



Types of writing

Case studies



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Case study assignments are studies into real world situations to which students have to apply the theories they are learning. Depending on your area of study, the assignment question may be presented in the form of facts for analysis. For example, these facts may be about an organisation (for management students and finance and accounting students), or a utility or building site (engineering). Your analysis may involve identifying and solving problems associated with the case, answering specific questions, or making recommendations: for example, engineers may be asked to recommend the best type of waste management control for a particular site.

Generally, case study refers more to the assignment question than the format of the finished assignment. The results of your analysis will normally be written up either in the form of a report, or an essay: that is, if you are required to analyse data, show results, then make recommendations, your assignment is more likely to follow the report format. On the other hand, if you are required to answer one or two questions related to the case study data, it is more likely that your assignment will resemble an essay, with a clear thesis statement made at the beginning of the essay. However, essays written in response to case studies generally share a number of characteristics of reports, that is, information can be organised into sections with headings, and recommendations can be made in the conclusion. Finally, some case study assignments are presented in question-answer format.

The following example is a student's outline for a case study assignment to be submitted in the form of an essay. This first year management case study concerned Julia, a new member of an executive team. The case study provided information on what happened at a meeting where Julia gave a presentation, asked *Why is Julia experiencing difficulties in the executive team and what actions can be taken to remedy or improve the situation?*

EXAMPLE: STUDENT OUTLINE

Introduction

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| • aim - helping Julia with interpersonal skills and building trust | <i>Thesis</i> |
| • conflict management and team building | <i>Context, issues</i> |
| • definition of teams and team building. | <i>Definitions</i> |

Body

Julia is experiencing difficulties because she doesn't feel part of the executive team.	<i>The student's main points from their analysis of the case study materials</i>
There are poor working relationships throughout the company.	
Part of Julia's problem is that the executive team is a male dominated environment.	

Transition from identifying problems to discussing solutions.	<i>Attention to structure</i>
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Recommendations

Julia has to: improve her communication skills,

- participate in discussions
- has to build relations of trust
- communicate concisely
- develop conflict resolution skills
- improve how the group functions as a team.

The student will need to link these solutions back to the issues identified earlier

Conclusion

The suggested solutions would benefit not only Julia but also the group.

Benefits and outcomes could also be used as headings

A case study draws on both the specific details of the example and on research, and you will be expected to include academic references. Research on the topic will be needed to:

- understand how the case study scenario would be described by professionals from the field
- identify any relevant theoretical frameworks
- support any general claims made
- provide evidence of the probable effectiveness of your ideas for solutions.

