Writing a Case Response

A case response requires the writer to identify a problem in a hypothetical situation and recommend the best action to solve the problem. To respond effectively to a case, the writer must determine the questions the reader wants answered, analyze the problem, establish criteria for solving the problem, identify alternative solutions, and offer specific suggestions for implementing the best solution.

Case responses are a special kind of academic writing that is intended to be applicable to a wide variety of problem-solving situations that might be faced in the "real" world and are a very effective learning tool which requires the student to apply a broad array of theories, concepts, and techniques to analyze and solve actual business problems.

Strong thinking and decision making skills are required for successful case analysis, as well as the ability to take the kind of risks that managers face on a day-to-day basis. However, even the strongest analysis will be unsuccessful if it is not clearly presented in the written case response. The following guidelines are offered to assist the student with this task.

Goal of a Case Response

The primary goal of a case response is to recommend the best solution for the business problem presented in the case by applying case theory and personal experience/knowledge to that problem.

Audience Analysis

The primary audience is usually described in the case and requires the reader/writer to role play from the point of view of a direct participant in the case scenario. A successful case analysis will identify and meet the needs of this audience.

In addition to the primary audience, the needs and purposes of the secondary (real) audience must be considered. The secondary audience is the course instructor who "reads over the shoulder" of the hypothetical audience and looks to see that the student writer is displaying analytical abilities and knowledge of academic course concepts, vocabulary and readings.

Understanding your audience is essential to successful writing. To analyze your audience, your readers, consider the following factors:

- Educational background and English-language ability
- Knowledge and experience levels
- Concerns and characteristics
• Attitudes towards your purpose and information

Your understanding of your audience's reading ability and their knowledge of and familiarity with related concepts and terms will enable you to determine the extent and kinds of information that you should include in your writing. For example, if your audience is familiar with the subject matter and will readily understand terms and concepts, then you will not need to explain or define them. However, if your audience is not familiar with the subject matter or is not fluent in the English language, it will be important for you to explain the unfamiliar concepts and terms in a language, style, and tone that they will understand.

For the primary audience, determine his/her level of knowledge of and familiarity with the information and consider what relevant information and underlying assumptions are important for this reader to know and what will satisfy his/her needs. When assessing the needs of the course instructor as reader, look to the specific assignment instructions that accompany the case. The instructor will often be very specific in what she/he does and does not want to see as part of the case write-up.

Steps to Solve the Case Problem and Write the Case Response

In preparing to develop a solution for the case and write a case response, the writer should:

1. Determine the question(s) the readers want answered. Assess the readers and be sure to address the needs of both the primary and secondary readers.

2. Analyze the problem. Do this by reviewing the details of the case and the course materials relevant to the case. Search for specific clues and information that relate to each questions you have identified in #1 above. Determine possible solutions for the problem.

3. Establish criteria for solving the problem and evaluate alternative solutions based on these criteria. In your analysis of the problem and based on your opinion and knowledge, which solution will work and why? Which ones will not work and why?

4. Determine what information you need to write the response and how you should organize it. When writing your draft, you should identify the strategic issues and problems as well as analyze and evaluate the possible solution.

5. Support your proposed solution by providing supporting evidence and/or using examples to show the accounting concepts or relationships. How you arrange your support depends upon the reader's familiarity with your subject, their ability to follow your argument, and their attitude toward the problem. Supporting evidence and/or examples strengthen a case response by providing the readers with other ways of understanding technical relationships, concepts, and terms; by confirming information or explaining the content of the case; and by clarifying critical information applicable to a particular course of action or the proposed solution.
6. Make a recommendation or recommendations to the readers that explain to him/her the significance of your findings. In a case response, make your recommendation(s) where it will have the greatest impact on the readers, either at the beginning or end of your support section. In a memorandum format (for use within an organization), you should place your recommendation(s) at the beginning since readers of memos typically read the first few paragraphs, then scan the remaining sections for the information in which they are interested. You can repeat your recommendation(s) at the end to reinforce your argument. In a letter format (for use outside an organization), place your recommendation(s) at the end. Readers of letters typically read for understanding and/or clarification so present your findings, develop a course of action, and then conclude the response with your recommendation(s).

Final Suggestions on Case Response Writing

In writing your response, avoid the following errors:

• **Inadequate role playing.** Take on a role in the case and write from that point of view.

• **Poorly organized data.** Write concisely, coherently, and clearly when reporting information.

• **Failure to answer the question fully.** Be sure to address all parts of the assignment.

• **Ineffective integration of supporting materials/examples, outside readings and course content.** Demonstrate your knowledge and expertise by integrating information from all these sources fully in your case response.

• **Failure to provide supporting evidence and/or examples to substantiate your proposed solution.**

• **Use of irrelevant information in supporting your solution.** Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, address the underlying assumptions in the choosing a course of action, and avoid subjective interpretations that have no relationship to the case and the problem.

• **No conclusion or recommendation(s).** Be sure to recommend a course of action or solution and explain how the recommendation(s) meet the needs of and are beneficial to the reader(s).

As a writer, you should be aware of the characteristics of the different types of audiences (see Figure 1 for Audience Analysis) and how to satisfy the needs of each type of reader. For example, lay persons read for learning and interest whereas executives read to make decisions. When writing a case response, you must consider how well the readers will understand the words, concepts, and principles that you include in your response, but you must also decide what kinds of information these readers will need to order to satisfy the purpose of the case response. As you write your response, keep your audience in mind. Then choose the amount and level of content that fulfills your purpose yet satisfies your readers’ needs.

References:


