Case Study Interviews Defined

Case study questions are commonly asked during interviews for consulting firms. Case study interviews may also be used in other industries including marketing, research, consumer product management, and investment banking. A case study question is a hypothetical business problem. The candidate is expected to: 1) address the problem, 2) identify factors causing the problem, and 3) propose a solution. Employers are not necessarily looking for specific knowledge or the “right answer.” Instead, they are interested in learning whether or not a candidate can analyze an ambiguous problem, think logically under pressure, and present a convincing solution.

Why Employers Use Case Study Interviews

Case study interviews are designed to help interviewers understand how a candidate would respond in a certain situation. Employers use the case interview to determine if a candidate is able to handle the demands of the position.

- Specifically, interviewers use case study questions to assess candidates in the following areas:
  - Analytical and problem-solving skills
  - Results orientation
  - Listening skills
  - Communication and presentation skills
  - Personal attributes (enthusiasm, creativity, intelligence, etc.)
  - Business acumen
  - Fit with company culture

How to Prepare for a Case Study Interview

- Practice answering case interview questions (see reverse side for sample questions and tips for creating a strong answer).
- Conduct a mock interview with a Career Counselor and practice with friends.
- Connect with alumni in the company of interest prior to your interview to gain additional insight. Every company conducts case interviews a bit differently.
- If interviewing with a consulting company, visit their website prior to the interview. Many consulting companies explain their interview process, provide sample questions, and indicate the qualities they look for in an interview on their websites.
Types of Case Study Questions

There are several types of case study questions. Here are 5 common formats:

**Market Sizing:** Questions that examine the size of a problem, a product’s potential market, or the number of units used in a year.
*Example:* How many bicycles are purchased each year in Japan?

**Business Operations:** Questions that focus on the daily operations of a business. Issues may include finance, human resources, IT infrastructure, and others.
*Example:* A hotel chain is only filling 70% of its rooms. Why?

**Business Strategy:** Questions relating to high-level future business strategies. Problems may include growth models, competitor analysis, and other issues.
*Example:* Your client says it wants to begin exporting products to India. Should it?

**Brainteaser:** Questions or puzzles that challenge a candidate’s creative thinking skills.
*Example:* How can you tell if the light inside the refrigerator is on or off?

**Other:** Questions created from a candidate’s resume, current events, or situations the interviewer has faced.
*Example:* Your resume says you were a marketing intern at XYZ Company. How would you apply what you learned in this experience to a company that has declining sales?

Answering Case Study Questions

There are certain strategies that can help you effectively answer case study interview questions. In addition, candidates are strongly encouraged to practice responses to case study questions. Consider the following steps as you format your response to case study interview questions:

1. **Clarify the question:** Listen carefully to the question and ask follow-up questions if needed.
2. **Organize your response:** Identify key issues and organize a clear response.
3. **Develop a framework:** Approach the problem first in terms of breadth, then depth.
4. **Analyze issues and test solutions:** Discuss potential findings, present alternatives and a hypothesis. Consider using a matrix or flow chart here if it is helpful.
5. **Summarize the case:** Present concluding thoughts and recommendations.

Case Interview Tips

- **Question:** Ask questions to clarify an ambiguous case. It is alright to ask for guidance.
- **Interact:** Case interviews are a conversation between you and the interviewer.
- **Be Concise:** Remain focused on the question.
- **Explain:** Explain your thought process to the interviewer as you analyze the case.
- **Substantiate:** Provide logic and reasoning for your answers and what facts led you to a conclusion.