SWIF Learning
A Guide to ***S***tudent-***W***ritten, ***I***nstructor-***F***acilitated Case Writing

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Introduction

SWIF Learning—*Student-Written, Instructor-Facilitated Case Writing*—is a new learning technique designed to engage students fully in the educational experience and ease the transition from the classroom to the workplace. Traditional case teaching has unquestionable value, but it also has a major, if not frequently discussed, shortcoming. Traditional case methods limit the student to the role of analyst. In this role, students are primarily passive actors; as analysts, they are limited to responding to facts and events as reported by someone else. In contrast, SWIF Learning converts case teaching into an active learning experience. SWIF Learning requires students to assume a variety of new roles—researcher, petitioner, interviewer, negotiator, writer, editor, team-member, etc.

This manual provides students with a case-preparation roadmap for making the journey from passive case analyst to active case developer. We really have entered the information age and this reality, I believe, requires that the student discard the passive role expectations of the past and assume more of the active behaviors required of practicing organizational leaders.

Student-Written, Instructor-Facilitated (SWIF) case writing is a powerful tool for helping both students and instructors redefine their roles. In the pages that follow, I provide information selected to help speed the transition and make it smoother. The manual is divided into two sections. The first section provides background information on the case-writing process and answers the most commonly asked questions about case writing. The second section provides a guide to data resources and some tools for evaluating the case. New library technologies and computerized databases offer an extraordinarily rich array of information resources. In fact, the resources are so rich and growing so rapidly that it is impossible to summarize them in a document of this size, so this second section is meant to be only a starting point. The guidelines provided and the resources identified will help the new case writer prepare a clear, concise, and illustrative document.

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Why Write and Study Cases?

Cases have played a central role in business education for decades; in fact, some schools, most notably Harvard, have built their entire curriculum around case development and use. Cases studies help us decipher, understand, and use the knowledge gained through the experience of preparing them. The following is a list of seven learning benefits provided by the case-writing experience.

1. Integrating Theory and Practice

Case studies have the special advantage of being useful in both the generation and testing of theoretical propositions. In case-study writing, the investigator observes the working of the process under analysis and records what is happening. But simultaneously, it's the researcher's responsibility to examine the meaning of the observations and interpret them within the context of a prescribed or emergent theoretical framework.

2. Building Tolerance for Ambiguity and Incompleteness

The goal of the *SWIF* case study is not to find universal rules for effective management; they do not exist. The objective is simpler than that: to help the researcher discover a personal system for probing, classifying, and interpreting unstructured data drawn from an inherently ambiguous and dynamic organizational process.

3. Developing Critical Thinking Skills

Development of case studies gives the business graduate the opportunity to think critically within his or her discipline of study. By *critical thinking*, I mean a variety of abilities, including recognizing common structures or arguments from study material, integrating across learning experiences, critically assessing an argument, and being able to communicate critical ideas to others.

4. Learning to Distinguish Between the Significant and the Trivial

Experienced case writers know the struggle required to winnow and sift down ruthlessly to twenty pages a case story that could easily run fifty pages. Effective authors are distinguished by their ability to *recognize and tell only what is needed* and leave the rest to the reader.

5. Developing Shared Learning Skills

A significant discovery in the field of adult education concerns the now-known benefits of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is distinguished by its ability to bring students with different learning abilities and styles into small groups where they can teach each other in a process that reinforces knowledge provided by traditional lecture and text materials.

6. Providing an Opportunity for Original Thought

Typically, structured education teaches us to learn and repeat the outstanding thoughts of others. While this is important to understanding where we've come from, it doesn't help us reach new heights. The student-written case study provides an opportunity for the writer to observe a chaotic and complex experience, interpret what he or she sees, and turn the result into a disciplined and thoughtful narrative, thus, generating original thought.

