

Case Interview Cheat Sheet

Use this cheat sheet to ace your next case interview.

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If you're applying for a job at a consulting firm, chances are you'll be confronted at least once with the dreaded case interview. In it, you'll be asked to analyze a hypothetical business problem and come up with solutions. Case interview questions are designed to test your ability to think analytically under stress, with incomplete information. While case interviews rarely have just one right answer, there is a right way to approach them.

First, if you don't already have them, get WetFeet.com's best-selling guides to case interviewing, *Ace Your Case* and *15 Questions*. Practice the sample questions with friends. While you're thinking through the problems, concentrate on the three Ps: Presentation, Poise, and Persuasiveness.

Tips to help you crack the case every time:

Listen carefully to the material presented. Take notes if you want to, and be sure to ask questions if you are unsure about details.

Take your time. You're not expected to have a brilliant solution to a complex problem on the tip of your tongue. If you need a minute or two to collect your thoughts and work through your answer, say so.

Offer a general statement or framework up front to serve as an outline for your answer. Although the framework can be something as elaborate as a 3C (customer, company, competition) model, it need not be anything more than something like: "If you're asking about declining profits, then I'd want to check into factors affecting cost, and factors affecting revenues. On the cost side..." As you proceed with your answer, draw on the outline of your framework.

Home in on key issues. Many interviewers will be checking to see if you operate by the 80-20 rule, which means you should first address the broader issues that will get you 80 percent of the way to a good solution.

Orient your answer toward action. Theory is good for the classroom, but it won't fly in a boardroom. Clients want to know what steps they can take to solve a problem, not pie-in-the-sky philosophy.

Think out loud. The interviewer is looking as much for evidence of a logical thought process as for a brilliant conclusion to the case problem.

Be conscious of resources. A lot of consulting work involves figuring out how you are going to collect the information you need to answer a question—without costing the client a fortune. If it relates to the problem, ask your interviewer about the budget, capital, and other resources that the client can allocate to the solution.

Above all, have fun with the case! Consulting is really like a steady succession of case interview questions. To do well, you need to enjoy the intellectual challenge of analyzing tough problems and coming up with reasonable solutions.