

# Interviewing Techniques:

Strategies and Preparation  
How to Answer Questions  
Consulting Interviews – Case Studies  
Employer Questions  
Student Feedback  
Additional Resources

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## 6 Steps to Interviewing



### 1. Prospect:

Seek out the right companies. Read their company information. Ask questions about the company from people who work there or know it well. This is also a job search step

### 2. Approach

What is the best way to contact them? Networking is almost ALWAYS the best method of learning and connecting.

What about 1<sup>st</sup> impressions? Dress appropriately

### 3. Present

Every good sales rep has a 3-minute presentation rehearsed and ready to go. It is up to YOU to be sure the employer hears what is important about you. If they don't ask the right questions, be prepared to introduce information they should know.

Know your body language. Get a Mock Interview. Practice with a coach

### 4. Overcome Objections

How do you explain your "weaknesses?" Here's a good approach:

1. Choose a skill and explain the flip side
2. Explain what you do to ensure the weakness does not interfere

Example: "Because I am a divergent/creative person (a skill) I am interested in many things. So in order to avoid getting sidetracked from my task at hand (your weakness) I keep a daily log of tasks and prioritize them (how you compensate). See my pocket calendar here – I keep a running list of tasks to accomplish."

The above is much better than just naming your weakness (like saying "I am absent-minded").

Try to anticipate potential weaknesses (lack of experience, youthfulness, etc.) and work on explaining how these will not impair your work with that organization.

### 5. Close

Have a list of 5-10 questions you want to ask the employer (see sample list at the end of this document). They always ask you if you have questions, so be ready. If you want to work for them, tell them you are very interested and are excited about the possibilities. What is the next step?

### 6. Follow –up

ALWAYS write a thank-you. Get the names and addresses of all interviewers and send them a note. Email, written, phone, carrier-pigeon, whatever.

## Interviewing Readiness Checklist

- Have you done your homework on the organization?
  - read the Web page thoroughly
  - asked others about it
  - read recent articles, publications, etc.
- Practice! Practice! Practice!...role play with a friend or call the CDC to schedule a mock interview.
- Be prepared to discuss any weakness that may hinder your candidacy. (review sample questions)
- Do you have appropriate interview clothing?
- Bring extra copies of your resume with you.
- Have you traveled to the interview location prior to your interview?
- to avoid being late, travel to your interview location the day before to be sure of the address/directions. If you're at the company location, use the time to observe the environment. Is this a place where you'd like to work?
- Do you know what you are worth?



# Winning Interviewing Techniques



## Types of Interviews

### Behavioral

The employer makes assumptions about your *future* performance based on *past behaviors* and attitudes. They will ask you for details about your activities.

These interviews require you to offer concrete, specific examples to reveal skills. We recommend that you use the "**STAR**" framework to structure your responses in a specific, concise way:

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| • What was the <b>SITUATION</b> ?  | Situation – details: what, where, when, etc. |
| • What was your <b>TASK</b> ?      | Task – the job you got done: goal/objective  |
| • What <b>ACTION</b> did you take? | Action – <b>SKILLS</b> you used              |
| • What was the <b>RESULT</b> ?     | Result – how it worked out                   |

### Example Behavioral Questions:

- Tell me about a time when you exhibited teamwork.
- Give me an example of a time you confronted a challenge and how you dealt with it.
- Why isn't your GPA higher?

(They are looking for concrete examples that validate your skills)

**Non-Example:** “Briefly explain  $E=MC^2$ .” (they are looking for content/knowledge skills, not actions you took in a specific situation)

### Behavioral Question Example:

Interviewer: What is your greatest strength?

#### *Interviewee:*

STEP 1. **Situation** “One of my greatest strengths is persistence.” (state the point up front). “*For example*, last year my group had difficulty solving an unusual equation. Two of the study group students talked it over, presented it to the group and explained the resources they used to research the problem. But they could not find a solution.

STEP 2 . **Task** So I offered to help get this solved or exhaust all resources I could find within the one week deadline.

STEP 3. **Action**. . I *initiated* (skill word) 10 phone calls to other students and campus researchers who worked in that discipline. It took me six days, two

meetings and several emails, but I finally *discovered* (skill word) a Theoretical Math postdoc who was familiar with the equation. I *negotiated* (skill word) a meeting with him twice to understand the solution so that I could *share* the procedure with my classmates. I *persisted* (original skill you claimed) with this problem until I could get an appropriate answer.

STEP 4 **Result.** As a result of my *persistence*, we were the only study group that solved the equation.”



