



# Writing a case study

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## Introduction

Case studies are designed to help you link a 'real life' example to the bigger picture' (a theory or a broad trend). This resource outlines the key information to consider when preparing case studies.

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## What is a case study?

A case study can refer to a research method (of analysing and presenting data) as well as assignment type (which focuses on a specific instance / example). This document describes a case study as an assignment.

If you are asked to do a case study, you will be expected to:

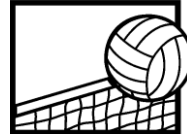
- analyse a specific case in all its complexity **and**
- explain the elements of its complexity by using a certain theory / different theories

In other words, the **case** is the 'real life' situation/subject, while the **study** is the analysis of the latter. The figure below outlines what can be the subject / focus of a case study:



### **An organisation / a project**

(For example, a bank or a software company – for Business students)



### **An event / a period of time**

(For example, a national sporting event – for Travel and Tourism students)



### **A person**

(For example, of a patient for Nursing students)



### **A group**

(For example, a group of pupils – for Education students)

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## **Key elements of a case study**

The following characteristics set a case study aside from other types of assessment. As you draft your case study, make sure that these come through clearly in your writing:

- Both broad and detailed description of the case and its elements
- Chronological order
- The focus is on the organisation / person / event / group / project (and its parts)
- Combination of description, analysis and interpretation of data

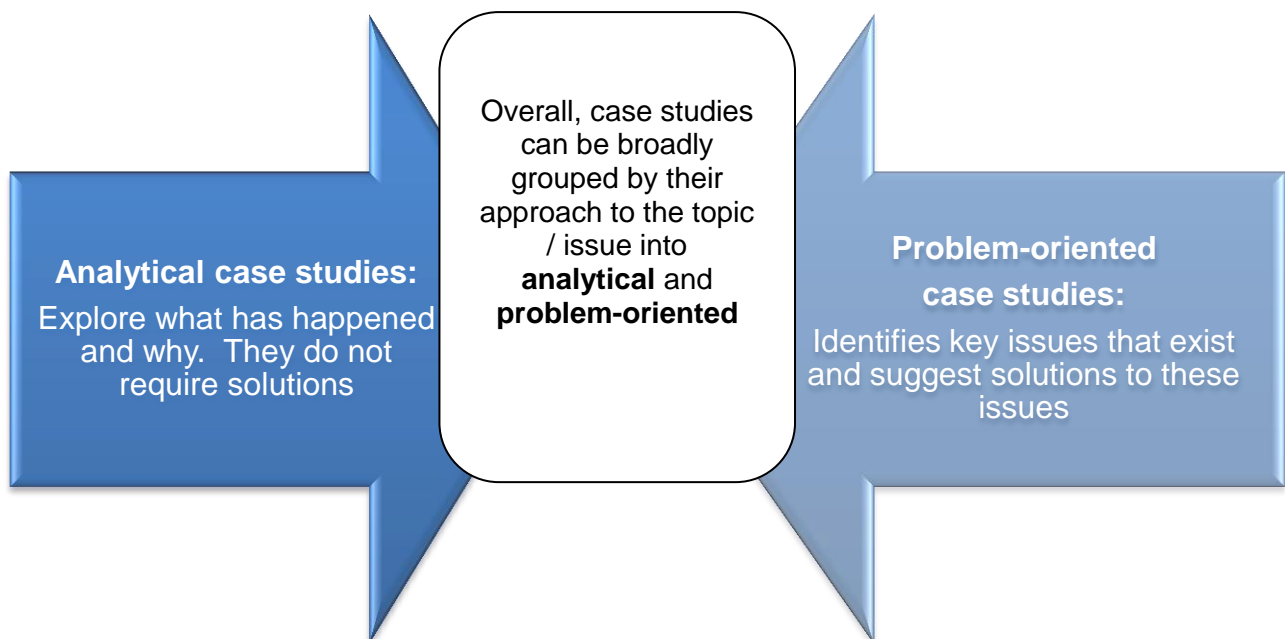
## What literature sources can I use in my case study?

Using a variety of sources will help you present an **objective** and **comprehensive** account.

