IMG INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

Fall 2026 First-Round Prompt

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Northwestern University Investment Management Group (IMG). The mission of IMG is to make investors of our members. We have no expectations of prior knowledge or experience in finance. We are looking for candidates with a strong ability to conduct research and a willingness to work as hard for us as we will for you. To that end, this assignment is meant as an assessment of your research abilities and general business intuition.

IMG has a strong preference for recruiting freshmen; students in other grades are welcome to apply but will be evaluated against a much higher standard.

We invite you to complete this assignment by **11:59 PM CT on Sunday, September 27th**. Select candidates will then advance to interviews to determine admission into the club. Due to the very quick turnaround of our recruitment process, we are unable to accept late applications.

Prompt

Please conduct research (primary and/or secondary) and compare/contrast sub-segments of the restaurant industry. **Specifically, if you were to own a restaurant location and were deciding between the following formats, what factors would you consider in your decision?**

The categories in question are:

- Fast food (e.g., McDonald's, Burger King)
- Fast casual (e.g., Sweetgreen, Chipotle, Cava)
- Casual (e.g., Chili's, Applebee's)

We do not expect a final answer on which type of business is more attractive, but simply an analysis of the factors that might motivate such a decision. **Please briefly explain how you define each category of restaurant in your answer.**

Some additional notes to consider:

- Compare and contrast these businesses in the context of owning a single location, not owning a larger chain.
- Note that examples of these types of businesses are not limited to locations within national chains—many local businesses with only one or a few locations also fall into these categories (e.g., 10Q Chicken).
- Do not focus your conclusions on specific companies (publicly-traded or private); think of this exercise more broadly in the context of the factors differentiating the different business models. Feel free, however, to use examples from such companies where appropriate.
- Set aside logistical considerations relating to starting a new business (e.g., finding an unleased location, permitting/zoning laws, etc.).
- Appropriately cite any sources on an additional page. Note that your submission should include and emphasize your original analysis and not simply be a "book report" summarizing others' thoughts.
- While there are many dimensions that inform decisions in owning and operating businesses, please focus your research on these business models in an economic sense (i.e., in terms of profitability), rather than your individual passion for certain types of restaurants or social/environmental considerations. This makes it easier for us to consistently compare different candidates' responses.

We encourage you to be as creative in your thinking as possible as you complete this assignment. There is no single correct answer to this prompt, and you will be evaluated based on your work's depth, quality, and nuance.

Summarize your findings in a single, typed page with no less than 10-pt. font and 1-in. margins. Please submit your findings through the Google form linked on our website, www.nuimg.org/recruitment.

Remember that we're looking for concise and logical analysis, not flowery prose. There are no bonus points for using big words or crafting complex sentences.

Please note that this assignment is not meant for teams; **each applicant's work must be entirely their own without influence from peers or mentors**. Violation of this policy will result in disqualification from IMG's application process.

Email northwesternimg@gmail.com with any further questions. Best of luck with your research!