7. Writing Skills Development

Writing is an essential skill and objective indicator of a well-developed mind. While students are frequently given writing assignments, most of them are simple read-and-report exercises. Cases make interesting writing assignments because they engage the writer's creative mind. Cases do not come with ready-made titles and answers, and they cannot be found in an encyclopedia. Well-researched and well-written cases require creativity, skill, and writing discipline—all key traits of a developed writer.

What Is a Case Study?

Typically written in narrative form, a case is a distillation of real events presented to provide the reader with data sufficient to help evaluate alternative courses of action. According to a former dean of the Harvard Business School, case studies are "systematically arranged problems reported from life." The best cases have been created using detailed research designs accompanied by meticulous fieldwork. Case writing demands planning, discipline, and hard work.

Where Do I Begin?

One of the first steps in the process of writing a case is to decide what type of case to construct. Many case classification options are available. Following is a brief listing and profile of four alternative types of cases that have been found to perform well as student assignments.

1. Company/Industry Profiles

The most popular type of student-written cases are company or industry profiles. This popularity stems from the fact that most of us know very little about the inner workings of the companies that influence our daily lives. For example, Kmart, the nation's third largest retailer, came very close to bankruptcy as a consequence of its aggressive entry into specialty retailing. Eventually, the company shed its excess and concentrated on reviving its stores by changing its identity to "Big Kmart." Thus, the first reason for the popularity of these types of cases is that it's interesting and informative to find out "how things are" and "how things work" in the corporate community.

A second reason, beyond the simple pleasure of discovering the unknown, is the fact that these types of cases are excellent at providing "memorable examples." The information gained from the analysis of a company or industry may not be directly applicable; that is, it may not produce a reproducible model. However, these cases provide a storehouse of examples from which to draw. For example, an analysis of the Wal-Mart Corporation quickly reveals that a major factor in its emergence as the nation's top retailer, surpassing both Kmart and Sears, is its expertise in information systems. This kind of example, one that reveals the link between functional expertise, strategy, and success, provides an excellent illustration for understanding how firms compete and win.

While it is true that company and industry profiles offer excellent opportunities for student case writing, there is one important caveat. The data are relatively easy to gather; in fact, sometimes too easy. In this era of meta-search engines and web page mania, it is embarrassingly simple to generate a massive list of potential data sources. The problem is that many of these hits repeat the same information. Also, much of the information on the Web is raw data that is not supported by fact. Anyone can write a web page and, because there is a difference between journalism and research, they fail to verify the information they report. This is the classic problem of using secondary sources. One must learn to question sources and to verify the information gathered on the Web. In other words, just because you read it on the Web doesn't mean it's true! The best case studies rely on information gathered from primary sources (i.e., company annual reports, company press announcements, original research studies, and interviews with knowledgeable sources) and verification of the information gathered.

Last, a potential problem with company/industry studies concerns the depth of the analysis. Quality case research demands that one does not simply restate the work of others. For example, it's interesting to know that Wal-Mart depends on a sophisticated information system. But the very popularity of this observation demands that a new researcher go one step further by digging deeper.

2. Decision-Making Episodes

Cases that relate specific decision-making episodes are very close to working models or simulations. They offer the reader a real-world experience and have a high degree of transferability. The reader is drawn into the process of making a complex business decision. The topic of the decision is secondary; the objective of the case is to demonstrate an effective or ineffective decision-making process. Questions common to this type of case include: Did the decisionmaker frame the problem correctly? Did she or he seek out the necessary data? Were internal and external factors weighted properly?

Authors of these types of cases need to have a high degree of familiarity with the issues and the people involved in the events being described. For student case writing, this typically means that the student has been personally involved in the case. This may be perceived as a roadblock, but actually the opposite is true. Many students, especially those in graduate and executive development programs, have had a wide range of experiences amenable to this type of case assignment; specifically, many have had to make important purchasing decisions, have experienced reorganizations, or have attempted to start their own businesses.

3. Theoretical Explorations

A reason often cited by business scholars objecting to the use of the case studies is the belief that cases cannot teach theory. Their criticism is based on the commonly made distinction between "theory" and "practice." According to this model, theories are abstractions, a set of assumptions, accepted principles, and rules of procedure that exist independently of actual events under examination. In contrast, practice is merely the way things are done. Implicit in the dichotomy is the presumption that practice is inherently suspect because it hasn't been informed by theory.

