Case Study: General

What is a case study or scenario?

A case study or scenario presents a 'real life' situation, accompanied by specific questions. Case studies assess your ability to:

- identify and apply relevant learned concepts and theories to a practical example (for example, use your course knowledge to analyse how a teacher interacts with students to determine their teaching style)
- use and interpret real-world data to complete calculations or solve problems (for example, analyse a company's transaction records and apply relevant accounting methods to calculate financial outcomes)
- demonstrate and apply course knowledge within a practical context by analysing information, evaluating options, and making evidence-based recommendations (for example, compare two diagnostic tools and recommend the most suitable option for a company described in the case study)

The key skill is applying learned concepts, theories, and knowledge to understand, analyse, and respond to a case study. In more complex scenarios, you may also need to identify problems, evaluate options, and develop appropriate solutions.

Responding to a case study: A four-step process

1. Understand the case
2. Recognise the issues
3. Develop recommendations
4. Structure a response

Step 1: Understand the case

When analysing a case study, break the scenario into smaller parts to make it easier to understand and evaluate.

1.1. Read and understand the case

Begin by reading the case carefully, then reread it to ensure you have not overlooked any important details. As you read, ask questions such as: *What happened? When did it happen? Who are the key stakeholders? Who was involved, and what actions did they take?* Make notes, highlight significant information, and record any details that may help you address the questions or problems presented.

1.2. Connect the case to your learned knowledge

Link the details of the case to relevant concepts, theories, and ideas from your course. Revisit key readings, lecture materials and learning resources to strengthen your understanding of the topic, then apply this knowledge to the scenario. To help, ask questions such as: *"What evidence of this concept can be found in the scenario?"* or *"How does this theory help explain what is happening here?"*.

1.3. Organise the information

Finally, organise the case details into categories to clarify your thinking and identify patterns. A **timeline** can help arrange events in chronological order,

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allowing you to see what happened, when it occurred, and who was involved. Alternatively, a **SWOT analysis** can be used to structure information by identifying the **Strengths** and **Weaknesses** (internal factors), and the **Opportunities** and **Threats** (external factors) relevant to the case. These tools can help you to better understand the situation and prepare for the analysis and recommendations that follow.

Step 2: Recognise the issues

A SWOT analysis (described above) can help you to identify key issues within a case study. Look for recurring themes, challenges, or behaviours and link them to relevant course concepts. Ask yourself: *"What course concept does this issue relate to?"* For example, a dissatisfied client may relate to 'conflict management', while business fraud may relate to 'white-collar crime' or 'organisational ethics'. Once identified, consider how the issues are connected, their causes and consequences, and whether they are likely to continue. A concept map can help visualise these relationships.

Step 3: Develop recommendations

A recommendation outlines a practical and targeted action that can be taken to resolve a problem. After reading and understanding the key issues in the case, draw on relevant course concepts, theories, and evidence to develop appropriate solutions. Brainstorm the strengths and limitations of each option, then select the solution most appropriate to the circumstances and most likely to achieve a successful outcome. Often, recommendations are where you draw on peer-reviewed literature and other credible sources to support and justify your proposed solutions. Using evidence in this way strengthens your argument and demonstrates that your recommendations are informed by research rather than personal opinion.

Step 4: Structure a response

When writing your response, follow a clear and logical structure that demonstrates your understanding of the case and your ability to apply relevant course concepts, theories, and evidence. Use information from the case and course materials to analyse the issues, support your conclusions, and justify your recommendations. Different disciplines may structure case studies differently; however, most include an introduction (providing background to the case), an analysis and discussion of the key issues, recommendations, and a conclusion.

Related helpsheets

- Mind Maps
- Writing an Introduction
- Incorporating Evidence

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