## Sample Interview Questions

### *Behavioral*

1. What goals have you set for yourself and how are you planning to achieve them?
2. Who or what has had the greatest influence in the development of your career interest?
3. Describe a situation in which you had to persuade someone to see things your way.
4. What were the biggest challenges/problems you encountered in college? How did you handle them?
5. Tell me about a class in which you were part of a study group. What role did you play in the group meetings?
6. What was the toughest academic decision you have had to make? How did you make that decision?
7. What kind of work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
8. Describe a time when a team member came to you for help. What was the situation? How did you respond?
9. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with someone whose personality was different from yours.
10. Have you ever been in a situation where someone regarded you as a threat? Describe the situation and tell how you handled this.
11. Give me an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
12. Give me a time where you had to carry out a directive you did not agree with.

13. How are you conducting your job search and how will you go about making your decision?
14. What types of situations put you under pressure and how do you handle them?
15. Tell me about an accomplishment of which you are especially proud.
16. What is the most important lesson you have learned in or out of school?
17. Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
18. Describe a time when you saw a problem and took action to correct it rather than waiting for someone else to do so.
19. Give me examples to convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of situations, people, and environments.
20. What makes you the best person for this job?
21. Tell me about a leadership role you had in an extracurricular activity. How did you lead?
22. Tell me about your most successful presentation and what made it so.
23. Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a customer. How did you go about doing so?
24. Tell me about a meeting where you provided technical expertise. How did you ensure that everyone understood?
25. Describe a time when you took a risk that you later regretted.

# What Caltech Students And Recruiters Said About Preparing For The Interview



The Career Development Center asked Graduate Students and Postdocs what advice they would give to next year's applicants.

## Student Comments

What Graduate students and Postdocs had to say after interviewing with company recruiters.

1. Candidates need to be prepared for a "Chalk Talk".
2. Candidates need to bring slides that summarize research.
3. Read the job description very carefully and emphasize the *skills* that the company is looking for.
4. Send Thank-You email within 24 hours after the interview and follow up with a mailed one.
5. Bring handouts that summarize your research. Bring two copies, one for you to use as a visual aid and another for the interviewer to keep and take notes with. My chemistry did not overlap very well with any of the companies I interviewed with. It is, therefore, important to stress the characteristics of your research rather than the actual details. Emphasize collaborations within Caltech and any with outside researchers. Give examples where you took a leadership role in your project and Show the interviewer that you took responsibility for your project and helped guides it's course. If your research group or field that will help you stand out to the interviewer. Even if your research is directly in line with the position, do not take that for granted. Explain how your research fits into the greater context of your research group, your field, and society as a whole.
6. Bring business cards. It may seem silly or something you are not used to, but it's an extension of your initial greeting. It does not have to be anything special or expensive.
7. Be on time. I wasn't always on time. Some interviewers were running late and did not care. Others did care and I think it made a bad impression. If you are late, do not dwell on it and jump right into the interview.
8. Know with whom you are interviewing with and why they are there. What you do during the interview and how you follow-up is different depending on whether you

are talking to a potential boss or a recruiter. Recruiters are looking for solid candidates that they can pitch to their managers. Recruiters will likely know very little about science. What they do know is people and they can tell when someone is confident about what they are talking about. More importantly, the way you talk tells the recruiter whether or not you are someone who is trusted and respected by your colleagues and faculty. If the recruiter is a possible boss or a technical person, emphasize how you and your research fit into the bigger picture of your research group. Show that you are a team player but are capable of individual achievement. Demonstrate creativity and show how you added to your research.

9. Follow-up on the interview. Drop an e-mail, send a quick card, or even better send them something you talked about during your interview—a reprint, preprint, etc. Just keep it short. Don't be a robot in your correspondences; this may be the 5<sup>th</sup> time you sent a thank you note but make them feel like it's the only one you sent.
10. Ask questions that show you care about where you will work. A new hire right out of graduate school is a serious investment for the company hiring you. Likewise, where you decide to go after graduating is a serious investment in your future. Ask questions that are insightful and allow the interviewer to offer their opinion. Yes or no questions will ruin the rhythm of the interview and leave you stuck. "Which products do you think are the future for your company?", "What does your company do best and what new areas are they exploring?", "What are the mechanisms for career movement within your company?", are all questions that illicit a conversation rather than a response.
11. Look professional, act professional, be professional. Make the interviewer think you have been out of college for some time by wearing nice clothes (one suit is all you need, no one will know you have the same outfit on for every interview). If you dress casual, they think you are not interested in the company, or don't have respect for them. Part of being a professional means being courteous to the interview. Don't be afraid to justify your points or statements but at the same time don't alienate the interviewer.
12. Timing is important. Have your thesis defense date in sight if you are a graduate student. Let them know it's coming soon and there are no foreseeable problems with the date of your thesis.
13. Be able to describe your research to anyone in any length of time. Prepare one-sentence research statement, 5-minute discussions and whole interview discussions on your research. You should be able to summarize your research to a wide range of people from someone with no technical background to an expert in your field.
14. Do not let the fact that you may be interviewing for a job that has nothing to do with your research phase you. Emphasize your leadership, collaboration, teamwork, and people skills. Scientific problem solving is very transferable. Did you mentor undergraduates or newer grad students? Did you start collaborations with other