There is nothing wrong per se with this dichotomy; the world of business is overpopulated by practices that persist only because of long established habit. But this argument is also shortsighted because it fails to distinguish between statement and understanding. In this context, *statement* means communicating the core elements of the theory, its underlying assumptions and propositions. *Understanding*, on the other hand, refers to an understanding of the theory in context.

By definition, theories must be applicable to a wide variety of circumstances; good theories are tools helping to understand the "why" and "how" of observed events. But just like any tool, they must be used to be useful. Imagine a surgeon ignoring a tray of fine surgical instruments in favor of a dinner knife. What good is a tool that isn't fully and effectively used?

The same question can be asked of a theory; without application, it may as well not exist. Cases provide students of theory with two opportunities for tool usage. First, cases can be used as theoretical test sites. They can be written to show how the theory actually works, bringing coherence and understanding to what at first appears to be a nearly random set of discrete facts. Second, cases can be used to present what the writer perceives to be typical of a class of events. The objective is to use the findings of this single case to form the basis for a better understanding of the theoretical ideas under study or to generate a generalized hypothesis applicable to samples drawn from the same family of decision-making events.

4. Ethical and Legal Confrontations

Almost all law schools in the United States depend upon the case study as a primary means of instruction. Commonly referred to as the Socratic method, this process requires that students read and analyze court opinions. During class sessions, the teacher asks students to respond to a series of questions about the case under study and will often continue probing at length in an attempt to reveal the underlying principles of law embedded in the case.

In the business community, legal questions abound. And while attorneys are paid to distinguish between *legal* and *illegal*, executives must often struggle with the more difficult challenge of distinguishing between *legal* and *ethical*. Cases provide an excellent means for helping explore the nether world that often exists between "doing the legal thing" and the more challenging task of "doing the right thing." (We'll explore these issues in depth later.)

Writing the Case

As a general rule, the case research process and write-up should be organized in any way that contributes to the collection of relevant data and to the reader's understanding. Professor

John Quelch, formerly of the Harvard Graduate School of Business and a distinguished case writer, has noted some of the elements of a good case: "Basically, it needs a start, a middle and an end," and, he continues, "You also need an exciting problem and a sense of the personalities involved." Some examples follow.

1. Defining a Purpose

All good writing has a purpose. In case writing, the definition of purpose begins with the decision about the type of case to be written, but it doesn't end there. By definition, all cases are intended to be educational, but it's up to the writer to target and polish the educational thrust. The writer must decide the *functional purpose* of the case. A decision must be made early on about whether the case will be explanatory, descriptive, or exploratory. Below is a brief description of each type of functional purpose.

- *Descriptive cases* are narratives that provide a detailed account of a circumstance or situation. Descriptive cases convey information only; thus, the reader is free to use the information unconstrained by any pre-existing goals of the writer.
- *Explanatory cases* require that the writer assume the role of an expert and use that expertise to translate a difficult subject into a language accessible to the reader. Explanatory cases remove obscurity; they exist to make the difficult comprehensible.
- *Exploratory cases* invite the reader to tour new terrain. The writer assumes the role of a knowledgeable but unobtrusive guide. In these cases, the reader is left to explore and experience the case. Like a professional guide leading a white-water trip through the Grand Canyon, the case writer remains in the background, secure in the knowledge that all potentially dangerous contingencies have been identified and planned for in advance.

