

# **Preparing for Case Interviews**

*Books available for overnight checkout from the Career Service Center*

## **Case In Point**

Great resource for case interview preparation! Information on how to prepare for every type of case interview with guided interactions. The true strength of this book is the simulated cases with outlined answers and comments. You can see interviewee's strength and weaknesses from the conversational outline of the cases. Includes frameworks and sample cases. Good for practicing with friends. A must read!

## **Vault Guide to Case Interviews**

This guide provides the skinny on business frameworks, sample cases, guesstimates, and brainteasers. It also covers important frameworks including Porter's Five Forces, the capital asset pricing model (CAPM), the BCG Matrix, the four Ps, and the four Cs. A good introduction to case interviews, but the sample cases are rather simplistic. Also accessible online from

<http://www.claremontmckenna.edu/csc/links.php>

## **Crack the Case**

Designed for those who are more familiar with case interviews. This guide provides an extension to the standard case frameworks. The sample cases are relatively more challenging and require higher quantitative analysis. Provides worksheets for interviewers and interview fact sheets. Great for second-round interview preparation.

## **Ace Your Case: The WetFeet Insider Guide**

Description of the case interview from start to finish including advice and sample cases

## **Junior/Senior Investment Banking and Consulting Presentation**

Copies available in the Career Service Center. First hand information about applying for consulting and investment banking positions including interview tips and sample resumes and cover letters.

## **Companies' Online Resources**

Many companies provide online interactive case interview prep on their websites. Check any company's website you are interviewing with for sample cases online.

BCG

[http://www.bcg.com/careers/interview\\_prep/interview\\_prep\\_splash.html](http://www.bcg.com/careers/interview_prep/interview_prep_splash.html)

Bain and Company

[http://www.bain.com/bainweb/Join\\_Bain/case\\_interviews.asp](http://www.bain.com/bainweb/Join_Bain/case_interviews.asp)

Deloitte Consulting

[http://careers.deloitte.com/Service\\_Subsection.aspx?FunctionID=11&ServiceAreaID=9&ServiceAreaPageID=247&AudienceID=1](http://careers.deloitte.com/Service_Subsection.aspx?FunctionID=11&ServiceAreaID=9&ServiceAreaPageID=247&AudienceID=1)

## **Claremont Consulting Network – Case Book**

Claremont Consulting Network (CCN) is a student-run club that helps pool resources and information on consulting opportunities. The club is actively involved in helping students at the 5Cs prepare for interviews and a career in consulting. Join the **CCN Facebook group!** For CCN interview prep materials, visit: <http://public.box.net/maybachzeplin01159>

## **10 Case Interview Basics**

(by Matt Goldman, CMC '04)

1. Take quick notes, while still listening and paying attention to the interviewer. You may need to go back to them at the end of the case.
2. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification. It's better to ask than to not understand.
3. Explain your thought process to the interviewer; don't just give them the answer. They want to understand how you think.
4. Be prepared for a sudden twist or change in the case.

5. Be careful with any math you need to do, or approximate and let your interviewer know. It's easy in a stressful situation to do arithmetic incorrectly. Don't multiply 2 x 3 and get 5.
6. If you need to figure out a market size or population, start with what you know and work your way down or up. As long as you state your assumptions you'll be OK. It's fine to ask, "Does that estimate seem reasonable to you?"
7. Don't get caught in your approximation calculations, that's not the main point of the case interview.
8. Be ready to sum up your findings at the end of the case in 30 seconds.
9. Be yourself, but make sure to be memorable. They want to see who you are, too. Remember, this person may have to work with you for 12 hours a day in a small conference room, so they want to make sure they like you.
10. Have fun. It's a challenge, but if you want this for a job you better make sure you enjoy it.

## **Some Tips from CMC Alum on Case Interviewing**

(by Devang Vussonji, CMC '04)

I thought it would be useful to make some general observations about the mock interviews. Keep in mind that these are solely my opinions and they may not work for you.