The type of literature depends on your course and assignment brief. You may wish to include some, or all of the following:

- Theoretical material (theories that relate to your study; relevant journal article)
  - Industry resources (official documents, reports, statements, company website)
  - Statistical data
  - News items (relevant articles from sources such as the Guardian, the BBC)
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## Different approaches to case studies



## Approaching the case study assignment

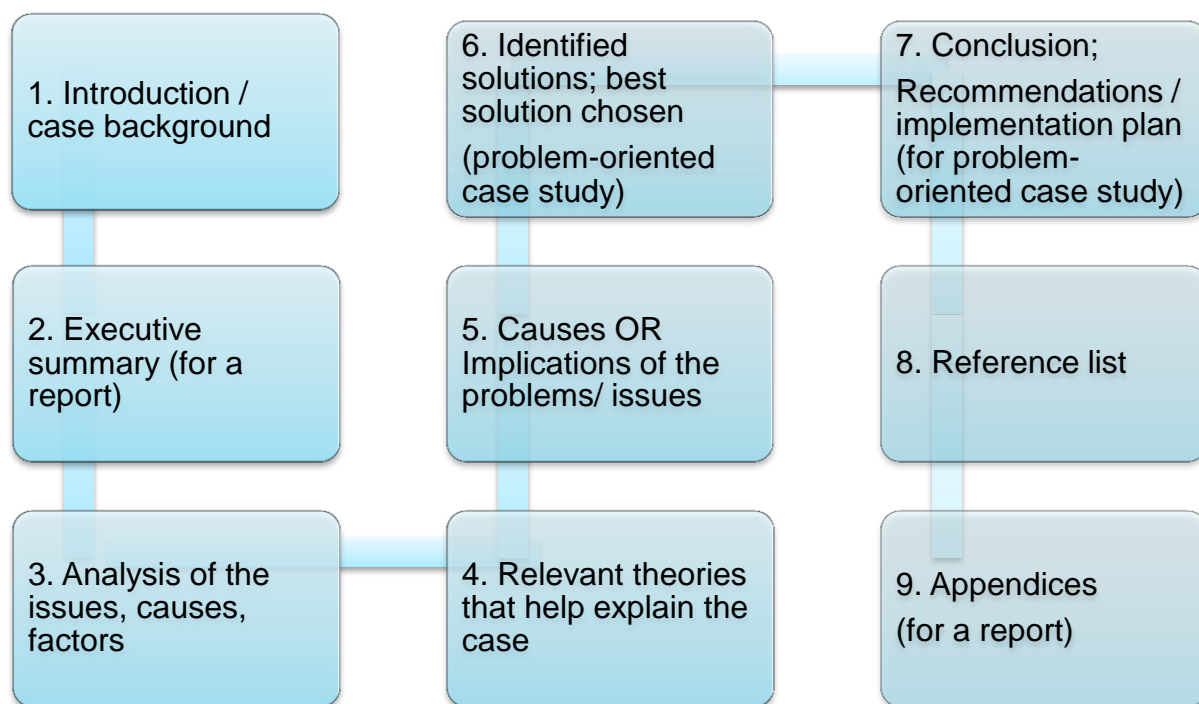
Whether you are presented with an analytical or problem-oriented case study, there are a number of steps involved in the process of writing it up:

1. Read through the case and gain an overview of the whole picture. Establish what has happened (explore events, factors and connections in greater detail) – use a theoretical approach / approaches to explain your findings
  2. Determine the reasons / causes
  3. Develop and assess possible solutions (if required)
  4. Make recommendations (if required)
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## Format and structure of the case study

A case study assignment is often formatted and structured as a **report** or as an **essay**. Use the **assignment brief** to plan your structure. If you still have questions, contact your tutor.

The diagram on page 5 outlines an expanded structure which includes all the key sections:



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## Common mistakes in analysing a case study

When working on your case study, make sure to avoid these common errors:

- Ignoring certain facts/ events /factors which affect the overall 'picture'
- Failing to provide an explanation for the causes or implications of the problem
- Making unsupported assumptions, which simplify the case (but omit valuable information)
- Presenting causes / solutions as generic rather than case-specific
- Relying too much on own experience / common sense rather than theory and data.

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### **Further information**

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit: I



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