2. Finding a Case Site and Subject

The most difficult step in the case-writing process for novice researchers is dealing with the twin problems of finding the *case site* (an organization) and the *case subject* (a topic or theme). Most students are predisposed to think first in terms of finding a subject and then the site. This strategy is unlikely to work. In student case writing, where short semesters make time issues especially important, it's much more efficient to start with a site and then find a subject. The logic for this sequence comes out of recognition that organizations are, by definition, problem-solving systems. The problem is not a shortage of subjects. The real problem is an *overabundance* of subjects. By focusing on the site first, the researcher applies a first-level sieve useful for sifting out the finer-grained subject matter. Suppose, for example, that the objective is to write a case on organizational staffing. Under this model, the researcher would first find a cooperative organization. Because all organizations must be staffed, the search can begin for the focused subject of the case. The focused subject might be excessive turnover, overstaffing, affirmative action, or even executive compensation. The point is that every organization has staffing problems. It is incumbent upon the case writer to do a bit of background detective work and engage in some creative thinking.

For those without immediate access to a case site, the first step is to get a good lead, that is, someone on the inside who can provide access to the story of interest. The source might be someone you know, a friend of a friend, or even someone mentioned in the media. Most people are very helpful, so this process needn't be excessively onerous.

The key to case subject selection depends upon the successful answer to two basic questions:

- Is there a call for a significant decision in the situation described?
- At the end of the analysis, will the reader be able to respond to the question, What would you do?

3. "Selling" Yourself and the Idea

Once contact is made with a potential internal ally, it's time to prepare for some selling. When seeking cooperation, there are several ways to get the process off to a good start:

- Remind the party that this case-writing project has an educational purpose. Most people believe in education, and they like to help students do well in their studies.
- You can teach *them* something. Promise them a copy of the final product and invite them to discuss it with you during the development phase. There is a good chance that they will enjoy the experience of seeing an old problem through new eyes, and they might include the case in internal management development programs.
- There is the outside chance for favorable publicity associated with having the company and its managers profiled in a case. For example, the Harvard Business School has used its cases for years to showcase the accomplishments of its graduates.

4. Caveats

Be wary of trying to write the "inside story." Case writers are not investigative journalists; they do not need the sensational or salacious to sell their product. The case writer is trying to get the facts and use them to help explain the decision-making process.

The cases should tell the story of a real company. Works of fiction are a critical component of our literary culture, but you're not writing literature. Real companies and real facts are essential in case writing because the case is not a statement about an abstract business problem; *it is a problem in context*. By reporting on a real company experiencing a real problem, you are providing the reader with a means for experiencing the problem as a whole, with all the subtle variations and delicate distinctions that make the case unique and memorable.

Ethical Concerns

Ethical concerns in case research generally center around three issues: integrity (truth), privacy, and informed consent. These concerns apply to two primary audiences: the subject of the case and its potential readers. In most student-written cases, ethical concerns are relatively straightforward because much of the information used in the case will be drawn from public documents and because the topics addressed in the case will be generic enough to preclude sources of potential conflict. Nonetheless, there are certain ethical guidelines applicable to all case writing.

Integrity addresses issues of honesty, character, principle, and morality. Of these, the most important to the case writer is honesty. The writer's first obligation is to tell the truth. Truth is not only subjective in some cases, the whole matter is a bit of a slippery slope. Except for certain religious tenets one chooses to hold as absolute, there are no hard and fast rules for deciding truth. In case writing, truth means fidelity to the actual events being described. Truth is determined in large part by the degree to which a case accurately reproduces the facts, circumstances, and intangible qualities of the original event. Case writers have an ethical responsibility to their case subjects to report what actually occurred.

With respect to privacy, the case writer is responsible for the protection of sensitive information. Topics of particular sensitivity include company competitive information and individual personal information, for example, alcohol and drug problems.

Informed consent means that the case writer and the subject(s) of the study have reached an understanding about the purpose and use of the project and the risks involved. It implies that potential participants have been given sufficient information about what they are actually being asked to contribute and the uses to which that information will be put, so they can judge whether unpleasant consequences might result from disclosure. Simply put, managers may talk with you about a situation in their company only if you promise to give them anonymity; you may find that they'll be more forthcoming (truthful) in criticizing their workplace if they are not exposed to repercussions from superiors.