- 1) Resume review: There are 10-15 standard questions that you need to be prepared for.
  - a) Tell me about yourself. – Tie your past (why you decided to study economics / what got you interested in the business world, business-related classes / projects that depend on your interest in business, business-related experiences that reaffirmed your commitment to business) and future plans (the only safe thing to say is that you are sure you will like consulting and you want to stick to the profession; if you need to get an MBA / any other qualification to progress in the career, you will, but your plan is to grow in the field). And that's why you are on the hot seat today.
  - b) Why consulting? – There are a couple of good answers: (i) you want to learn about businesses across the board and consulting will teach you a lot about businesses very quickly; (ii) you are an analytical person and you like working in a problem solving environment (give an example of working in such an environment).
  - c) Why my firm? – What is unique about the firm that you like? BCG has an interesting team structure. Bain has an entrepreneurial environment. McKinsey has an extremely intellectual environment that is very stimulating. Here is where your research on the firm will pay off. You want to give the interviewer an impression that you think the world of the firm and that it's your first choice. Make sure you have researched the firm and the industry (company website, NexisLexis news search).
  - d) Are you sure you want to travel four days a week and live out of a suitcase? – Yes! You LOVE traveling. You think there is a lot to learn from different environments. Not only would you be fine with traveling, your eagerness to travel is what got you interested in consulting. If you hate traveling, McKinsey, BCG, Bain and Deloitte are not for you. Litigation and real estate consulting firms don't require you to travel as much. You may want to reconsider your options. Of course, the firms that make you travel a lot are the most prestigious firms and those are the firms that will get you into a good graduate school. Anyways, it's your choice to make.
  - e) What do you want to do in the future? - Don't give them the impression that you are trying out consulting for a couple of years and you are going to grad school soon after or that you are going to switch jobs soon. Give them the impression that you wanted to work in the field and for the firm you are interviewing with ever since you were a toddler and you will keep working with them until you reach your grave. All that you are doing is showing them commitment. No one expects you to know what you are going to do in two years. But interviewers want to make sure that you are serious about it TODAY. If you are already thinking about quitting, you may not be a very good hire. Now, firms like Bain encourage entrepreneurship and for Bain you may want to tweak your answer to suggest that you may want to start your own firm in the future.
  - f) Example of teamwork? – from internships, class projects, other activities
  - g) 3 strengths? – analytical skills, other skills listed in the job description for the job you are applying
  - h) 3 weaknesses? – list weaknesses that you are trying to overcome and point out how you have overcome them over the years

Also, anything on your resume is fair game. So if you have put down, 'President of Investment Club' as one of your activities, the interviewer may ask you, 'What do you think about the stock market today?' Or if you have put down, 'Researched the Sarbanes-Oxley bill' in one of your descriptions, the interviewer may ask you, 'What are some of the provisions of the bill?'

Further, you should have 4-5 good stories about yourself and you should mold these stories into answers for ANY question. For example, if you worked for Goldman Sachs that is an impressive experience. An answer to one of the questions in the interview should be related to Goldman Sachs. If they ask you about yourself, tell them how you worked for Goldman Sachs and got extremely interested in the business world and you now want to add to that experience. If they ask about strengths, tell them how you worked for Goldman Sachs and you produced excellent results under intense pressure. If they ask about weaknesses, tell them how you were very extremely shy but interacting with people at Goldman Sachs changed that. The point being, you can use the same experience for multiple answers. Of course, you should use one experience only once. Hence you need 4-5 experiences because there will be 4-5 different questions. But sit down and think about the experiences that best suit the job for which you are applying. And it does not have to be work experiences. It could be projects you have worked on or an activity on campus. And don't just list what's on your resume. Turn each experience into an interesting, funny and personal story. Something that's powerful - leave the interviewer with memorable stories!

## 2) Case:

Numerical skills: Your numerical skills have to be top notch. There are NO calculators. Problems will be incorporated in the case, which may require you to calculate 'total price of 16 units which sell at \$17 per unit' or 'a third of 300,000 people' etc. Rule yourself out of the race if you get ANY of these questions wrong. If you want to guarantee a job offer, try working out the math in your head. If you spend a couple of hours thinking about it and if you have a friend quiz you on it, it's not that difficult. For example, what's 16 times 17? 16 times 20 is 320. 16 times 3 is 48. Hence 16 times 17 is  $16(20 - 3) = 320 - 48 = 272$ . 30% of 300,000 is approximately 100,000. People who get these jobs have STRONG quantitative skills. There is no substitute for these skills so don't think you will get the job if the rest of your interview goes well. You HAVE to do well.