research groups in and out of Caltech? Did you work with a team on your project? If you did, how did it work out and what role did you play? If not, why not (it's not necessarily a bad thing but you have to have good reason for why you worked in a vacuum).

15. Have an answer for everything. Simple enough. You need to be able to answer questions that have nothing to do with technical details. Why is this research important? What did you learn from it and why is that important? What are your future career goals? How do you fit in with that particular company? These questions probe your personal traits and whether you understand how you fit into the big picture. It would be better if you could answer these questions in your interview without even being asked. For example, while talking about your research you could say I discovered that the catalyst had the best selectivity and reactivity. This was important because up until now, the next best catalyst was an order of magnitude less effective. This is the type of catalyst that you would need to produce the next generation of polymers with high strength to weight ratios. In telling about your research you answered what you learned, why it was important, and how it fits within the bigger picture of catalysis.
16. If the interview is a regular season game, the second, on-site interview is the playoffs. You've got to step up your game and get ready to get technical. Some on-sites are "get to know you" interviews. They already have an idea that you would be a good fit and want to make sure. More often though, you've got your foot in the door and this is your opportunity to keep it wide open.
17. You are on 24-7. Assume you are on the interview the minute you get on the plane. I knew someone who flew to Washington for an interview. He happened to be sitting next to the head of the department he was interviewing with. Their conversation went something like this "boss-Are you visiting Seattle?" "friend-yes, I'm there for an interview. "Boss-Oh yeah, what kind of position?" "friend-I'm a chemist, I'm there to interview with a biotech company. "Boss-Huh, you like being a chemist?" After a few more rounds they found out they were interviewer and interviewee. Plane, hotel lobby, offices, dinner, are all fair game, Keep your game up. You may be interviewing in their offices from 7 AM to 5 PM, so be prepared to talk all day as well.
18. Prepare your talk. Tell a complete story that is accessible to your audience. Fine tune and customize your talk all day as well
19. Bring material to talk about. Give out a summary of your research in pamphlet form to your audience before your talk. Bring extra slides to talk about on the individual interviews after your talk. Bring demos if you have any.

## Recruiters' Comments

**The Career Development Center asked our company recruiters what they typically want to know about PhD and Postdoc candidates at the on-campus interview. Here are their comments:**

1. What specific accomplishments has the student made?
2. What interest do they have in our company?
3. What are their 5 years career goals?
4. What is the greatest challenge they faced in their research?
5. Provide candidates with a list of typical interview questions.
6. List of questions for the interviewer/employer so that the candidate can determine if it is a right fit.
7. Encourage a candidate to answer a question to the best of their ability, rather than I don't know.
8. A candidate should demonstrate flexibility as far as work schedules and locations.
9. A candidate should always demonstrate the desire to learn by giving examples of assimilating new information quickly from classes, seminar, etc.
10. A candidate show demonstrate attention to details, mostly related to experiments, but can easily be seen resume, attire, and presentation.
11. Non-verbal communication is extremely important.
12. Candidates need to bring slides of their work.
13. It is important for candidates to attend seminar (information session).
14. A candidate should demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the company.
15. A candidate should demonstrate knowledge of the recruiter and if they are scientists then what did they study.
16. A candidate needs to show enthusiasm and curiosity.
17. Questions need to be answered in a precise and honest fashion.

