



Interviewing Guide

Essential resources for long-term career planning

Interviewing

Congratulations! You have been selected for an interview. At this point, you have made the "first cut." The interview is your opportunity to sell yourself - not only as the ideal candidate with the best qualifications, but as the candidate who is the best fit for the position and the company.

Interviewers seek candidates who can articulate their qualifications well and can fulfill the position requirements. They may ask technical questions related to your past performance and your knowledge of the position, business and/or industry.

To Prepare

Research the organization and industry: Learn everything you can about the company, its culture, history and current state. What is going on in the industry? How is the company situated in comparison to competition? Research the job: Analyze the job description and other information on the position. How do your skills and experience make you the ideal candidate?

Research yourself: What are your skills, interests and values? What do you need in a job to do your best? What are you happiest doing? What salary do you require? Be able to clearly explain what you want to do, how you meet an employer's needs, and why you are the best candidate for the specific position.

Plan responses to questions: See the list below and do further research online. How would you answer these questions? Meet with a career counselor for a mock interview. Draft a list of possible questions you can ask: Avoid benefit and salary questions. Ask questions you really want to know the answers to that shed light on the job. Remember, you are interviewing them as well to ensure that you find the right fit for you.

Prepare your materials: Bring copies of your resume, references (in case you are asked), and a notepad (with your questions) and pen in a professional portfolio. You will also need directions to the interview, the phone number of the company (in case you are late for any reason), and the name of the person or people with whom you will meet. Be ready with interview-appropriate clothes, and a polished appearance.

Be on time: Arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the interview to collect yourself. You would be surprised how that will help rather than rushing in at the last minute. If you are at the company location, use the time to observe the environment. Is this a place where you would like to work?

Practice, practice, practice: Role play with a friend or make arrangements for a mock interview.

During the Interview: General Guidelines

First impressions often determine your success. Make the best possible first impression through your appearance, behavior and timeliness. You have been asked for an interview because you possess the basic qualifications for the job, such as education and work experience. During the interview, employers will look for several qualities in the candidates such as honesty, credibility, intelligence, competence, enthusiasm, spontaneity, friendliness, and likeability. Much of the message communicating these qualities will be conveyed

through your nonverbal behavior. You can communicate these messages by engaging in several nonverbal behaviors such as:

- Demonstrate your self-confidence with a firm handshake.
- Make eye contact frequently, but don't overdo it. You will be perceived as more trustworthy if you look at the interviewer as you ask and answer questions. A direct, though moderate, eye gaze conveys interest as well as trustworthiness.
- Sit with a slight forward lean toward the interviewer. If not overdone, it communicates your interest in what the interviewer is saying.
- Try to convey interest and enthusiasm through your vocal inflections. Your tone of voice can say a lot about you and how interested you are in the interviewer and organization.
- Smiling will also help reinforce your positive image. You should smile enough to convey your positive attitude.
- Sit up straight. Good posture communicates confidence and professionalism.

Other Tips

- Your goal should be to make your interviewer comfortable.
- Make a favorable impression on everyone you meet.
- Present yourself in a straightforward, honest manner. If you do not know the answer, do not try to fake it.
- If you are unclear about a question, do not hesitate to ask for details.
- Ask to meet with other people in the organization, especially those with whom you would be working.
- Investment banking and most consulting interviews have the reputation for being the most stressful. Be prepared for interviewers to test you to see how well you handle stressful situations.

Possible Problem Areas

During the course of an interview, you may be asked difficult questions. Some of these include:

- "Tell me about yourself..." Briefly detail what qualities or skills you possess that match the needs of the job and, most importantly, how you have demonstrated these abilities in the past.
- Issues such as unemployment, prior terminations, or low GPA: Everyone has weaknesses. Be honest and present your case in as positive a manner as possible. Whatever you do, do not make excuses or blame others for your prior misfortunes or failures.
- Salary issues: Salaries are often established by companies before the interview process begins. Be sure you have done your homework and have solid information about your market value. As a negotiation point, however, you do not want to bring up salary first unless absolutely necessary.
- Illegal questions: Employers may only ask questions that are directly related to the job requirements. If you find yourself in a situation where an employer asks an illegal question, consider the following:
 1. If you answer the question be mindful that any information that you provide during an interview may be taken into consideration in the selection process. Be sure that you are comfortable with sharing certain personal information with employers.
 2. If you refrain from answering the question (which is within your rights) do so in a polite and respectful manner. Depending upon the context and how the message is received, you could risk alienating or offending the interviewer.

