

## *Case study*

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### **Description**

The term ‘case study’ is used in distinct but related ways: one, as a research method, in which specific instances (‘cases’) of a phenomenon are determined at the start of a study and used to bound the unit of **analysis**; two, to report research **results**/findings. In both approaches, the written **genre** of case study often uses a narrative to situate and describe the research findings, then illuminates the findings in particular ways (Coffin et al., 2003). A case study can describe real-life accounts or fictionalized narratives based on real situations (Tight, 2010). They aim to engage the reader through the stories of research participants’ experiences (Sword, 2012). Multiple cases may be included to illuminate different dimensions of the findings from one study, often with cross-case analysis concluding the findings or **discussion** section (Yin, 2014).

### **Variations and Tensions**

The case study is often assigned in courses in applied disciplines (e.g., business and law) (Lapoule & Lynch, 2018). In business, a case study may also be called case report or case write-up (Nathan, 2013). A case study might report on an investigation of practice through a particular theoretical lens, for example, in different corporate contexts in order to compare contexts (Lapoule & Lynch, 2018). Students may read case studies to learn and write case studies to demonstrate their analytic abilities. The structure of such case studies may include four components: background, analytical framework, findings, and implications (Coffin et al., 2003).

When **drafting** case studies, like other research **reports**, writers often need to ensure the anonymity of research participants while providing sufficient information to establish rigor. For example, in the field of counseling, when basing a case study on an actual client, writers will change identifiers (e.g., demographic information, institutional context, geographical location) so

24 that the client is not recognizable (Scholl, 2017). This example comes from a case study on using  
25 a counseling approach related to social phobia:

26       The client (T.C.) was a single student in his early 20s who was self-referred to the  
27       counseling center at a medium-sized East Coast university. T.C. was the younger of two  
28       children, and his parents were married. The identifying information provided here has  
29       been limited to protect the student's confidentiality. Also, the pronoun *he* is used for  
30       uniformity but should not necessarily be interpreted to imply a male client. (Brady &  
31       Whitman, 2012, pp. 86-87)

32 Here, the authors restrict the amount of information they provide about the client and explain that  
33 the actual gender of the client may not be male.

#### 34 **Reflection Questions**

- 35       1. If case studies are used in your discipline, are they used as both a research method and a  
36       writing genre?
- 37       2. Have you read or written case studies? If yes, what was the structure of the cases?

#### 38 **Graduate Student Voice**

39       While reading a case study, I focus on the most important facts of the case. Overall, I find  
40       case studies easier to read and understand than many research articles because case studies use a  
41       storytelling approach. – Mahmoud Altalouli

#### 42 **For Further Reading**

43       Becker, B., Dawson, P., Devine, K., Hannum, C., Hill, S., Leydens, J., Matuskevich, D., Traver,  
44       C., & Palmquist, M. (2020). *Case study*. The WAC Clearinghouse.  
45       <https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/writing/guides/casestudies/>. This guide includes the  
46       types and uses of case study and provides examples.

47 Nathan, P. (2013). Academic writing in the business school: The genre of the business case  
48 report. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 12(1), 57–68.  
49 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2012.11.003> This article presents key aspects of writing  
50 business case reports, including the typical structure and format, citation, and the use of  
51 active and passive voice.

## 52 **References**

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70 Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Designs and methods*. SAGE.

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