In summary, it is the case writer's ethical responsibility to *inform* participants fully about the *purpose* of the research, to explain *why* certain questions are being asked, and to answer any questions the respondent(s) may have regarding how the collected information will be used.

Releases

Organizations that write cases for commercial purposes routinely receive a formal release from the participating organization. There are two reasons for this policy:

1. It protects the subject company from publication of information that may, at the worst, be incorrect or, at a minimum, be misleading.
2. If and when the case is commercially published, a company release will protect the writer and sponsoring institution by providing written verification that permission has been granted to use the material in question.

Good sense requires that both student case writers and subject companies be aware of these precautions. While they're important, simply obtaining a release can put a chilling effect on potential research. The vast majority of student cases will not touch on topics requiring strict adherence to the formal release requirements for three reasons:

1. Most students will draw the greater portion of their information from published sources, so what they report in the case will have already been published and available to the public.
2. It is unlikely that a student project will be published. Most have only two readers: the person(s) who prepared the case and the instructor.
3. The subjects addressed in student reports typically do not address issues critical to competitive advantage or personal privacy. Student cases tend to focus on the "management fundamentals," that is, topics unlikely to serve as the basis for a potential dispute.

Nonetheless, student writers and their instructors must be aware of these issues and evaluate each project with reference to these guidelines.

Preparing the Case

1. Organization

As a general rule, a case should consist of a minimum of four primary parts:

1. The introduction, which outlines the issues and draws the reader's interest.
2. The background section, which provides insights into the broader context of events and forces surrounding the decision-making process.
3. The core analysis section, which contains information directly relevant to the decision at hand.
4. The appendixes, including any necessary notes, tabulations, calculations, references, etc., which are germane but which are too long or too technical to be included in the main body of the report.[*]

Remember, cases are not organized around chapters; they consist of a series of labeled subsections that, as a general rule, should not exceed two pages in length. The precise labeling and position of these subsections will, of course, depend on the subject matter. It is the author's responsibility to discover the natural divisions in the presentation. Headings should be short, informative, and directive; no key aspect of the case should be presented without calling the reader's attention to it through the use of a heading.

2. Collecting the Data

In the early phase of the case-writing project, the primary objective of the investigator is to get acquainted with the subject. Much of the early data-gathering consists of forming impressions that will later be refined or replaced. In the refinement phase, the researcher will collect information from both primary and secondary sources. And while secondary sources—newspaper and magazine articles, books, survey summaries, etc.—can be very

[*] Warning: Some student writers seem to think the value of their case will be gauged by the number of pages they submit and that twenty or thirty pages of appendixes are an excellent way to add to the length. Occasionally, significant amounts of supporting information may be necessary, but that is the rare case, not the norm.

useful in helping frame the issues, as we discussed earlier, every effort should be made to use primary sources. There is a wide range of primary data sources (SEC filings, annual reports, internal memos, interviews, etc.), all of which are distinguished by the fact that they have not been contaminated by the errors or biases of others. It's the case writer's objective to produce an original presentation of the facts. Relying too much on secondary sources of information dramatically increases the probability of error because information has been biased by the interpretation of unknown others. Many journalists say that a good rule of thumb is, "If you can't stand behind it, don't write it."

Because interviews are commonly a key data-gathering technique, it's critical to be mindful of the proverb that "truth is in the eye of the beholder." The case writer must stay in control of the process. The case belongs to the writer, not the person being interviewed. It is only human nature that the remembrance of past events be influenced by the motives and needs of the person experiencing the events. The interviewer does not have to assume automatically that the person being interviewed is trying to mislead or misdirect; most interviewees surely are not. But it's only prudent to hear with a "critical ear." It is the writer's responsibility to verify and check facts that are crucial to an accurate interpretation of the events related the case. The following insert provides several helpful strategies for conducting successful informational interviews.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is an effective tool in gathering information on relevant issues of the case. It can be one of your most valuable strategies in gathering information and in establishing contacts as you begin your information search. Like all other aspects of case writing and analysis, however, informational interviewing requires preparation.

