Credit-to-GDP ratio?
- 84. Is growth credit-fueled?
- 85. Is growth broad-based or sector-concentrated?

VII. External Sector & Currency Strength (86-95)

- 86. Current account balance trend?
- 87. Trade balance structure (commodities vs value-added) ?
- 88. FX reserves (months of imports) ?
- 89. Currency trend (10 years) ?
- 90. Inflation trend (structural vs volatile) ?

- 91. Central bank independence?
- 92. Real interest rate level?
- 93. FDI inflow consistency?
- 94. FPI volatility exposure?
- 95. Is currency structurally appreciating or depreciating?

VIII. Inflation, Monetary Policy & Asset Cycle (96-102)

- 96. Core inflation stability?
- 97. Monetary policy credibility?
- 98. Asset price inflation (real estate, equity)?
- 99. Household debt levels?
- 100. Credit cycle position (early, mid, late)?

IX. Infrastructure & Physical Capital (103-110)

- 101. Power reliability?
- 102. Logistics performance index?
- 103. Port, rail, highway quality?
- 104. Digital infrastructure penetration?
- 105. Broadband & mobile penetration?
- 106. Energy import dependence?
- 107. Renewable capacity growth?
- 108. Urban housing affordability?
- 109. Water security?
- 110. Is infrastructure ahead of or behind growth needs?

X. Innovation & Future Orientation (111-118)

- 111. R&D spending % of GDP?
- 112. Patent filings trend?
- 113. Startup ecosystem maturity?
- 114. Ease of doing business trend?
- 115. Regulatory burden?
- 116. Industrial policy clarity?
- 117. Adoption of AI, automation, advanced manufacturing?
- 118. Is the country future-facing or status-quo biased?

XI. Social Stability & Inequality (119-125)

- 119. Gini coefficient trend?
- 120. Wealth vs income inequality gap?
- 121. Middle-class expansion rate?
- 122. Social mobility indicators?
- 123. Crime rate trend?
- 124. Trust in institutions?
- 125. Consumer confidence trend?

XII. Geopolitics & Strategic Position (126-132)

- 126. Strategic geographic advantages?
- 127. Trade agreements strength?
- 128. Exposure to sanctions risk?
- 129. Supply chain positioning (friend-shoring, near-shoring)?
- 130. Diplomatic stability?
- 131. Military risk exposure?

132. Is it a rule-maker or rule-taker globally?

XIII. Sentiment & Market Behavior (133-140)

- 133. Equity market depth?
- 134. Bond market liquidity?
- 135. Domestic investor base strength?
- 136. Retail participation trend?
- 137. Valuation vs history?
- 138. Foreign ownership levels?
- 139. Capital controls?
- 140. Long-term investor perception?

XIV. Historical Pattern Recognition (141-148)

- 141. Growth pattern over 50 years?
- 142. Crisis frequency (currency, banking, sovereign)?
- 143. Reform cycles – post-crisis or proactive?
- 144. Inflation history?
- 145. Political regime shifts?
- 146. Demographic turning points?
- 147. Credit bubble history?
- 148. Structural transformation success?

XV. Strategic Investment Filter (149-100)

- 149. Is population supportive of long-term growth?
- 150. Is productivity rising sustainably?
- 151. Is debt manageable relative to growth?
- 152. Is inequality politically sustainable?
- 153. Is currency likely stable or appreciating?
- 154. Is policy predictable?
- 155. Is capital allocated to productive sectors?
- 156. Are reforms compounding?
- 157. Is the country gaining global relevance?
- 158. Would long-term capital feel safe compounding here?

How to Use This Framework

You're looking for:

- Growing working-age population
- Rising productivity (TFP)
- Manageable sovereign debt
- Controlled inflation
- Stable currency
- Reform-oriented governance
- Increasing GDP per capita
- Rising R&D & innovation intensity
- Healthy external balance
- Improving institutional quality

When demographic tailwind + productivity + fiscal discipline + currency stability align – that's where multi-decade compounding happens.