18. A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT YOUR OWN GOALS ARE (THIS IS A STANDARD INTERVIEW QUESTION).
19. It is important for candidates to be prepared for the time constraint – Practice research presentation.
20. Show interest! If you are serious about the company you are interviewing with, you should learn some basics about the company prior to the interview (sites, products, etc.) and you should have questions about the company that you want answered.
21. Be energetic. Employers are looking for people excited by what they do and who enjoy sharing their work/experiences.
22. Be honest/frank about your employment interests (location, type of work).
23. Think of examples that you can point to for the common qualities that companies are looking for like creativity, initiative, leadership, good interpersonal relationship skills, and communication skills. Often interviewers are surprised by the fact that many students have not even considered these types of questions in advance of the interview.
24. Preparation – 30 minutes to describe the highlights of their research over the past 4-5 years. Not a lot of time, but this presentation must be full of impact, complete and well presented. It is this 30 minutes that can often decide if they will be successful in a seminar and day of interviews at the company of interest. Honesty, integrity, and just being yourself are big keys for many of us. In describing the work that had been done, there is nothing more irritating than the person who “did it all by themselves” when there are 10 names on the paper when the work was published. It is more important to know how much you have done, but I might argue that it is even more important to know what your personal impact on the work was as well. It is quite useful for them to leave a copy of a research summary and an updated CV with the interviewer so that it can be brought back to the company and reviewed by others as well.
25. Familiarize themselves with the company via an annual report or web site prior to the interview.
26. Be prepared to discuss their research, but not plan on giving the interviewer a 45 minutes seminar.
27. Focus on a couple of key problems solved in their research that highlight creativity, problem solving, teamwork and initiative.

28. Present themselves in a way which highlights how their skill set will fit the company's needs.
29. Be enthusiastic and show true interest in joining the company.
30. Be honest with themselves in being selective in which companies they choose to set-up interviews.
31. Bring an up-to-date resume
32. Bring research summary – Less than 2 pages for Ph.D. and 3 pages for Postdocs
33. 15-20 minute verbal presentation – “Chalk Talk” – Practice
34. Bring Questions
35. Attendance of information sessions. Nothing is worse than taking a portion of the interview period to recap what has already been presented
36. Prepare a research summary and be prepared to discuss it in details. We as interviewers want to come away knowing what types of work a candidate has done, their level of intellectual contribution, the contributions of co-workers (mature scientists will acknowledge others) and the significance of the work.
37. Show enthusiasm and energy. Not only are we looking for value-added employees, we are also looking for people we would enjoy having as a future colleague; it is important not to underestimate impact the tenor of has on our evaluation of “plays nice with others”.
38. Ask poignant questions. This an extension of #3 above; if you are really interested in pursuing a career with our company, then show it. This may involve some homework and research on the company, its culture, its location, etc.
39. Stick to the agenda outlined by the interviewer. If one is not provided at the start of the interview, ask the interviewer how he or she would like to conduct the interview, timing, etc.
40. Use “slides” to give the thesis summary. Don't give a chalk talk at the blackboard (too slow) or a verbal presentation (too vague).
41. Make the thesis summary understandable to a broad audience. Bring along extra slides for more detailed discussions, depending upon the questions.
42. Read up on the company

43. Please ask questions!

Here's a couple sites to visit to get you started on interview preparation:

<http://www.rileyguide.com/interview.html>

<http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/compinterviewtips.htm>

# The Consulting Interview



## Case-Method/Case-Based:

Requires you to analyze a problem/situation and present a solution. Employer is assessing your analytical ability/thought process, (as opposed to whether or not your answer is correct).

Example: How many gas stations are there in the United States?

## Consulting: McKinsey

What are the techniques?

## Group discussion

60 minute discussion with 4 candidates

Participants given information and asked to arrive at a consensus around a given issue

## Structured case

30 minute case interview with standard format and calibrated questions

## Behavioral interview

Background interview focused on candidates past experiences  
Structured questions followed by probing: what candidates did, said, thought, etc

## The Interviewer's Perspective

Common Interview Questions

Case Studies

Ask a Question

## The Interviewer's Perspective

During every stage of your interview process we will be probing your ability to listen, process information, think creatively, and articulate your thoughts. We will assess your strengths against the four major attributes we believe are common to successful McKinsey consultants:

- Problem-solving ability
- Personal impact
- Leadership
- Drive/aspirations

### **Problem-solving ability**

- We'll use case studies and other probative techniques to gauge your intellectual horsepower, logic
- reasoning ability, curiosity, creativity, business judgement, tolerance for ambiguity, and intuitive feel
- for numbers. Typical questions we might use to assess these qualities include "How would you
- estimate that number?" "What kind of things would you do to make that business more profitable?"