I. Know What You Want to Accomplish

Before embarking on meeting people for informational interviews, students should spend sufficient time gathering information through extensive secondary research. Not only does this help define the problem under consideration, it also helps identify core issues and prepare target questions.

II. Conducting the Informational Interview

Before

- Research the organization under consideration.
- Learn about the person you will be interviewing.
- Define the problem and prepare a list of relevant issues.
- Prepare a list of questions you wish to ask for each relevant issue. List the questions in the order of importance. This helps in efficient utilization of the interview time.

During

- Initiate the opening conversation and set a relaxed tone.
- Use open-ended questions and allow sufficient time for complete answers.

– Carry a recording device or take careful notes of the discussion.
– Restate the purpose of the interview and your expectations.
– Be conscious of the time and adhere to the agreed-on time schedule.
– Be focused and guide the direction of the interview.
– Be a patient listener and don't be aggressive.
– Be prepared for the unexpected and be willing to explore.
– Request referrals to other individuals in the field or in related organizations.

After

– Prepare a detailed summary of the interview as soon as possible. Immediacy is essential for capturing the finer details of the interview.
– Evaluate the information received and compare it to the set objectives for the interview.
– Send a thank-you note and follow up with other referrals.
– Reflect on what you have learned about how to conduct a successful interview.

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3. Writing the Narrative

You can do an excellent job of research, but no one will know about it unless you are able to communicate it effectively. The well-written case report is your best insurance that the energy invested in research will receive the recognition it deserves. Here are some guidelines:

- The narrative should be written so that the reader experiences the situation as it unfolds. No business decision takes place in a vacuum. All decisions are part of a larger business climate that the writer has an obligation to try to capture in the case. Well-written case studies provide information on the outlook for the industry, the patterns of authority distribution, personalities and backgrounds of the key decisionmakers, and the cold hard facts that define the problem.

- The writer should not be an analyst. One word can make the difference between an objective description and biased interpretation of the facts. For example, suppose you write, "Mr. X decided to hold a strategic planning meeting." This statement is a neutral description of an objective fact. But if you write, "Mr. X unfortunately decided to hold a population planning workshop," your statement loses its neutrality. The single word *unfortunately* has changed the sentence from a description of fact to an expression of the author's opinion. Attention to these minor details is crucial because the writer selects and frames the material presented. In selecting facts for presentation, the written must continually guard against injection of personal values and beliefs. The writer must let the facts of the case tell the story; case facts should be reported as closely as possible to the terms used by the business executives and others in the case situation.

- The case must include *decision points*; that is, the case analyst should be provided with an opportunity to choose among alternative (and equally plausible) courses of action. The case writer may purposely choose to include distracters, much as the writer of multiple-choice questions includes alternatives to the correct answer. In this case, the distracters aren't meant to mislead; they are meant to help the analyst deal with the complexity of real-life decision making.

Table 1

Writing Hints	
Opening	It's critical that the reader's attention be captured early. A very popular and effective tactic is to begin with a brief vignette, such as an introductory sketch designed to draw the reader quickly into the case setting.
Style	Style is defined as the way an author puts sentences together, his or her choice of words and use of punctuation. No single style is best for case writing because cases necessarily vary depending on the subject matter and the purpose of the project.
Supporting exhibits	Most people are better able to grasp the essential nature of complex systems or the relative importance of statistical or financial data with a pictorial representation, rather than with an elaborate verbal explanation. Readers who lack the necessary technical background will often be able to grasp and interpret pictures and graphs correctly, even though the underlying mathematical information may be highly technical.
Dialogue	Use dialogue if it heightens the realism of the narrative. Actual quotes, if available, can be particularly effective at heightening realism.
Editing and rewrites	Expect to rewrite the case two or three times before final submission. It's not at all unusual for the second draft to be half the length of the first. See Appendix A of this guide for help with the revision and self-evaluation process.

