At a Glance: Consulting Case Interviews

What is a case interview?
A case interview is the analysis of a business question. Unlike most other interview questions, it is an interactive process. Your interviewer will present you with a business problem and ask for your opinion. Your job is to ask the interviewer logical questions that enable you to make detailed recommendations. In this context, the interviewer is attempting to assess your ability to synthesize the elements of the problem into a coherent and cohesive solution.

What do case interviews evaluate?

**How you approach a problem**
- Structured, logical thinking
- Organization and detail orientation
- Comfort with numbers*

* Math major not required!

**How you engage with people**
- Ease of communication
- Confidence and poise
- Enthusiasm for problem-solving

**What you know about business**
- Business intuition
- A few, fundamental business concepts and frameworks*

*see resources below

What happens during a case interview?

During the interview, you will likely be asked to answer at least one of three types of questions…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Sample Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brain Teaser</td>
<td>Why are manhole covers round?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Sizing</td>
<td>How many dry-cleaners are there in NYC?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Case</td>
<td>Your client is one of the leading manufacturers of bathroom taps and fixtures. Recently it has noticed a decline in profits. Why are the profits declining? What can the client do?</td>
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Interview Check-List

**Now or at least 3 weeks before interviewing…**
- Read the resources below

**2 weeks before interviewing…**
- Practice cases with friends

**The day before interviewing…**
- Get sleep

**On the interview-day**
- Bring paper and pens

How should I approach the case interview? Use RASCALS

1. **REPEAT**
   - Listen to the question

2. **ASK**
   - Ask as many clarifying questions as you can about the problem
   - Use this time to show enthusiasm. If the product you are discussing is tires, think about tires. Get interested in tires. Show this through your questions

3. **STOP**
   - Ask your interviewer “Do you mind if I take 30 seconds to step back and collect my thoughts?”
   - PAUSE
   - BE SILENT
   - THINK
   - (It may feel awkward, but your interviewer will see this as a sign of maturity and confidence)

4. **CONSTRUCT**
   - Structure your response, write it down
   - Draw pictures
   - Create charts
   - Provide organization
   - Think of each point you want to make as the topic sentence in a paragraph – give an overview of what you will say, and then say it

5. **ANSWER**
   - Use headlines to describe what you are thinking (e.g., talk in topic sentences)
   - Converse with the interviewer about the approach you have devised
   - Let your answer feel like a conversation – as if you are making a recommendation to a client

6. **LOOSEN UP**
   - RELAX
   - Smile
   - Show confidence in your answer
   - Show enthusiasm in the topic
   - Show interest in asking for feedback from the interviewer on your approach

7. **SUMMARIZE**
   - Articulate your conclusion
   - Reiterate your main points
   - Highlight the most important parts of the conversation (so the interviewer remembers!)

What else can I read?

**Case in Point by by Marc P. Cosentino**

**Vault Case Interviews Practice Guides.** There are two guides. Access through CCE website: [http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/vault](http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/vault)

**WetFeet Ace Your Case Guides.** There are five guides. Access through CCE website: [http://crs.wetfeet.com/schools/columbiaug/Insider-Guides.aspx](http://crs.wetfeet.com/schools/columbiaug/Insider-Guides.aspx)