### **Personal impact**

Your presence, personality, level of assertiveness, empathy, and communications style are intrinsic to your success as a consultant. We will test your ability to listen as well as to articulate your own point of view—and your ability to stand by your views if challenged. We try to see if you would be comfortable in a team situation, have an interest in other people, and a sense of self-confidence without arrogance—in other words, we are looking for people who are fun to work with. We may ask questions such as "What are some of your most important achievements?" or "Can you discuss a tough decision you had to make and how you reached it?"

**Leadership:** Your willingness to take on a leadership role is as important at McKinsey as your ability to work as part of a team. Help us recognize your ability to seize opportunity and take action. Show us how you might build a team and encourage and facilitate a shared vision. We will be looking for signs of entrepreneurship, including a willingness to take a personal risk. We will seek evidence of your persistence in the pursuit of what you want, and your ability to keep a clear focus amidst escalating demands. We might probe this area of your personality with questions like "What leadership roles did you play at school?" or "What are some of the most challenging experiences you've had at work or at school?"

**Drive/aspirations** We will be assessing your personal drive for excellence, and well as your energy level and perseverance. We want to know if you set high aspirations for yourself and expect outstanding results. We look to how you handle obstacles and if you are willing to go outside your comfort zone in order to achieve what you want. We will probably ask questions like "Describe a situation in which you were working to reach a goal. What obstacles did you confront along the way?"

### **Common Interview Questions**

During your McKinsey interviews we will be probing your strengths along four key areas: problem solving ability, personal impact, leadership, and drive/aspirations. We will be asking a series of questions designed to help us get to know you better along these lines; here is a sampling of the type of questions you can expect.

- To assess your problem solving ability
- To assess your personal impact

- To assess your leadership
- To assess your drive/aspirations

### **Problem solving ability**

- How would you go about estimating your competitor's budget for \_\_\_\_\_ expenses?
- What other numbers would you want to know in order to estimate it?
- What kinds of things could a \_\_\_\_\_ business do to become more profitable?
- Other things such as competitive position being the same, which type of business do you think
- would have greater returns on sales, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?
- What could you do to reduce absenteeism in a \_\_\_\_\_ factory?
- Where might you look for information on traffic patterns near a shopping mall?
- Describe a situation you handled creatively.
- Describe a situation in which you had to convince others that your view, approach, or ideas
- were right or appropriate.
- Describe a tough decision and how you reached it.

### **Personal impact**

What experiences have you had working in teams? Using a specific example, what role did you play on the team? How did you select that role? What were the most/least satisfying aspects of working on that team? What is the most difficult thing for you in working with a team?

Describe your relationships with colleagues, professors, bosses, and others in a significant academic/work experience. In what ways were you most effective with people? What conflicts or difficulties did you experience? What kinds of people did you find most challenging? What would your colleagues say about you? Describe the social environment at your school. How satisfying was it for you? What difficulties did you experience? Did you have any specific problems with faculty or administration? With which groups did you interact most comfortably? Why? How do you spend your spare time? Describe a "delicate" situation in which your personal sensitivity made a difference.

### **Leadership**

Describe a situation in which you recognized a problem or opportunity and organized to take action in response. Did you choose to pursue this situation on your own or did someone else ask or suggest that you pursue it? What obstacles did you face? How did you overcome them? What leadership roles have you played in school, at work, in your community? When have you felt most fully challenged and stimulated in your academic or work experiences? Most frustrated? What did you do about your frustration? Have you ever had an idea or a goal to achieve something that required action by other individuals beyond just

yourself? How did you get the idea or come to set the goal? How did you find or mobilize the requisite resources to make the idea or goal become real? How did you deal with any unforeseen events along the way? Your resume indicates that you \_\_\_\_\_. What prompted you to do this? What obstacles did you face and how did you overcome them? What satisfied you most about the experience? Least? Did you have to make any sacrifices along the way? What lessons have you learned? Knowing what you do now, would you do it again?

### **Drive/aspirations**

What aspirations do you have for yourself over the next 5 or so years-- professionally and personally? Describe a situation in which you were aspiring to reach a goal. What obstacles confronted you along the way? What did you do to overcome them? Describe a situation that demanded sustained, unusually hard work, where others might have thought you couldn't succeed. Was the experience stressful? If so, how did you handle the stress?

### **Case Studies**

As part of our interviewing process, we ask candidates to discuss a business problem with each interviewer. Your insights on the case are used in conjunction with the rest of the interview process to help us reach a decision on your potential.

