



# Legal Case Interviews

Commercial Law Firms

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## Legal Case Study Interviews: A Short Guide

### What is a Legal Case Study interview (LCSI)?

A legal case study interview is an exercise which allows the firm to assess your potential skills as a lawyer. The case study format enables the firm to identify core skills areas that enable you to deal with clients, documentation, giving advice and making judgements. It can take the form of a written exercise, presentation, or discussion – sometimes a mixture.

The LCSI will normally take place when you reach the interview or assessment day stage, after you have completed any initial assessments, such as application, the Watson Glaser test and even video interviewing.

You can expect the LCSI to involve more than one interviewer and might involve Senior Partners and practising lawyers.

The LCSI can vary in the range in length, from a short task (20 minutes) to a longer, more detailed review of documentation with a presentation (1 hour).

LCSI are used with all candidates (law and non-law), meaning technical legal knowledge is not a requirement, though basic knowledge of commercial matters is useful.

### What types of legal case study interview are there?

Depending on what the firm is looking at assess you will find that the LCSI takes on several different formats and lengths. You can expect one or more of the following:

- A written task
- A discussion of your recommendations
- A presentation

A case study can take anything from 20 minutes – 1 hour to complete. Even if the case requires a written response you can be asked to defend your work in a verbal discussion.

### What will I be given?

You will usually be given information to review and assess. It is common to be asked to make a recommendation to your interviewer about how you would proceed following a review of the documents. Documents can include:

- a 'bundle' of documents, including memos, emails, contracts, and client information.
- A newspaper or press article
- Data and statistics
- Financial documents
- Confidential information (information not disclosed to one party)
- A briefing or client scenario
- Contract
- Regulatory or governance information

### Common topics to tackle in your case study:

- How would you proceed with the case? *What logical actions would you take next?*
- What advice would you give a client? *Would you recommend they sell their firm?*
- Should the firm take on this client? *Does the client seem suitable for the firm?*

- Should A company buy B company? *Based on the information, is this viable?*
- How does this firm's case sit in current affairs? *Is there a future for this industry?*

### What will I need to do?

- Present your findings
- Argue or defend your decision
- Write a letter, memo, or email summarising information
- Make a recommendation for action

### What is the process really testing?

It is important to know that recruiters find new ways to test their candidates each year. This is mainly to stem any 'copy' interviews and ensure one cohort doesn't have an advantage over another.

The case study process is usually testing your non-technical skills. These skills are those suitable for a successful commercial lawyer.

These could be:

#### Client Skills

- Can you communicate with clients?
- Can you give advice with plain instruction?
- Do you put the client at the centre of your decisions?
- How well can you negotiate?
- How do you change your approach for a client?
- Can you negotiate based on the needs of the client?

#### Resilience

- Can you cope with time pressure?
- How well do you deal with questioning?
- Can you defend your position?

#### Organisation and logic

- How do you cope with reading multiple documents?
- Can you identify issues within lots of information quickly?
- Can you prioritise your workload?
- Do you think in a structured way to deal with core issues?

#### Communication and interpersonal skills

- How do you change your approach when dealing with internal team members, senior staff, and clients?
- Are you consistent in communicating effectively across written, verbal, and digital communications?
- Can you present efficiently?
- Can you write a short memo?

#### Decision making and judgement

- Can you take a stance on a divisive issue?
- How effectively can you use the information given to make a decision or recommendation?
- Can you summarise complex information?

#### Commercial awareness

- How well do you understand the interests of the firm?
- Can you recommend a client to the firm?
- How do you consider the needs of the client?
- How might you maximise income for the firm?



## How can I prepare?

You can prepare for a range of types of task prior to finding out which type you will be expected to do on the day.