3. What is the interviewer's underlying concern or question? You could answer the question in such a way that assures him or her that your personal situation would not interfere with requirements of the job. For example, "What country are you from?" The employer's real concern could be related to work authorization. Therefore rather than responding to the actual question, provide the information that you are authorized to work in the U.S.

Behavioral Interviewing

Many companies today rely on behavioral interviewing to identify candidates that are the best fit for the company. Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that how you behaved in the past in specific situations is a predictor of how you will behave in the future, and require that you provide examples from past experience.

It is especially important that you prepare for behavioral types of questions. Practice the actual interview by articulating your answers OUT LOUD! Identify strong examples from your background (academic, work experience, extracurricular activities, etc.) that highlight your relevant skills and allow you to present yourself as the ideal candidate for the position. Be honest.

When answering behavioral questions, it can be helpful to remember the STAR format. Address the **Situation** you faced, the **Task** you were responsible for, the **Action** you took, and, most importantly, the **Results** of your action. If you have thought ahead about the skills that you want to highlight during your interview, and have examples that demonstrate your capabilities, you will be able to come up with a positive example for any behavioral question asked.

Close the Interview

Interviewers normally will initiate the close by standing, shaking hands, and thanking you for coming to the interview. At this point it is proper to ask the interviewer about the selection plans:

- "Based on our meeting today, do you think I'm a good fit for the position?" (This gives you a chance to address any issues or concerns they may have had that you weren't able to address.)
- Ask what the next steps and timelines are.
- "When do you anticipate making your final decision?"
- Tell them you want the job. If you don't, there's a good chance you won't get it.
- "May I have your business card?" Getting a business card is important. You will need it to confirm the spelling of the interviewer's name on your thank-you note and for the contact information for any follow-up calls.

After the Interview

- Send a thank-you letter within 24 hours of your meeting. This is a vital part of the interview process and one too often ignored by job seekers. Depending on the company culture, send either a well-edited email or a hand-written note (as long as you have clear handwriting).
- A separate thank-you note should be sent to each person with whom you interviewed at the company. Never send the same note to multiple individuals.
- Thank-you notes should always be personalized and customized to the person with whom you met at the company.

- Thank them for interviewing you and specify the particular position you interviewed for (often, recruiters are interviewing for many positions at once). Reference something specific about your conversation with the individual, which will cause the interviewer to recall your discussion and keep you in active consideration. If possible, try to highlight one of the accomplishments you discussed during the interview, or introduce a new one that builds on your interview discussion. This also helps to build rapport and your relationship with this individual.
- Remember that the thank-you note is often a sales letter in disguise. If you left out pertinent information during the interview, be sure to include it in the thank-you note. It gives you the opportunity to emphasize the match between your background and the employer's interests.
- Always focus on what YOU CAN DO FOR THEM. Thank-you notes should not be overly long; on an email letter the recipient should not have to scroll down to view the entire letter.
- Be sure to follow up by phone according to the time frame you indicated in your interview or in your thank-you letter. The follow-up often determines who gets the job.

Telephone Interviews

Companies subject themselves and their candidates to telephone interviews primarily for "cost reasons." By asking some key questions of candidates about their skills, career objectives and training, a company determines the value of bringing them in for a face-to-face interview. If you are being interviewed on the phone, consider the following tips:

- Be prepared: Prepare as you would for a regular interview. Have the resume and the cover letter you mailed to the company ready, as well as the information that you have collected about the company, your questions, and a pad of paper to jot down notes as needed. Make sure you are in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Do not smoke, chew gum, eat or drink.
- Be ready to talk about how you fit with the company and what interests you about this position.
- You might be at a disadvantage since the interviewer cannot see you and pick up messages from your body language; it becomes critical for you to communicate verbal enthusiasm and interest in the position and the company. Smile while you speak; it may also help if you dress up for the telephone interview, as you would for a personal interview, in order to help you feel confident and professional. Do not interrupt the interviewer!
- Enunciate. Speak a little slower than in a face-to-face interview.
- At the end of the interview, thank your interviewer for his or her time and ask about next steps. Make sure you have the interviewer's correct name and contact information.
- Soon after the interview, take notes on what you discussed, in case you are called for a personal interview.
- Send a thank-you note!

