

4.1: Writing Assignment

The purpose of a case writing assignment is to give practice in the kind of writing that is valued in the workplace. If after you have completed your assignment, you would not yourself pay money for what you have written, then what you have written is not good enough.

In the workplace, you would not pay for writing that tells you facts you already know. The writer might mention what you already know here and there in the piece, but if the piece is substantially about facts you already know, the piece would have no value to you.

You would not pay for writing that is unclear, especially when you know the author could be clearer. If the author writes that the company should focus on something, you would want the author to clarify. How is the company supposed to focus? What action must be taken to constitute focus?

You would not pay for writing that tells you to research or analyze the problem. The assignment requires analyze for which research might be useful. Admonishing the reader to do research and analysis, however, is condescending and useless.

Generally, the assignment will ask that the case be written from the viewpoint of a consultant, an outsider of the firm. From this viewpoint, the firm is identified by name. Do not use first- and second-person pronouns, we and you, to refer to the firm.

Generally, the assignment will require a narrative. If so, write in complete sentences organized into paragraphs, with attention to topic sentences and transitions between paragraphs. Do not submit a list when a narrative is required. Whereas a narrative shows how the writer thinks, a list only shows that the writer knows some words.

The following is a checklist of additional pointers on case writing:

1. Respond directly to the assignment. If the assignment is to submit research findings, do the research, submit the findings, and explain how you got the findings. If the assignment is to make a recommendation, analyze the facts, make a recommendation, and explain why the recommended course of action is best.
2. Answer the question before explaining the answer. If the requirement is to answer in one paragraph, the answer should be the first sentence of the paragraph. If the requirement is to answer in a short essay, the answer should be the last sentence of the first paragraph. In this instance, the first one or two sentences of the first paragraph should lead to the answer, the middle paragraphs should explain the answer, and the last paragraph should re-iterate the answer.
3. Cons before pros. Address reasonable arguments against your position before addressing the arguments for your position. The best argument for your position should be the last argument.
4. Write about what you know. Write especially about what you know that others may not know, because they have not studied the case as well as you have studied it. The mind needs time to work, so study the case several days before you write about it.
5. Do not question yourself or undermine your own position by apologizing, equivocating, or otherwise suggesting ineptitude. Do not write “In my opinion” (suggesting it is not worth much), “I think” (suggesting you do not know), or “I feel” (suggesting you do not think).
6. Do not complain about insufficient information, or call for further study or research. The task of strategic management is to identify the best course of immediate action given available information.
7. Write with grace and dignity. Do not disparage, patronize, preach, use slang, or make frivolous comments.
8. Be specific. Business is a numbers game, so use numbers whenever possible. When describing a course of action, give enough detail for the action to be visualized, as in a skit. Action that cannot be visualized cannot be executed.
9. Be assertive, neither wishy-washy nor dogmatic. Avoid *mights* (wishy-washy) and *musts* (dogmatic).
10. Economize on words. Do not merely restate the facts of the case. Either use the facts, to support an argument or introduce a topic, or do not mention them at all. Do not write a long introduction—get quickly to the point.

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