Skill	Example preparation
<b>Understanding the firm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading their annual report</li> <li>▪ Asking questions of alumni and current employees – being specific about the culture and working practice of the firm</li> <li>▪ Researching their recent cases</li> <li>▪ Following them on social media</li> <li>▪ Reading firm blogs and insight pieces</li> <li>▪ Follow any mentions in law papers, news reports and business news</li> <li>▪ Reading their recruitment brochures</li> <li>▪ Reading further on their sector specialisms</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding the role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading any recruitment material thoroughly</li> <li>▪ Asking questions of alumni and current employees – being specific about daily tasks, management structure and the level of responsibility on entry</li> </ul>
<b>Summarising documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collect a range of emails, articles, essays and/or short reports. Time yourself skim reading and summarising their content in 5 bullet points</li> <li>▪ When writing an essay, pull together all your resources on the topic and summarise them in less than a page of A4</li> <li>▪ Find a substantial report online – such as a report by a research hub and summarise the findings on a PowerPoint slide (e.g. Mckinsey &amp; Co Global Institute <a href="#">report on the future of work</a>)</li> <li>▪ When you read a chapter of a book for your essay writing or research project, write a summary in one paragraph</li> </ul>
<b>Making a decision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access <a href="#">JobTestPrep</a> (via Handshake) to sit a range of Situational Judgement Tests</li> </ul>
<b>Taking a side and defending it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Visit a news article or opinion piece and make an argument to defend it or oppose it (good to find someone to help argue against your standpoint). The <i>Financial Times</i> is a good place to start: <a href="https://www.ft.com/opinion">https://www.ft.com/opinion</a>. Choose something you already have a position on to get started – then perhaps argue the opposite viewpoint.</li> <li>▪ Review some recent court decisions – do you agree? How would you argue the appeal based on the information you have? An example could be this article on the recent litigation involving the <a href="#">Post Office</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Time management &amp; Organising information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking short E-Tray tasks can help you with organising and prioritising information under time pressure (example from Assessment Day <a href="https://www.assessmentday.co.uk/e-tray-exercise.htm">https://www.assessmentday.co.uk/e-tray-exercise.htm</a>)</li> <li>▪ Reflect on how you currently organise your time at Cambridge – between study, extra-curriculars, family, writing essays etc. What good practice can you take from this?</li> <li>▪ Look at your email inbox – set yourself a time limit. How could you colour code your emails by content? Could you organise them by prioritisation? Create folders and move them accordingly.</li> <li>▪ Practice using SWOT analysis by reading an article on a business case, perhaps a merger and acquisition, and think about how the article could be broken down.</li> </ul>

Skill	Example preparation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Time yourself reading an article, summarising the content, and passing an opinion. Do it again with another article of the same length and evaluate your progress.</li> <li>▪ Staying organised can cost a <a href="#">firm money or even cases</a>, so it is important to show you are on the ball with your own diary management too – expect this to be tested in some cases.</li> </ul>
<b>Commercial awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hear from Lawyer <a href="#">Eloise Skinner</a> on choosing quality commercial awareness resources</li> <li>▪ Visit LawCareers.net's '<a href="#">Guide to Commercial Awareness</a>' for regular updates to your inbox</li> <li>▪ Follow your firm on social media</li> <li>▪ Read the business section of news outlets such as the <a href="#">Financial Times</a> and the <a href="#">BBC News</a></li> <li>▪ Follow trading news, perhaps via <a href="#">CNBC</a></li> <li>▪ Read or write for '<a href="#">Cambridge Market Insights</a>' – the student run business and economics magazine</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Practice how you might communicate information to different audiences. You could read an article and pretend you were summarising it for a client, your manager, or a case-partner, stating any actions you recommend.</li> <li>▪ Practice considering how you would communicate information across different sources: email, telephone, presenting, meetings. What considerations would you make?</li> </ul>
<b>Presenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If you are required to give a longer, persuasive presentation, watch Nancy Duarte's '<a href="#">The secret structure of great talks</a>' for ideas on how to make your arguments persuasive.</li> <li>▪ Practice talking on a topic to time.</li> <li>▪ Practice creating a presentation from scratch in a short amount of time. Take a report or news article and create a summary presentation, with a recommendation on the topic in under 30 minutes. Include data in your presentation if it forms part of your decision making. Review your presentation and consider any questions you might be asked as a follow-up.</li> </ul>
<b>Business jargon, terms, and issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build your knowledge of common business terms (like Mergers &amp; Acquisitions). There are lots of 'cheat sheets' to get you going: <a href="https://www.workspace.co.uk/content-hub/entrepreneurs/glossary-of-business-terminology">https://www.workspace.co.uk/content-hub/entrepreneurs/glossary-of-business-terminology</a>.</li> <li>▪ It is also useful to understand the common risks experienced when buying a business. Firms will have articles on this on their websites, such as this from Crombie Wilkinson: <a href="https://www.crombiewilkinson.co.uk/site/business/company-and-commercial-law/legal-risks-when-buying/">https://www.crombiewilkinson.co.uk/site/business/company-and-commercial-law/legal-risks-when-buying/</a>.</li> <li>▪ When you read an article and find a term you aren't familiar with, look it up before leaving the article.</li> <li>▪ Use LinkedIn Learning to learn the basics of financial documents (the very basics), like how to read a balance sheet: <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/learning/finance-for-non-financial-managers/what-to-look-for-in-a-balance-sheet-2?u=2963594">https://www.linkedin.com/learning/finance-for-non-financial-managers/what-to-look-for-in-a-balance-sheet-2?u=2963594</a> (just use your CRSID to log-in).</li> <li>▪ You can build awareness of terms by reading articles on particular areas. It is more efficient to focus on one topic at a time (choose one that would be most relevant to the firm) – for example <a href="#">Shipping</a> or <a href="#">Cryptocurrency</a>.</li> </ul>