How to crack the case: Read the Vault Guide on Case Interviews, it's considered the authority on this subject. You don't need to know things like Porter's forces etc. Just figure out an approach that works for you and stick to the approach. Read through the different types of questions (for example, market sizing) and practice ALL the examples. It will help to have read common business problems and issues – it will make you think faster. If you have taken Industrial Organization / Economics of Strategy, you will be fine. I recommend two textbooks:

***Modern Industrial Organization by Carlton and Perloff – Chapters 9-11***  
***Industry Studies by Larry Duetsch – read any of the chapters***

Finally, here is the ideal flow of the case:

1) Scenario Presentation: The interviewer will give you a scenario. The scenario will present a few key facts about the company and then define the problem that the company is facing. Take notes on the key facts of the case. For example: A company produces exotic fruits in Latin America and distributes them in Europe. The company wants to reduce costs by 5% and it has hired you to make suggestions. (The fact scenario will generally be much longer and may include irrelevant facts.)

2) Scenario Summary: Once the interviewer has posed the question of the case, you must summarize the problem to your interviewer.

3) Verify Objectives: Repeat the main objective to your interviewer to ensure that you understand all the purposes at hand. For example: One objective is to reduce costs by 5%. Are there any other objectives I should know about? The company might be looking to increase profits as well (in which case you would want to discuss revenue as well).

4) Clarify: Interviewers will present you with only part of the relevant information: it is up to you to ask the right questions. Doing so provides you with additional information with which to analyze the question and demonstrates that you can ask the right questions in pressure situations (as you will have to do as a consultant).

5) Analysis Framework: Once you have summarized the problem, ask the interviewer if you may have a couple of minutes to think about the minutes. Take 1-2 minutes to think about how you will analyze the case. What factors will you look at? Once you have a framework in mind, present the framework to the interviewer. For example: The company wants to reduce costs by 5%. I would like to start by pursuing the following avenues: 1) production costs, 2) labor costs, 3) distribution costs and 4) labor costs.

6) Analysis: Think aloud. Have a conversation with the interviewer. Make a hypothesis about a possible avenue to pursue and verify with the interviewer if the hypothesis is correct. If yes, pursue it; if not move on to the next hypothesis. Take notes about everything. Cases are generally of two types:

- a) Cost Reduction: At this point, I have the Income Statement and a Balance Sheet in the back of my head. It helps me think of possible costs (production (fixed and variable), marketing, distribution). Analyze each cost and identify possible problems. Most cases have a numerical problem hidden in this section. Once you arrive at the correct factor, the interviewer will give you the numerical problem. Though the math is simple multiplication and percentages, you need to be quick with the calculations. Practice! Sometimes the problem may not be numerical, but conceptual (labor unions increasing wages and therefore costs). The case may require to “increase profitability” instead of “reducing costs.” One way of increasing profitability by 5%, of course, is to reduce costs by 5%. If that’s not the case, the solution may be to increase revenues.
- b) Revenue Expansion: At this point, demand and supply curves are in the back of my head. The earlier books I mentioned are suddenly very important because you are discussing business strategy. Possible answers could be increasing market share, increasing market size (attracting new consumers) etc. Ask questions such as: What is the market size? Are there comparable competitive products/services? If yes, how many competitors? What is their market share? If no, how different is the product/service? Are there barriers to entry (capital requirements, distribution channels, technology / patents, government policy)? What is the threat of substitute products / services? What are the implications of the Internet revolution? Try to ask as many of these questions as possible so that the interviewer knows that you know what questions to ask.
- c) Other: There can be many other types of cases. Read the Vault Guide and learn to think on your feet.

7) Case Summary: Once you have taken up your time, the interviewer **often** asks you to summarize the case. Start by stating the problem and then detailing each avenue you explored and what conclusion you reached. Conclude with the solution you reached.

A Management Consulting job is about creative analysis and presentation. Do your best to keep the case fun and engaging; in addition to assessing the aforementioned skills, the interviewer is asking him or herself whether you’re someone they’d like to sit next to on a 6 hour flight. The more that you seem to find the case fun and challenging (and the more that you actually do!), the better impression you will make.

Other types of consulting interviews also have cases. Such cases, however, are generally conceptual. You need to be extremely creative in your analysis section. Reading up on the industry in the news helps put a lot of things in perspective.