

CONSULTING INTERVIEWS: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

The Boston Consulting Group

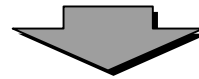
GOALS FOR THIS DOCUMENT

Provide an overview of the interview

Describe the evaluation criteria

Demystify case interviews

- **What they are and why they're done**
- **What to do and what not to do**
- **Provide a case example**



**Increase your confidence and help you
succeed in consulting interviews**

INTERVIEW FORMAT

First Round Consists of Two 45-Minute Case Interviews

1-2 minutes	→	Introduction Set the agenda
10-15 minutes	→	Be prepared to discuss prior experiences Open discussion (resume, motivations)
20-25 minutes	→	Case introduction Case discussion Case wrap up
4-5 minutes	→	Q&A, your chance to ask questions

SOME KEY EVALUATION CRITERIA

Success-oriented behavior

- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Toughness/resilience
- Initiative/motivation
- Demonstrated results/leadership

Analytical skills

- Framing/organizing the problem
- Prioritization of issues
- Identifying relevant information
- Drawing conclusions from facts
- Identifying key implications and next steps

Presence/communication

- Listening skills
- Oral skills/articulation
- Charisma/spark
- Credibility/maturity

OPEN DISCUSSION

Some Tips

Exhale!

- It's natural to feel nervous
- Think of it as an engaging conversation with a colleague

Be genuine

- We don't seek a specific profile
- "Fit" is a two-way street

Convey your "brand"

- Your unique strengths, characterized in a memorable way
- Two or three things the interviewer will remember about you

Prepare to ask questions about firm, industry

- Usually after the case has concluded

THE CASE INTERVIEW

The What and Why

Most consulting firms use some form of case interview

Cases are mainly taken from real-life examples of BCG casework

Typically structured as a 20 to 30 minute discussion

Cases serve as a vehicle for us to gain insight into how you might approach and analyze a typical business issue

- **Also gives you a perspective on what consultants do**

Not the only metric we use to evaluate candidates

- **Education and work experience**
- **Interpersonal and communications skills**

WHAT DO COMPANIES LOOK FOR DURING THE CASE?

Not “The Answer”

Analytics

- Provide structure to unstructured problems
- Break problems into components
- Apply transparent, logical thinking to each component
- Synthesize discussion into solution

Poise

- Appear excited by the kinds of issues consultants face
- Are not intimidated by process or problems
- Assimilate information quickly and effectively
- Ask insightful questions






Creativity

- Apply a unique perspective to business situations
- See the big picture
- Draw conclusions from partial information
- make assumptions, see patterns, and generate hypotheses

THE SEVEN HABITS OF SUCCESSFUL CASE INTERVIEWS

1. **Make certain you have a clear understanding of the objective—ask for additional information if necessary**
2. **Frame/organize the problem to identify key issues to be addressed**
3. **Prioritize the issues you want to address**
4. **Identify the key information that you need to reach conclusions/make decisions**
5. **Draw conclusions from the facts provided to you**
6. **Identify key implications and additional steps**
7. **Summarize findings as necessary**

SOME COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Pitfall	Interviewer comments
Unstructured answer	 <p>“It is very clear when you are interviewing a student who has not had a lot of case exposure. They tend to lack structure in their approach.”</p>
Narrowly defined problem	 <p>“It is very common for a student who has a marketing background to focus only on the marketing issues such as how the product is positioned or someone with a financial background to focus on financing issues and ignore the strategic reasons or fit for an acquisition.”</p>
Generic or simplistic answer	 <p>“Many students tend to be too simplistic in their analysis. Students need to develop a framework unique to the situation presented. Imposing a generic framework is generally a recipe for failure.”</p> <p>“Interviewers look for a student to dig deep on issues instead of just skimming the issues. Students should try to determine the most important issues and ask penetrating questions regarding these issues.”</p>
Focus on answer, not thought process	 <p>“Too many students try to give the answer instead of walking through the logic. They should try not to make any assumptions, but if they feel they need to, they should clearly state that it is an assumption they are making.”</p> <p>“Many students tend not to frame the problem. They say ‘I would look at this’; instead they should explain why they would look at something, a hypothesis about what types of factors drive the business or a range of possibilities.”</p>
Lack of conviction	 <p>“If I can get an interviewee to change his or her mind with one question, what will happen when I leave him or her alone with a skeptical client?”</p>

HOW DO I PREPARE?

No Magical Formula

Prepare mentally

- View the interview as an opportunity, not a hurdle
- Remember, most questions have no “right answer”

Practice

- Case interviews are an acquired skill
- Use classmates, friends who interviewed last year, and people at your school’s career services
- Look on the Web for firm-provided practice questions (bcg.com)

Read, read, read . . . and think

- *Wall Street Journal*
- *New York Times* business section

A BCG CASE EXAMPLE

Your client is the CEO of a national fast food restaurant chain which operates 500 restaurants. The chain is thinking of instituting a frequent-diner program

The program would be modeled after the frequent-flier programs. Each dollar spent in the restaurant by a member would earn one point. After 20 points have been accumulated they can be redeemed for a sandwich priced at \$2.00

- How would you determine if this is a good business proposition?
- Should they institute this program?

A SUGGESTED APPROACH (I)

Fast Food Frequent Diner Program Case

Develop a framework

- 1. Suggest a hypothesis on what chain wants to do: increase revenue, loyalty with customers, etc.**
- 2. Will want to look at what competitors are doing: Is this becoming a necessity to compete, or is it a way to differentiate chain? Even if others are doing, want to think about how can make this one unique**
- 3. Need to assess how program will impact customers' behavior: frequency of visits, dollars spent at each visit**
- 4. Recognize that it may impact different customers differently (i.e., those that already come frequently vs. those that just stop in once in a while)**
- 5. Also need to assess the costs associated with the program (free sandwiches, marketing, cards, etc.) and whether or not they are less than the additional revenues**

A SUGGESTED APPROACH (II)

Fast Food Frequent Diner Program Case

Dig deeper into a couple areas: additional revenue expected and expenses

- 6. Focusing on the revenue side, interviewee should outline the factors they would consider, data needed and ideas for getting the data**
- 7. Should be able to use the data from the focus group to estimate the additional revenue**
- 8. Interviewee should then move on to the cost side and identify and estimate the relevant expenses (can estimate sandwich costs from focus group data, guesstimate other expenses)**
- 9. Give a recommendation as to whether to go ahead with program**

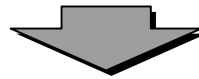
Other areas to think about

- 10. Likely competitor responses**
- 11. Ways to use the program to gain other advantages: more effective marketing, test new products, etc.**

SOME BACKGROUND DATA

Focus-group Results by Customer Segments

Customer segment	Percentage of customers	Number of customers/store	Number visits/year	\$ per visit
Heavy	40	8,000	30.0	4.00
Light	60	12,000	9.0	4.00
	<u>100</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>17.5</u>	<u>4.00</u>



Key questions

- How will the program impact customers' behavior?
- Will this impact the customer segments differently?