**Top tip:** The best way to make good use of your time is to approach work you are already doing in preparation for exams, essay writing or research and even in your extra-curricular roles by treating it like a case interview. You will soon see that you are already using lots of the skills firms are looking for.

## Practicing legal tasks online

You can practice legal research skills, communication skills, making recommendations and advice giving, as well as learning more about emerging issues (technology in practice) by completing tasks in a virtual internship. [Forage](#) are one organisation who have partnered with leading firms to enable this. These include:

- Arnold Bloch Leibler
- Ashurst
- Baker McKenzie
- Bird & Bird
- Clifford Chance
- Herbert Smith Freehills
- Hogan Lovells
- Kennedys
- Latham Watkins
- Linklaters
- Matheson
- Minter Ellison
- Pinsent Masons
- Slaughter and May
- White & Case

## Checking information on firm websites

Increasingly firms do not hide their recruitment processes and you are likely to find at least some information about the type of case assessment you will get at interview.

Here are just a few examples:

Firm	Notes
<a href="#">Allen &amp; Overy</a>	"The first interview is based on a commercial case study, where you'll have time to work through a brief and prepare a short presentation to deliver to your interviewer. This will be followed by a discussion on the key points from the case study"
<a href="#">Clifford Chance</a>	"Our new virtual interviews will consist of one 75-minute commercial interview with a written exercise element conducted by our committed team of partners and associates"
<a href="#">Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer</a>	"A lot of our work for clients is in writing so we want to see how well you can spot key concepts and convey them to the reader, as well as evaluate your attention to detail"
<a href="#">Hogan Lovells</a>	What does the day involve? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ a paper-based critical thinking test – a different version of the online test</li></ul>

Firm	Notes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a commercial business exercise, if you've applied for a training contract, to assess how well you work in a team</li> <li>▪ an interview with two partners, a partner and a senior associate or a partner and a member of graduate recruitment to probe your reasons for wanting a legal career and check how well you know the legal and business worlds</li> <li>▪ a situational interview with a senior associate and a member of the graduate recruitment team to assess how well you might handle the common situations that trainee solicitors deal with.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Linklaters</a>	Comprehensive information and examples of the critical and legal evaluation tests you will take.
<a href="#">Norton Rose Fulbright</a>	<p>What does the assessment day include?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ an interview with two senior members of the practice</li> <li>▪ a written exercise to assess how you interpret and relay information</li> <li>▪ a negotiation exercise, assessed as part of a group so that we can see how you work in a team (training contract assessment)</li> <li>▪ Find out how to prepare on the <a href="#">Application advice</a> page</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Slaughter and May</a>	<p>On arrival at our offices on the day of your interview you will be given a written exercise to complete. This written exercise requires no legal knowledge and you will not be expected to prepare in advance. We hope that the following will give you a good idea of what to expect.</p> <p>The written exercise is based around a fictional business. The business is likely to have been in existence for some years and is going through a strategic review process.</p> <p>There will be various pieces of information provided, for example, an internal memo, some statistics, and a newspaper article. These may consist of 5 or 6 pages of reading. Your task will be to write your own report once you have assimilated the information and facts provided. Clear instructions will be given about what is expected and your report will be assessed for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ written communication</li> <li>▪ ability to persuade</li> <li>▪ judgement and problem analysis</li> <li>▪ innovative ideas and commercial knowledge</li> </ul> <p>You will be given one hour to complete this exercise and have the option of writing or typing your answer. There is a lot of information to consider and we would encourage you to manage your time carefully to allow you to complete the task and review your work in the hour set.</p>



## Commonly asked questions

### Question: Does the process favour Law students?

No.

