

Consulting Interview Tips

OVERVIEW

- What recruiters are trying to assess
- General interview questions
- Case interview questions
- How recruiters might modify the screening process

WHAT RECRUITERS ARE TRYING TO ASSESS

- The recruiting process is a series of discrete events
 - Resume filter
 - First round/ short case + fit
 - Second round/ series of cases
 - Final round/ more cases and more in-depth fit
- General and case interviews screen for skills and intangible characteristics
 - Skills

Skill	What the Interviewer Wants to Assess
Consulting knowledge/ experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the candidate's qualifications translate to firm's career trajectory?
Management experience/ level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the candidate part of a team, manager of a work stream, manager of a project, manager of multiple projects, involved in marketing/ proposing engagements • At what management level does the candidate interact with the client
Industry knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the candidate understand what drives a company's bottom line • Does the candidate understand a company's competitive situation/ pressures
Functional/ technical expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the candidate actually do on projects • What subjects comprise the candidate's technical knowledge
Logic/ Ability to structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the candidate able to break down a large issue into manageable steps
Familiarity with business strategy/ economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the candidate think of the economic rationale behind business decisions

➤ Intangible Characteristics

Intangible Characteristic	What the Interviewer Wants to Assess
Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will I feel comfortable putting this candidate in front of senior management of a Fortune 500 company
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the candidate articulate and eloquent • Does the candidate explain things succinctly or does he/ she ramble • Is the candidate engaging when he/she speaks
Leadership and achievement orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the candidate engaging, excited about his/her work • Has the candidate shown a take-charge attitude towards his/her career • Does the candidate show evidence of pushing his/ her limits

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Ability to handle pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the candidate get nervous when challenged or questioned• Is the candidate comfortable talking about a wide range of issues
Fit to consulting culture/ lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the candidate comfortable with rigorous travel, volatile schedules, long hours, high-pressure situations• Is the candidate curious, inquisitive, an independent thinker, self-motivated
Motivation for consulting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the candidate's long-term career plan and how does consulting fit in

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS CAN BE BROAD-BASED...

- Walk me through your resume. Describe the key accomplishments on your resume and explain the choices that you made
 - Consulting knowledge/ experience
 - Management experience/ level
 - Industry knowledge
 - Functional/ technical expertise
 - Logic/ Ability to structure
 - Personality
 - Communication skills
 - Leadership and achievement orientation
 - Motivation for consulting
- Describe a recent/ your favorite engagement. What were the concerns of the client, what were the deliverables? What was your role in particular?
 - Consulting knowledge/ experience.
 - Management experience/ level.
 - Industry knowledge.
 - Functional/ technical expertise.
 - Logic/ Ability to structure.
 - Familiarity with business strategy/ economics.
 - Communication skills.
- Describe a situation when the client was not happy with the findings. How did you respond?
 - Consulting knowledge/ experience.
 - Management experience/ level.
 - Personality.
 - Communication skills.
 - Leadership and achievement orientation.
 - Ability to handle pressure.
 - Fit to consulting culture/ lifestyle.

...OR DESIGNED TO TEST FOR SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

- Consulting knowledge/ experience
 - With what other firms are you interviewing. How will you make your decision?
 - What is the consulting market going to look like in five years?
- Management experience
 - Describe the project where you felt like you took on the most responsibility.
 - What do you hope to learn in your next position.
- Industry knowledge
 - What are the key issues facing [candidate's industry]?
 - Engage candidate in a debate. Examples: discuss recent article in the Wall Street Journal.
- Functional/ technical expertise
 - Describe a quantitative project.
 - Describe a market research project.
 - For technology candidates, describe experience in platforms, applications, etc.

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- Business strategy/ economics
 - Dissect one project on resume for economics and business implications.

CASE INTERVIEWS ARE THREE-FOLD

- Conundrum cases are questions with typically one short elegant solution and other very tedious, nearly impossible to calculate solutions.
 - Tests lateral thinking and ability to handle pressure.
 - Rarely used.
 - Example: You have one barrel of white wine, one barrel of red wine, and one ladle. How many ladle scoops do you need from one barrel to the other until you have a perfect rose?
- Guesstimation cases are seemingly very broad and require a numerical answer.
 - Tests structuring ability, basic mathematical skills and knowledge of basic facts.
 - Used primarily during first rounds, when a short case is needed, or within the context of a longer case.
 - Example: How many Timberland hiking boots will be sold to Generation Xers in the US in the next quarter?
- Progressives are collections of small pieces of analysis around a single topic or theme that usually drive towards a business decision or insight.
 - Tests full range of analytical skills by asking different types of questions.
 - Example: The founder and CEO of a shoe company is concerned about flat revenues and wants you to put together a proposal on how to advise her. What issues would you like to investigate and what analyses would you expect to perform?

HOW RECRUITERS MIGHT MODIFY THE SCREENING PROCESS

- Candidate's background
 - If candidate has extensive experience in a particular industry, a case about that industry will likely be tougher or the candidate will be held to a higher standard. Alternatively, the interviewer might give a case in a very different industry to test breadth.
 - If candidate is not an MBA, the interviewer might not give a very detailed business case. However, if you have a dual MBA/ SIPA or a CFA or several hard-core business courses, expect to be treated as an MBA.
- Candidate's functional expertise
 - If candidate has operations background, then case might revolve around cost-restructuring or reengineering. Example: A manufacturer of construction equipment is profitable one quarter, but unprofitable the next, then profitable again, then unprofitable. What's going on?
 - If candidate has technology background, then case might revolve around technology. Example: Two companies have recently merged. You will be addressing the boards of these companies regarding their upcoming IT integration strategy and have the opportunity to interview the CEO's of each company involved. What information would you ask to prepare for the meeting and what will you likely discuss?