4. Discussion Questions

As a general rule, include discussion questions in the final product and make them an integral part of the research from the very beginning. They're important for at least two reasons. First, they give the writer self-generated feedback about whether the case is on track. As discussed earlier in this manual, even the best cases are mere snapshots of a real situation. During the writing phase, the researcher must continually decide what to include and what to omit. Well-conceived discussion questions, developed early in the project, can act as a kind of riverboat pilot guiding and directing the writing and editing processes as they move through unknown waters.

The second reason is to help the reader use the case efficiently. In a very real sense, the discussion questions serve as a moderator between the writer and the reader. Good discussion questions guide the reader along a discovery path parallel to that of the writer. The objective is *not* to bring the reader to some predetermined conclusion; rather, the objective is to make sure that no important landmarks are overlooked during the journey.

After the Case Is Written

As previously discussed, SWIF Learning is designed to be an active process. The discussion questions that conclude your case report are critical because they engage the reader in the case experience. Having prepared the case, you recognize the complexity of the reported events. Important information had to be either underreported or left out entirely because of space limitations. Intricate issues had to be oversimplified and many of the subtleties that accompany real-life decision making were lost in the reporting process. And finally, events described in the case continue to unfold and new challenges appear on a daily basis.

The case you have prepared is a living document in the sense that its ability to generate fruitful conversations and new insights into how organizations work is almost unlimited. Assemble a new set of discussion participants and you have a brand new way of interpreting and responding to the events described in the case. Your experience with SWIF Learning has provided you with a powerful new set of skills for analyzing and understanding how organizations function. Continue to develop the research, writing, and thinking skills identified by the case-writing experience. Learning is a lifelong activity. In the end, *the case you are writing is your own.*

References

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Dontham, W. Annual report of the President of Harvard University. Cambridge, Mass.: Office of the President, Harvard University, 1941–1942.

Sources of Information for Case Writing and Analysis

The primary sources for case-study research are the university library and the World Wide Web. A summary of their resources is listed below.

The University Library

The typical university library provides a valuable collection of databases useful for both primary and secondary data collection on a company or industry. Some of the leading information databases are listed below.

1. Macro-Level Industry Information

- Standard and Poor's Industry Surveys Quarterly
- U.S. Industrial Outlook
- Value Line Industry Survey
- Corporate and Industry Research Reports
- Guide to the Economic Censuses and Related Statistics
- Market Share Reporter

2. Company-Level Information

- Moody's manuals for financial information
- Standard and Poor's corporation records, current issues
- Hoover's guides and handbooks on companies
- Dow Jones news retrieval
- Annual reports and other corporate documents
- SEC file
- EDGAR PLUS
- Stock brokerage reports (Investex, corporate, and industry research reports)

In addition to these sources of information, the library commonly provides an online database on industry and company related information. The ALADIN software, for example, provides a guided menu for exploring these databases. Two prominent sources on ALADIN are *ABI/Information* on business and management and the *Business and Industry* database. These databases provide search-driven abstracts and articles.

The World Wide Web

While the library provides ready access to large databases on the industry and companies, it has its limitations in providing detailed and updated information. Therefore, students should not limit themselves to the sources in the library. The World Wide Web is also an important source for detailed and updated information. The Web also provides relevant sites on case writing and research.

1. Popular Library Subscriptions

Library subscriptions to online databases often include:

a) Dow Jones (http://dowjones.com)
b) Lexis-Nexis (http://www.lexis-nexis.com)
c) Encyclopedia Britannica Online (http://www.eb.com)

2. Generic Business- and Industry-Related Web Sites

a) Annual Report Gallery (http://www.reportgallery.com): The site has links to annual reports of companies available on the Internet.
b) Central Banks on the World Wide Web (http://www.bis.org/cbanks.htm): The site is regularly updated with a list of links to web sites for the central banks of several countries.
c) Data on the Net-UCSD (http://odwin.ucsd.edu/idata): The site has hundreds of links to sources of social sciences data.
d) Economic Time Series (http://www.economagic.com/): The site provides links to a great many time series, mostly for the United States.
e) Edgar Plus (http://www.sec.gov/edgarhp.htm): This site contains financial reports of corporations that have been filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission in the past two years.
f) Hoover's Stock Screener (http://www.stockscreener.com/): This site allows you to screen stocks using up to twenty criteria simultaneously.
g) Morningstar Net Stock Screens (http://www.morningstar.com): This site allows you to screen over 8,000 stocks according to certain criteria.
h) OECD Statistics (http://www.oecd.org/statistics/): This site includes information about economics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