Case Interviews

The case interview is a unique and challenging process that enables consulting and investment banking firms to assess candidates' analytical and creative skills. It is also a crucial tool in helping them weed out candidates. The results of a case interview can literally help a company decide whether or not to extend an offer. Unlike behavioral interviews, case interviews are not intuitive. You simply cannot wing a case interview. You can, however, learn the different types of cases firms use, and the different frameworks for solving a case. With much practice (case interviewing is a learned skill), you can successfully handle the case interview.

When preparing for a case-style interview, keep in mind that there are three major types of cases:

- Estimation Cases
- Business Cases
- Mini Cases

Estimation Cases

In estimation cases you are asked to come up with an "educated guess" of some number, such as the classic, "How much does a Boeing 747 weigh?" While the questions may sometimes seem "off the wall," estimation is an important skill to possess in consulting work. As a consultant, you will often have to make decisions based on incomplete or unavailable data, in which case it becomes important to generate reasonable estimates.

In these types of exercises it is not important whether your assumptions are right or wrong, but to make sure that your estimates are at least reasonable based on common sense. For example, if one of the assumptions you make is about the U.S. population, do not say that you assume it is 10 million.

Estimation problems are based on logical reasoning applied to a number of known data points (your assumptions) to arrive at the desired answer. Since your logic is what is tested, lay it out clearly for the interviewer. Before you start making assumptions, tell the interviewer what your logic is going to be to figure out the answer.

Business Cases/ Mini Cases

Business cases are generally longer than mini cases (20 to 30 minutes typically) and test your business skills in addition to your logical reasoning skills. Consulting firms rely heavily on general business knowledge and expect you to be able to integrate the concepts from your courses in analyzing a business situation.

A case interview is typically an interactive process and most likely the interviewer will volunteer additional information as the interview progresses or when you ask questions. It is important to gather as much information as you need. The amount of information you receive up front can differ greatly depending on the style of the interviewer and the type of case you get. It may make sense to jot down some quick notes to help you remember the pertinent facts. Other interviewers start out with a simple two-sentence summary and expect you to probe for more information by asking thoughtful questions.

Remember, it is acceptable to ask questions. One of the most valuable skills of a successful consultant is the ability to ask the right questions. On the other hand, be careful not to spend too much time asking a lot of factual questions. It may become difficult for the interviewer to follow your logic and you may seem to be taking a shotgun approach to solving the problem. Keeping that in mind, always make sure that you think out loud so the interviewer understands how you are formulating your questions.

The critical skill being evaluated in the business case interview is whether you can solve a business problem in a logical and coherent fashion. It is important not to ramble and jump from one hypothesis to the next, but rather to use a logical framework to attack the problem. Think logically about a good way to approach the problem. You can take some time on this. It is no problem to be silent for a moment while you consider your approach. This makes you look thoughtful and is much better than starting to ramble and run around in circles. Some examples of frameworks and possible problems to which they apply are given below:

- **Income Statement:** A simple income statement is often a very valuable framework to use. By analyzing 5profitability through its component factors such as revenues, cost of goods sold, and operating expenses, you can quickly pinpoint the direction in which to focus your analysis.
- **Four Cs:** To analyze a company's strategy in terms of its chosen market position, you have to evaluate the different factors that will determine its success.
 - *Customers*
 - What do the customers want and need?
 - How will we satisfy those needs?
 - What is most important to them?
 - How much will they pay for it?
 - *Competitors*
 - What are your competitors doing?
 - What are their strengths and weaknesses?
 - How are they meeting the customers' demands?
 - What is their cost structure?
 - *Capacity*
 - What is your company's capacity in terms of financials?
 - organization?
 - production?
 - marketing?
 - What are your strengths and weaknesses?
 - *Costs*
 - What is your cost structure?
 - How is overhead applied?
- **SWOT Analysis:**
 - Strengths: Used to analyze the capabilities of the company.
 - Weaknesses: Used to analyze the capabilities of the company.
 - Opportunities: Used to evaluate the company's environment.
 - Threats: Used to evaluate the company's environment.
- **Four P's:** Useful for marketing-related cases such as new product introductions, new market developments, and market share increases. Remember that the four P's are the implementation of a strategy that first depends on the selection of a target customer segment and a product positioning: Product, Price, Place, Promotion.
- **Seven S Framework:** Useful in determining sources of competitive advantage for a company: Structure, Strategy, Skills, Staff, Style, Systems, Shared Values.
- **Porter's Five Forces Framework:** Used to evaluate the attractiveness of an industry in terms of the ability to earn high returns: Barriers to Entry, Bargaining Power of Buyers, Bargaining Power of Suppliers, Availability of Substitute Products, and Level of Competition Among Firms.

Applying the Framework

When you have selected a framework to build your case on, you need to apply it. Lay out the framework for the interviewer and start analyzing it branch by branch. Listen carefully to any clues the interviewer may give you. If you go down the wrong path (or a different path from what the interviewer intended), you may be redirected by comments from the interviewer. If you learn from the comments that the type of framework you have chosen does not fit the problem, do not be afraid to discard it and use another one.

As in any interview, it is important to be yourself and be relaxed when analyzing the problem. When you get stuck, you can summarize what you have found out up to that point. That helps the interviewer trace your line of thought and buys you some time to think about where to go next. Always think out loud so the interviewer understands your train of thought and state your assumptions. When you need a piece of factual information to help you along with your analysis, ask. The interviewer will realize its relevance if he or she is able to follow your logic and should be willing to volunteer the information.

Remember to:

- Gather information: Listen carefully and jot down notes as needed
- Clarify anything you do not understand: Ask questions
- Organize your analysis: Explain your thought process out loud so that the interviewer can understand the logic behind your reasoning
- Address the problem: Do not hesitate to use diagrams or flow charts to structure your thoughts; continue to work out-loud; make assumptions but explain your reasoning; refer back to the facts; use simple, clear language
- Close the case: Summarize your analysis, be persuasive and clear, reach a conclusion or share possible solutions and next steps

Mini Cases

Mini cases are typically short and focus on a single problem. Often, the goal is to come to a solution rather than uncover the underlying causes of a problem. To solve these problems, it is recommended that you first define what the characteristics of the desired outcome would be. Then, brainstorm the ways that the company could deal with its problem; use this as an opportunity to be creative. Finally, tackle each idea in turn, drawing out the possible issues involved and setting them against the criteria for the desired outcome (i.e., to avoid high expenditures). After evaluating each of the ideas you have generated, choose a solution from among those that meet all of the desired criteria.

Preparing for the Interview

There is only one good way to prepare for a case interview, and that is PRACTICE! Use the resources available to you such as mock interviews, interview workshops, and, most of all, your classmates. Get together with some of your friends interested in consulting and give each other cases. You may even want to tape your interviews on a camcorder so you can watch your body language and your reactions to the interviewer's comments and questions. It is easy to make up some of your own cases. Almost everyone can use a company they have worked for or maybe a company that a friend has worked for as the basis for a business case. Another great source of practice material is the *Wall Street Journal*. Just read an article about a company and use it as a case. You can simply make up some of the facts to fill in the picture.

Several consulting firms organize case interviewing workshops. You can attend these or watch the videotapes if they are available. When interviewing with a firm, try to keep in mind the type of work that they do. Most likely, the interview cases will reflect the particular company's area of expertise. Talk to students or alumni who have interviewed with the firm before and ask what type of questions they were asked.

Typical Interview Questions

Education

- Why did you choose Bates College?
- Why did you choose to major in _____? To concentrate in _____?
- What is your grade point average?
- What subjects do you enjoy the most? The least? Why?
- What leadership positions have you held?
- Have you done the best you could in school? If not, why not?

Work Experience

- What were your major achievements in each of your past jobs?
- What functions did you/do you enjoy doing the most?
- What did you/do you like about your boss? Dislike?
- Which job did you enjoy the most? Why? Which job did you enjoy the least? Why?

Career Goals

- Why do you want to join our organization?
- Specifically, what attracts you to this industry?
- Why do you think you are qualified for this position?
- Why should we hire you?
- What do you want to be doing five years from now?
- If you were free to choose your job and employer where would you go?
- What other types of jobs are you considering? Companies?
- When will you be ready to begin work?
- How do you feel about relocating, traveling, working over-time and spending weekends in the office?

