

## Writing a case study

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### What is a case study?

Case studies require you to apply theory to a real-world example. Generally a case study provides a description of a particular practice, for example a business problem, scenario or situation, as a basis for a critical analysis, review and/or evaluation. Importantly, the critical analysis/review/evaluation of the case in point is then undertaken by applying the relevant theory to a real-world example.

According to Summers and Smith (2003, p. 48), the main aim of case study type assignments centres around:

- assisting students in learning to apply selected theories through simulated problem solving and decision-making
- allowing students to learn actively (by doing) rather than passively (by simply listening to lecturers or reading)
- reinforcing the applicability of theory to practical situations.

### Writing a case study

There are a variety of ways in which case studies are used. Hence there are a number of different ways they can be structured. Two common ways of writing case studies are to write them as a report or as an essay. You can use the same information for either structure, you just present it differently. If you are set a case study as an assignment, make sure you ask your lecturer or tutor which format you are supposed to use.

## Writing a case study in report format

A formal case report is generally organised into sections with headings. These are usually numbered as in the example below:

Letter of transmittal (not always required)  
Title page  
Executive summary  
Table of contents  
Introduction or case background  
Body of the analysis  
Alternative solutions  
Conclusion/recommendations  
Implementation plan (if requested)  
References List  
Appendices

### Source

Summers, J. & Smith, B. (2003). *Communication skills handbook*, Milton, Qld, Australia: John Wiley & Sons

## Writing a case study in essay format

When a case study is written as an essay, it has an introduction, body and conclusion. The most important point to remember is to present the analysis of the particular case in relation to the theory and the best practice that stems from that theory.

The following example paragraph from a case study demonstrates analysis of a case.

### **4.3 Nature of Organisational Design and Design Principles**

ABC Mission has a matrix organisational design because it incorporates the following six design principles: specialisation, departmentalisation, chain of command, span of control, centralisation and decentralisation and formalisation (Robbins, Millet & Walters-Marsh, 2004, p. 474). ... (remainder of paragraph omitted).

The span of control at ABC Mission is one where there are dual lines of control (Robbins, Millet & Walters-Marsh 2004, p. 475). In the Aged Care business at ABC Mission, there are two Regional Directors, one for Western Region and one for Northern Region (see Appendix 3 for the organisational chart for ABC). While staff within each department have their respective managers heading the department, the two Regional Directors often request tasks/information from staff within these support departments. While there is the potential in this sort of structure for role conflict, unclear expectations and role ambiguity from having to report to two bosses (Robbins et al. 2004, p. 475), the issue of staff reporting to more than one boss does not seem to cause problems at ABC Mission. Therefore it seems that the dual lines of control in the organisation work well.

#### **Note how:**

The first paragraph makes a statement about the case in relation to one of the theoretical concepts:

- it has attributes which are consistent with a matrix organisational structure.

The second paragraph explains how the case under study demonstrates the theory and draws the ideas presented in the paragraph to a logical conclusion which connects with the judgment made in the opening sentence.

### **Related Quick Guides**

Writing paragraphs, Organising information for your assignments, How to demonstrate critical judgment