The case study interview process is not designed to favour Law students. It is designed to test your ability to carry out the work of a lawyer from a 'soft skills' perspective. This includes your critical thinking, communication, judgement, and resilience.

Whilst it is natural that a law student will have more legal knowledge and be more fluent in legal terms by default, this is not what is being tested.

A mistake to make is to interpret legal knowledge as commercial awareness. Understanding the work of the firm, its needs, and its client base are more important than your knowledge of the law for this type of task.

### Question: Is a Legal Case Study the same as a Management Consultancy Case Interview?

No.

A legal case study interview is not the same as a case study interview commonly used in Management Consulting – and it is important to distinguish between the two.

Both will deal with commercial topics, ask you to make recommendation and use information to make decisions.

Whilst a consulting case study will often follow a common framework for problem solving and be a similar length and format regardless of the firm, the legal case study interview can take on a number of different formats, look for different responses and test a range of skills and bring out a number of responses from the candidate.

### Question: Who will lead my case study interview?

This will depend on what type of task you get.

If it is a written task with no interrogation, then there may not be another person involved. You will simply complete the task and submit it online or to the person who gave you the task.

If your task is to argue a case, make a recommendation, defend a position or to demonstrate strength under scrutiny then it is likely to be with someone 'in the know'. That person could be another trainee, a solicitor, a partner, or senior partner (the latter tend to come at later stages of the interview).

### Is there always a right answer?

No. That can often be the point – they are looking at how well you make an argument or how you use the information in front of you to make a judgement on the best course of action.

You should read all the documents, make notes of key issues, facts and figures and keep these with you. Your job is to make the best of the information they give you to make a decision – you will go wrong if you ignore this information or miss a key document.

If your rationale is sound and you can defend it, you have done your job. They are looking for potential – not perfection.

### Top tips

- Make a judgement early on how much you can read in the time you have. If it is too much, skim everything and make short notes. Then focus on key information to help your recommendation.
- Pay attention to any contrasting information or any internal memos that tell you what you can or not disclose to a client or the opposition.

## Resources

### Careers Service

- Key resources and tools <https://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/key-resources-and-tools>
- Skinner, E (2021) 'In Conversation with Lawyers – Eloise Skinner' Online: Video. Available at: [https://youtu.be/qnyoZ\\_XXNgE?t=755](https://youtu.be/qnyoZ_XXNgE?t=755) Accessed: April 2021 (watch from 12.35 for Commercial Awareness).

### External Resources

- Assessment Day <https://www.assessmentday.co.uk/e-tray-exercise.htm> (Access online tests)
- BBC (2021) 'Suez Canal: Owner of cargo ship clocking waterway apologises' Online: Article. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-56522178> (Accessed: April 2021)
- Cambridge Market Insights <https://www.cambridgemarketinsights.com/> (student run economics and business magazine)
- CNBC <https://www.cnbc.com/world/?region=world> (consumer business, markets, investing, tech)
- Corporate Law Academy *Interview Experiences* Online: Website. Available at: <https://www.thecorporatelawacademy.com/interview-experiences/> (Accessed: April 2021)
- Corporate Law Academy *Mergers and Acquisitions Case Studies and Interviews* Online: Website. Available at: <https://www.thecorporatelawacademy.com/mergers-and-acquisitions-case-study/> (Accessed: April 2021)
- Corporate Law Academy *Practice Written Case Study* Online: Document. Available: <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/thecorporatelawacademy/Written+Case+Study+1++The+Corporate+Law+Academy.pdf> (Accessed: April 2021).
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- Forage <https://www.theforage.com/?ref=PYR6RGjCeBp8C7jPr> (Virtual work experience)
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- LawCareers.net (2019) 'Commercial Awareness Case Playlist' Online: Video. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtJ1wQIOG7gQYWa0RNZkfrxOdBeP4\\_Zb1](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtJ1wQIOG7gQYWa0RNZkfrxOdBeP4_Zb1) (Accessed: April 2021)
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- LEX100 *The Law Firm Assessment Day* Online: Article. Available at: <https://www.lex100.com/career-clinic/the-law-firm-assessment-day/> (Accessed: April 2021)
- McKinsey Global Institute (2021) 'The future of work after Covid-19' Online: Report. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19> (Accessed: April 2021)

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