CORPORATE FINANCE & STRATEGY

12 practical interview questions for your next corporate finance or strategy hire

A useful finance interview gets beyond what the candidate worked on. It shows you what they can work out, what they need to investigate and what they would recommend.

How to use this guide

Choose questions that match the job. For each case, ask the candidate to explain their assumptions before reaching for a spreadsheet.

Assess the responsibilities of the role, not personal circumstances. Offer reasonable adjustments where required so candidates can demonstrate their ability.

Use the notes beneath each question to record evidence, the candidate's personal contribution and anything requiring verification. These prompts support judgement; they are not a scoring formula.

Interview record

Candidate _____

Position _____

Interviewer / date _____

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01 Revenue is ahead of budget, but profit is behind. How would you investigate?

Look for a bridge separating volume, price, product mix and costs, followed by investigation of the largest drivers. Which data would they request first, and what action might follow?

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

02 Profit has increased, but cash has fallen. What would you check?

Listen for receivables, inventory, payables, capital expenditure, debt repayments and tax payments, reconciled rather than guessed. Can they distinguish a timing issue from deteriorating cash conversion?

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

03 A product sells for $100 excluding GST and has $60 of variable cost. Sales wants a 10% discount. How much extra volume preserves total contribution?

Contribution falls from $40 to $30 per unit, requiring approximately 33% more volume before additional costs. Then look for questions about capacity, demand, servicing costs and whether existing customers will also receive the discount. The calculation starts the decision; it does not settle it.

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

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04 The forecast has missed for three consecutive months. What would you change?

Look for comparison of original assumptions with actual operating drivers, not simply replacing the forecast with the latest run rate. Who owns the revised assumptions?

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

05 A department wants three additional employees. How would you assess the request?

Look for the work required, capacity constraints, alternatives and expected benefits. Clarify whether remuneration includes or excludes superannuation, then consider other relevant employment costs. How would they test whether the capacity delivered what was promised?

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

06 Which costs would actually disappear if we closed an underperforming product line?

Distinguish genuinely avoidable costs from allocated overhead that would remain. Include exit costs, customer effects and alternative uses of capacity. An accounting loss alone does not establish that closure improves the business.

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

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07 We can afford only one of two proposed investments. What would you put in front of the CFO?

Look for comparable cash flows, investment requirements, risks and operational constraints, with a clear recommendation. What would change their choice?

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

08 A proposed acquisition meets our return hurdle. What would you check before recommending it?

Look for earnings quality, customer concentration, cash conversion, capital expenditure, valuation assumptions and integration demands. What could change the price, terms or decision to proceed? Relevant regulatory conditions may also affect feasibility.

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

09 The acquisition case includes substantial cost savings. How would you verify them?

Ask for specific costs, accountable owners, implementation timing and one-off expenditure. A spreadsheet entry should not become an accepted benefit simply because it improves the return.

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

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10 An investment is underperforming six months after approval. What would you investigate before recommending more funding?

Separate execution delays from assumptions that no longer hold. What would the next dollar achieve, what alternatives exist and what evidence would justify stopping?

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

11 An operating manager rejects your analysis. How would you resolve the disagreement?

Look for a practical way to reconcile definitions, assumptions and source data before escalating. Ask for a real example and what the manager understood that the candidate initially missed.

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

12 Give me an example of a recommendation you made. What changed, and how did you check the result?

Look for a specific personal contribution, decision and observable outcome. Junior candidates need not have made the final decision, but should understand how their work was used.

EVIDENCE / FOLLOW-UP

Before interviewing, identify the three decisions the hire must help improve in their first year. For comparable candidates, use the same core cases and agree the assessment criteria beforehand. Allow anonymised examples; confidential employer documents are unnecessary.

Discuss your next corporate finance or strategy hire.