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.

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)

**Different approaches to case studies**

**Analytical case studies:**
Explore what has happened and why. They do not require solutions

**Problem-oriented case studies:**
Identifies key issues that exist and suggest solutions to these issues

Overall, case studies can be broadly grouped by their approach to the topic / issue into **analytical** and **problem-oriented**
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)

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:
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.
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: l

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub