

Ace the Case Interview!

Vanderbilt Career Center

Case Interviews Defined

- What are they?
- Why do employers do case interviews?
- What are they looking for in case interviews?
- Especially common in Consulting interviews



Possible interview structure

- Intro
- Questions about you
- Why Consulting?
- Possible math question
- Case Question(s)
- Your Questions
- The Grand Finale

Commonly asked Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are you doing here?
- Why consulting?
- Why did you pick your school?
- What do you think consultants do?
- What do you know about this job and our firm?
- Why would you choose our firm over our competitors?
- How are your quantitative skills?
- What percentage is 7 of 63?
- Tell me of a time you were a team player.
- Tell me of a time you showed leadership skills.

Commonly asked Questions (cont.)

- Give me an example of a time when you influenced or persuaded a group.
- Tell me about a recent crisis you handled.
- Have you ever failed at anything?
- Tell me about a time when you took the initiative to start something.
- What type of work do you like to do best?
- With what other firms are you interviewing?
- Which other industries are you looking into?
- What accomplishments have given you the greatest satisfaction?
- What experiences/skills do you feel are particularly transferable to our organization?
- Why should I hire you?

Tips for Handling Case Questions

- Listen to the question
- Take Notes
- Summarize the Question
- Verify the Objective
- Ask Clarifying Questions
- Organize your answer

Tips for Handling Case Questions (cont.)

- Hold that Thought for "One Mississippi"
- Manage Your Time
- By the Numbers
- Be Coachable
- Be Creative and Brainstorm
- Exude Enthusiasm and a Positive Attitude
- Bring Closure and Summarize

Students who receive job offers

- Convince the interviewer they are committed to consulting and know what they are getting into (e.g., type of work, travel, lifestyle)
- Demonstrate success-oriented behavior
- Exhibit good-analytical skills when answering case questions
- Articulate their thoughts, create a positive presence, and defend themselves without being defensive

Basic Questions to Ask

- What is the product?
- Who hired us?
- How long will this engagement last?
- Is there a work plan?
- Has the company faced this problem (or opportunity) before? If so, how did it react? What was the outcome?
- What have other companies facing this situation done?
- Has the firm already done any research on this issue? If so, what were the findings?



Types of Cases: Brain teasers

- Samples:
 - Why are manhole covers round?
 - What is the angle between the hands of a clock when it is 3:15?
- Things to Consider:
 - Used mostly in first-round interviews
 - Some have definite answers, some are more flexible
 - Keep your cool, and think logically
 - Laugh at your mistakes

Types of Cases: Market sizing

- Samples:
 - How many telephone booths are there in NYC?
 - How many golf balls were lost in Tennessee this year?
 - How many pairs of boxers are sold in the U.S. each year?
- Things to Consider:
 - Also known as “back of the envelope” questions
 - There are no right answers
 - Work with standard assumptions
 - Use easy numbers-round up or down
 - Write the numbers down
 - Population-based, household, individual, or “who makes this stuff up”?

Common Assumptions

- The population of the U. S. is 280 million (can fluctuate from 250 million to 300 million)
- Men and women each represent 50% of the U. S. population
- The average life expectancy of an American is around 75 years
- Americans per household is 2.8
- Number of U. S. households is 100 million
- Percentage of households with a VCR is 90%
- Percentage of households with cable TV is 90%
- Percentage of households with a PC is 60%
- Percentage of households connected to the Internet is 76%

Sample Market Sizing Question

- How many garden hoses were sold in the U.S. last year?
- Recommended reading:
Cosentino, Marc P. (2004). Case in Point

Business Case Questions

- Samples:

- The total widget market is \$170 million, and our sales are \$30 million. What percentage of the market share do we hold?
- DuPont has just invented a lightweight, superabsorbent, biodegradable material that would be perfect for disposable diapers. What do they do with it?
- Our client is a large auto manufacturer who is thinking about making a device that will increase fuel efficiency in your car by 20 percent. What is the market for this product? What should it be priced at?

Business Case Questions

- Things to Consider:
 - Generally long, 15 minutes to one hour
 - Can be written or oral or in a group
 - Should be an interactive dialogue between you and the interviewer
 - Continually ask questions, and think out loud
 - Make notes

What NOT To Do

- Avoid monologues
- Don't answer the wrong question
- Avoid “explosion of the mouth”
- Don't digress
- Don't use terms you don't understand
- Don't ask questions that are too open-ended

Practice Case Question

You and another associate are working together on a project. Things are going really well – the client is pleased with your firm's work. However, whenever your project manager shows up things seem to fall apart. Members of the client team have recently mentioned how much the project supervisor bugs them. He seems disorganized and often takes meetings off track with wild ideas.

How would you handle the situation?

- All groups will have 3 minutes to ask questions
- Groups will have 5 minutes to prepare their answer

Featheringill Q&A

The Career Center comes to
Featheringill Atrium:

- Wednesdays 11:00 – 1:00

For: brief questions on internships, jobs,
interviewing, CareerLink, resume/cover letter
drop off or review,....

With Engineering Industry Career Coach:
- Shannon Beeman



Engineering/IT Industry Career Day

- Thursday, October 2nd from 3-6pm in SLC Ballroom
- Career Fair type event
- All students welcome
- 45 + engineering employers to attend
- See www.vanderbilt.edu/career and then Engineering/IT Cluster page under student section for complete list of employers
- RSVP via CareerLink under Events Tab

Engineering Express

- One-hour presentations/discussions on topics related to the Engineering and IT job or internship search
- Check CareerLink for dates, times, and locations, and to RSVP

Contact Us

- www.vanderbilt.edu/career
- Coaching Assessment walk-ins
 - 1-3pm (MWF), 12-2pm (TR)
 - Fill out the ICAP form on our website
 - Meet with a Career Coach for 15 minutes
- Coaching Appointments:
Call 322-2750 to setup a time