3. Human Resources and Organizational Studies Sites

a) American Society for Training and Development (http://www.astd.org)
b) HR Online (http://hronline.com)
c) SHRM (http://www.shrm.org)
d) Training and Development Resource Center (http://tcm.com/trdev)
e) Workforce Online (http://www.workforce.com)
f) Academy of Management (http://www.aom.pace.edu)

4. Prominent Sites on Case Writing and Research

Some of the prominent sites on case writing and research are the following:

a) North American Case Research Association: http://web.bentley.edu/empl/c/lchin/nacra/nacraindex.html
b) World Association for Case Research and Applications: http://www.agecon.uga.edu/~wacra/wacra.htm
c) European Case Clearing House: http://www.ecch.cranfield.ac.uk/
d) CaseNet: http://csf.colorado.edu/CaseNet/index.html
e) Case Studies for Politics: http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/casestud/

Appendix A

Self-Evaluation Checklist for a Case Study Report

1.	Is the report easy and interesting to read?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐
2.	Does it fit together? Does each sentence contribute to the whole?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐
3.	Does the report have a conceptual structure (i.e., themes or issues)?	Yes	☐	A little	☐	None	☐
4.	Are the issues developed in a serious and scholarly way?	Yes	☐	A bit	☐	No	☐
5.	Is the case subject adequately developed?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐
6.	Is there a sense of story to the presentation?	Yes	☐	Some	☐	No	☐
7.	Is the reader provided some vicarious experience of the actual events?	Yes	☐	A bit	☐	No	☐
8.	Have quotations been used effectively? Are they accurately transcribed?	Yes	☐	A bit	☐	No	☐
9.	Are headings, figures, artifacts, appendixes, and indexes used effectively?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐
10.	Has it been well edited? Has only essential information been provided, without distracting errors of punctuation and form?	Yes	☐	Needs work	☐	No	☐
11.	Has the writer made sound assertions, without over- or under-interpreting?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐
12.	Has adequate attention been paid to various contexts?	Yes	☐	Somewhat	☐	No	☐
13.	Were sufficient raw data presented?	Too much	☐	Just right	☐	Insuf-ficient	☐
14.	Were data sources well chosen and of necessary quality?	Well chosen	☐	Questionable	☐	Poor	☐
15.	Are the observations and interpretations consistent with one another?	Con-sistent	☐	Askew	☐	Incon-sistent	☐
16.	Has the role and point of view of the researcher remained sufficiently in the background?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐
17.	Is the nature of the intended audience apparent?	Yes	☐	Ambiguous	☐	No	☐
18.	Is empathy and attentiveness shown to all sides?	Yes	☐	So-so	☐	No	☐

Source: Adapted from Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage) 1995, p. 131.

Appendix B: Sample Disclaimer

This case was prepared by [student group], under the direction of Professor [name], as the basis for class discussion, not to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

Appendix C: Sample Letter to Cooperating Company

[Date]

[Receiver's Address]

Dear ________________,

I am writing to express appreciation for your cooperation and assistance in support of my case-writing research. The project is now complete, and I have prepared the attached case entitled ________________. I trust that it captures the important elements in the situation and, at the same time, avoids divulging any information that should be kept confidential. At this time, the case will be used to fulfill the requirements of my class ________________, but it may also be used for further instruction or published textbooks or case journals. Therefore, we request that you review it and note any corrections. Please sign and forward to me the attached letter to show that you have reviewed the case and find its use appropriate for educational purposes.

Cordially,

Case-Writing Guide