Most candidates enjoy the cases and the business problems they raise. Hopefully, it also helps you become better informed about our firm and the kinds of clients we serve.

### **Why We Use Case Studies**

- How You Should Approach the Problem
- What We Are Looking For
- Do's and Don't's

### **Why We Use Case Studies**

Case studies are a valued part of the interview because they expose you to the kind of work we do every day. Just as important, they give us an opportunity to see how you think about problems and gain insights into your ability to solve them. Your ability to deal creatively with complex or ambiguous problems in unfamiliar businesses, to structure your thinking, and to reach sensible conclusions with the available facts in a short space of time is your most important asset as a consultant. Since no particular background or set of qualifications prepares you to do that, we've come to rely upon the case study approach as an integral part of our interview process.

## **How You Should Approach the Problem**

The cases you discuss in each of your interviews will be different; however, they are generally based on each interviewer's professional experiences and will usually be situations with which you are not familiar. They might include deciding how a company should react to a new competitor or determining what attributes a company should look for in seeking a joint-venture partner. In answering the case, it is important that you apply a logical, well-structured approach that enables you to reach a reasoned conclusion. At a minimum, you should be sure that you:

Understand the statement of the problem and the question that you are being asked to answer--ask for clarification on points that you feel are unclear. Think broadly--do not get bogged down on one particular issue before you have explored other areas that may be important. Address the issue--candidates often focus too much on their own area of expertise rather than the important issues (e.g., accountants focusing on the financial aspects of new product development without mentioning customers).

Break the problem down into a logical structure--there may be several issues to be addressed in order to reach a conclusion. Address the issues one at a time—your interviewer may not expect you to get through all of them in the allotted time. Communicate clearly and succinctly. Request additional information--as you build an understanding of the problem, there may be more information that you need. Test your emerging hypotheses--keep coming back to check that you are addressing the question you were asked. Conclude--synthesize your thoughts concisely and develop a recommendation.

If you are stuck, a useful fall-back is to think about what really makes the difference between profit and loss (revenue minus costs), i.e., focus on the key problem areas that the company must address to make money. Although it's not always relevant, it will be key in many situations.

## **What We Are Looking For**

In most instances there is no "right answer" to the problem. The key is that you demonstrate your ability to think it through in an insightful way, that you reach a reasoned conclusion that is supported by the evidence, and that you can clearly synthesize the discussion. Listen carefully to the scenario; if you miss critical information it can affect your ability to solve the problem.

During the case study, we look for evidence of your ability on a number of dimensions--logical reasoning, creativity, quantitative skills, business judgement (not business knowledge), pragmatism, and an ability to structure problem solving. We also look for evidence of intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for typical consulting issues.

Equally important is for us to get a sense that you are comfortable with our working style--learning from the emerging facts and developing revised hypotheses as more

information becomes available. You should be receptive to new information and use it to push your thinking forward. When you are asked a question, you should refer back to any relevant information that's already been discussed rather than answer it in isolation.

### **Case Study Do's and Don'ts**

- Listen to the problem--make sure you are answering the question that you have been asked to answer.
- Begin with setting a structure--think of 4-5 key questions that you need to answer before you can synthesize the overall issue.
- Stay organized--finish one key question and arrive at a point of view on it before you go on to the next.
- Step back periodically--summarize what you have learned and what the implications appear to be.
- Communicate your train of thought. Even if you have considered some alternatives and rejected them, tell the interviewer what and why.
- Ask for information judiciously--make sure that the interviewer knows why you need the information, and be prepared to propose quick and inexpensive ways of collecting it.
- Watch for cues from the interviewer--and keep an open mind Do not try to "crack the case"--it is much more important to clearly demonstrate a logical thought process than to arrive at the solution
- Use business judgment and common sense.
- Relax and enjoy the process. Think of the interviewer as a teammate in a problem solving process and the case as a real client problem that you need to solve.

### **Some Common Mistakes**

- Misunderstanding the question asked or answering the wrong question.
- Proceeding in a haphazard fashion, i.e., not identifying the major issues that need to be examined or jumping from one issue to another.
- Asking a barrage of questions without explaining to the interviewer why you need the information.
- Force-fitting a few familiar business frameworks to every case questions, whether they are relevant or not (or misapplying a relevant business framework that you do not really understand) rather than simply using common sense.
- Not being able to synthesize a point of view based on the information provided by the interviewer.

### **Ask a Question**

- Need more information or have a question? Contact McKinsey at
- [career\\_opportunities@mckinsey.com](mailto:career_opportunities@mckinsey.com)