

PREPARING YOUR CASE RESPONSE

We use formal case studies as the basis for class discussions and assignments. The instructor provides questions for each case and those questions must form the basis of your response.

Assessment of your write-up is based on:

- Developing a well-articulated response to questions
- Accurate and appropriate use of literature
- Responses that are contextualized to the issues in case

Suggestions for preparing your case response

1) Use the discussion forum to better understand the case.

- a) Experience and research shows that preparing cases alone is not as productive (nor as much fun!) as doing it together. Not only do study groups help improve your own skills, you also can learn from other students' thinking and problem-solving styles.
- b) There is an open forum dedicated to this discussion and it is particularly valuable to share ideas in this forum. You are also encouraged to develop off-line study groups.
- c) Use the discussion forum to review key issues from the case, compare different perspectives, refine and rethink positions, and to practice articulating your ideas.

2) Read the case carefully

- a) *Peruse the case:* Quickly look at the case by reading the introduction and conclusion, and by skimming the rest of the contents. Now you know what you are getting into.
- b) *Quickly read the case:* Read the entire case rapidly, without underlining or highlighting. You now know the basic structure of the case and where the main information is.
- c) *Make a brief outline:* Who is involved in the case? What problems do they face? What is their situation like?
- d) *Set preliminary goals:* What do the study questions ask? What will it take to answer them? What issues in the course does the case involve?
- e) *Re-read the case:* Focus on the important information that was located during the skimming, and take initial steps toward answering to the questions posed for the case. Highlight, underline, or make marginal notes to organize the details and record new thoughts generated by reading.
- g) *Work the problems:* What issues are central to the problem? What conflicts between ideas, perspectives, or values are involved in deciding what action to take? What are the alternatives? Answer the specific study questions, using the relevant information from the readings and case. Make thoughtful assumptions about the information that is *not* available in the case.

3) The case write-up requires that you know the case well AND integrate the associated reading material.

- a) Answer the questions provided by the instructor.
- b) Each answer should comprise one or two coherent, well-written pages that really do answer the question. Many questions do not have a right or wrong answer. Credit will be given for answers that demonstrate thoughtful, careful reading of the case, originality, analysis, good writing and references to appropriate readings.
- c) It is critical to make substantive justification for your position. Justification entails blending the context of the case with readings and literature. Responses that rely primarily on the case are not sufficient.
- d) The questions are interrelated and it is important to consider how your response forms a coherent whole. Recognize that issues discussed or raised in earlier questions could be addressed in later questions.
- e) Essays are an *individual* project. Please do not share written responses with any other students. However, you can explore ideas and discuss your thoughts within the discussion forum.
- f) Essays will be evaluated on the basis of *both* substance and style. [Should your grammar inhibit my ability to understand what you are trying to say, you have a problem!] Hence, essays should be well organized; written in clear, coherent sentences and paragraphs; follow the common canons of good grammar (complete sentences, no split infinitives, appropriate use of commas, etc.); use only correctly spelled words. To be safe, it is usually best to proofread before handing in a paper.

The information above was modified from the Case Teaching Workbook, University of Washington, Electronic Hallway, developed Vicki Golick.

In addition to the advice above, here are some typical concerns I find when reading case write-ups. If you can address these issues you'll be in good shape.

Typical Feedback and Suggestions on Case Write-up

Too much case summary:

It is tempting to include too much information from the case. It is a difficult task to effectively extract just the pertinent information. Less is always better in these situations. Often people need to include more in initial drafts and then cut the "extra" material as they focus writing the response to the question. Summarizing the issues in the case is seldom an effective response to the questions. It is an aspect of what you need to do, but it is not the bulk of your response.

Respond to questions:

It is very important that you clearly respond to questions posed for the case. The questions are intended to focus your analysis on issues relevant to the course and assigned readings. Your response to the question should be clearly labeled in the paper. Effective responses briefly summarize the issue, reference relevant literature, and clearly articulate a reasoned *answer*. All too often students do not clearly state an answer to the question

Use headings

This paper is intended to be a concise analysis of the issues presented in the case. Liberal use of headings is highly desirable/necessary. I highly recommend using the questions as headings in your paper. Headings are used to guide the reader to each section of your paper and help you stay focused on your primary concern – a clear and thorough response to the questions.

Clear and effective writing

Papers often suffer from weak grammatical structure and ineffective writing. Some of the basic principles of topic sentences for every paragraph and paragraphs for every main idea are critical to developing a strong response. Take the time to edit your work and clarify what you are trying say.

The use of literature is inappropriate

Students provide some references, but they are not effectively woven into the basis of the argument and as a result the response tends to lose focus. It is an art to weave relevant literature into your response, but it is absolutely critical. Merely reflecting on the case and its implications without grounding from the literature is very problematic. Literature can help develop a substantive response.