



# Case Interviews

## What is a Case Interview?

A case interview is typical for consulting and analytical positions and tests your analytical and problem solving skills. Questions are usually hypothetical situations and can be ambiguous in nature. It is up to the candidate to retrieve the pertinent information from the question, to probe the interviewer for more details and to make appropriate assumptions. The purpose of the question is to test the applicant's ability to logically, systematically and persuasively address the issues of the case and develop a solution.

Case interviews are not something you can/should "wing". They take a lot of time and preparation to master. There are a variety of different books and resources available to help candidates prepare. Many review the different types of questions they may get asked as well as some of the frameworks they may want to be familiar with (e.g., Porter's 5 Forces, the 5 C's, the 4 P's).

## Types of Case Questions

**Brain Teaser**—Tests your creativity and ability to think out of the box. *Sample Question: How many streetlights are in NYC?*

**Market Sizing**—Tests your quantitative skills and ingenuity. *Sample Question: What is the market for laptops likely to be in 10 years?*

**Business Operations**—Tests your basic business knowledge and ability to identify main issues. *Sample Question: A bank discovers that its customer turnover is 25% higher than its competitors. Why?*

**Business Strategy**—Tests your analytical ability and strategic thinking. *Sample Question: A sock manufacturer wants to start exporting to Germany; should it?*

## A Guide to Answering Any Case Question

Even if you are completely stumped by a question, this guide will give you a great starting point with which to frame your answer.

**Summarize the Question**— This is a simple first step, but one that shows the interviewer you listened to the question. It allows you to hear the information again, and prevents you from answering the wrong question.

**Verify the Objectives**—Even if they seem obvious, there may be underlying objectives. Ask, "Are there any other objectives besides \_\_\_\_ I should know about?"

**Ask Clarifying Questions**—This shows the interviewer you feel comfortable asking questions, while turning the case into a conversation.

Depending on the case, you might ask questions about:

- The company (public/private?)
- The industry/life cycle
- Competition (major players/market share)
- Entry/exit barriers
- Financial statements
- Management team

**Lay Out Your Structure**—Take a moment to think about the structure and organization of your answer. Write it down! Consultants love visuals – whether it be decision trees, charts, or simple lists. Be familiar with common frameworks (e.g., Porters 5 forces, The 3 C's, The 4 P's, etc.)

## How to Prepare

**Advising Appointment**—Meet with a CALS career services staff member to discuss case interviewing and how to prepare. Use our [online scheduling tool](#) to make an appointment.

**Insider Guides (Vault)**—As a Cornell student you can download a number of Vault Guides for free! You must use our special [link](#) to access these free guides. Guides include: Vault Guide to the Case Interview and Vault Career Guide to Consulting

**Books**—Both the CALS Career Library (Mann Library, 1<sup>st</sup> floor) and the Barnes Hall Career Library (103 Barnes Hall) offer a number of hard-copy reference books for you to review in your preparation. Some titles include: *Case in Point*, *Mastering the Case Interview*, and *Ace Your Case*.

**Case Prep/Consulting Webinars**—One of the many great tools on [CALS Alumni Mentors](#) platform are the myriad of career related webinars offered. Included are many case prep and consulting related offerings: *Mastering the Case Interview*; *How to Ace the Case Interview*; *The*

#1 Case Interview Mistake; Confessions of a Deloitte Consultant; Working in Consulting, etc.

**Interactive/Informational Websites**—There are a number of websites you can use to gain information on how to navigate or practice case interviews. Make sure to check out employer career websites, as many will offer sample cases. Cornell also offers you access to [CQ Interactive](#) or use [Consulting Case 101](#), both offer online, interactive drills and cases. You may also want to take a look at [caseinterview.com](#), which is an informational/video style case prep site created by a former McKinsey employee.

The following company websites may be helpful:

- The Boston Consulting Group – [www.bcg.com/join\\_bcg/practice\\_cases/default.aspx](http://www.bcg.com/join_bcg/practice_cases/default.aspx)
- Bain & Company - [www.joinbain.com/apply-to-bain/interview-preparation/default.asp](http://www.joinbain.com/apply-to-bain/interview-preparation/default.asp)
- McKinsey & Company - [www.mckinsey.com/Careers/Apply/Interview\\_tips](http://www.mckinsey.com/Careers/Apply/Interview_tips)
- Oliver Wyman - [www.oliverwyman.com/careers/19.htm](http://www.oliverwyman.com/careers/19.htm)

**Workshops** – Each year career offices across campus will offer workshops presented by staff, employers and/or alumni focused on case interviewing. Be sure to look at our [career workshop schedule](#) to see when they are offered.

**Student Organizations** – Cornell offers a number of student [organizations](#) that focus on the consulting field. Some include, but are not limited to: Big Red Consulting; Cornell CASE; Cornell Consulting Club; Cornell Consulting Group; and Cornell Strategic Consulting.

**Statistics\*** – There are certain statistics that one should be familiar with to help you solve cases. You can find many of these via U.S. Census Bureau & Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Population of the World
- Population of the U.S.
- Number of Households in the U.S.
- Number of Adults in the U.S.
- U.S. Population Under 18
- Number of Cars per Household
- Minimum Wage
- Average Household Size
- Average Family Size

### Some General Tips

**Understand the Question**—Demonstrate strong listening skills by actively listening to the question and taking notes. Verbally summarize the question and verify the objective.

**Think Logically**—Determine what additional information you need and what key issues, or high-impact areas, need to be addressed. Show good business and common sense.

**Ask Questions**—Ask thoughtful/clarifying questions to probe for additional information needed to analyze the problem, develop assumptions and determine a solution(s). The questions asked should show “Big-picture” thinking. Start with basic questions to gain information about the company, industry, competition, external market, etc. As you progress switch from open-ended questions to close-ended questions. Asking too many open-ended questions may appear as if you are soliciting the answer from the interviewer. When asking questions, imagine the interviewer is your client.

**Analyze the Information & Establish a Hypotheses**—Demonstrate your business intuition and problem solving skills by showing in-depth analysis of the case when presenting your solution(s). Substantiate your response and provide logical back up for answers. Be sure to explain what case facts led to a conclusion. If your final answer seems flawed, (e.g., number too high) don’t be afraid to go back and reevaluate it.

**Organize and Structure Your Response**—Organize a response and let the interviewer in on your plan. Use frameworks when necessary and keep in mind that the focus is as much on your approach as your solution. Don’t rush through your answer and use your time wisely.

**Have a Conversation**—Talk through your answer and explain your thought process. Ask questions and lure the interviewer into a conversation with you. Ask the interviewer if you are on track with your assumptions. The interviewer may offer additional information and/or guide you.

**Be Concise**—If asked for the top 2 issues, confine your response to 2 items. Stay focused on your response and don’t digress or go off on tangents.

**Be Innovative**—Brainstorm solutions that are innovative and creative. Don’t be afraid to offer alternatives.

**Be Adaptable**.—Show your ability to tailor your response to changing situations. Also, try and rebound from mistakes. Don’t let them shut you down.

**Be Enthusiastic**—If you are excited about the job and industry you should be excited about tackling a case question. Approach the question with gusto and enthusiasm.

**Summarize**—Make a summary or conclusion at the end.

updated: 4/2016