Personality and Other Concerns

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your major weaknesses? Your major strengths?
- What causes you to lose your temper?
- What do you do in your spare time? Any hobbies?
- What types of books do you read?
- How well do you work under pressure? In meeting deadlines?
- What kind of supervisor do you work best for? Provide examples.
- What types of people do you prefer working with?
- How (creative, analytical, tactful, etc.) are you?
- If you could change your life, what would you do differently?

Technical and Professional Knowledge (Questions relate to level of understanding and ability to apply it)

- Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.
- Give an example of how you applied knowledge from previous coursework to a project in another class.

Teamwork (Questions relate to ability to work with others - peers, other units, senior management - to accomplish organizational goals)

- Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?

- Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your professor's or supervisor's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
- Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.

Analysis

- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example(s) of how you have done this.
- Describe a situation in which you had to collect information by asking many questions of several people.
- In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What was the nature of the discipline? What steps did you take? How did that make you feel? How did you prepare yourself?
- Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle the situation? How did that make you feel?
- What was the most complex assignment you have had? What was your role?

Adaptability

- How was your transition from high school to college? Did you face any particular problems?
- Tell of some situations in which you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?

Work Standards

- Describe a time when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
- What are your standards of success in school? What have you done to meet those standards?

Initiative

- Describe a project or idea that was implemented or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
- Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

Planning and Organizing

- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.
- Describe a time in school when you had many projects or assignments due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?

Communication

- Tell about a time when your active listening skills really paid off for you - maybe a time when other people missed the key idea being expressed.
- What has been your experience in giving presentations to small or large groups? What has been your most successful experience in speech making?

Customer Service Orientation

- Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle. Be specific and tell what you did and what the outcome was.

Sensitivity

- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
- Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?

Prepare for Objections and Negatives

The following are questions that interviewers may not pose, but do consider. It is important that you relay your interest in the position and the company with all of your answers so that these questions are answered in a positive manner, without needing to be verbalized.

- Why should I hire you?
- What do you really want?
- What can you really do for me?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What problems will I have with you?

Questions You May Ask an Interviewer

Interviewers expect candidates to ask intelligent questions concerning the organization and the nature of the work. You should indicate your interest in the company by asking questions. When developing your questions, be sure the answers cannot be found with a little research or online/website. Questions may arise throughout the course of the interview. If there is time at the end, don't bombard the interviewer with questions. Instead, choose 3-5 questions that are extremely important to you. At least one question should be about the business (see **The Company**, next page). Bring a list of questions with you and scan the page when asked for questions to ensure that you do not ask a question that was answered during the course of the interview.

The Position

- Will I work independently or with a team?
- Will I be closely supervised or work on my own?
- Who will I report to? Who will evaluate my work?
- How will my work be evaluated and how often?
- If I meet my goals and objectives and show strong performance, what career path can I expect?
- How will I be trained?
- At the end of my training program, will I have any input as to where I am placed?
- How many of last year's graduates are still in the training program?
- What are the reasons some people choose to leave this program or position?
- What opportunities are there to transfer into other departments within the company?
- What are your short-term and long-term expectations of me?

The Company

- How would you describe the company's corporate culture?
- Where do you see the company going in five years?
- How is the company managed? What is the corporate structure?
- Does the company have a proven track record of promotion from within?
- Beyond the training programs in your brochure, what additional development programs do you offer?
- If I want to further my education, does your company offer tuition benefits?
- Are there recent or anticipated changes in the structure of the corporation - mergers, spin-offs, cut-backs?
- What are the company's goals? How are they developed and reviewed?
- What is the company doing to stay ahead of the competition?
- What is the client mix of this company - public, corporate, individual?
- I am impressed with the growth of Division "X." To what do you attribute this growth?
- What are the market plans to continue that growth or increase market share?
- I notice Division "X" has been a financial drain on the company. What steps are being taken?

The Interviewer

- What attracted you to this company?
- How long have you been with the company? Why have you stayed?
- What skills have you found to be critical to one's success in this job?
- What personal qualities have you found to be critical to one's success in this job?
- Please describe your job within the company and to whom you report.
- What do you like most about your work? What do you like least?
- What other information can I provide to help in your decision making process?

The Interview Process

- What is the next step in your interview process?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- May I have your business card?

You may want to write your questions down and take them with you on the interview. It is fine if you can recall these questions, but you may need to refer to your list when the interviewer asks if you have any questions. In addition to the questions you have prepared ahead of time, if possible ask a few follow-up questions about specific topics of discussion during the actual interview or information session.