

The One-Page Case Study: Facilitating the Use of Cases

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Abstract

Experiential learning opportunities increase students' motivation while developing their abilities to integrate and apply theory (Fronczak & Kelly 2000). There are multiple experiential learning methodologies: the focus here is the case-study. In the business context, case studies have proven to enable students to creatively apply theoretical and analytical skills to develop solutions for problems (Forman 2006). It is for these reasons the case-study method has become a gold standard in experiential learning. However, the practical challenge of using and grading case studies, especially in large sections, can be so overwhelming as to prevent their usage. The purpose of this paper is to detail the use of a one-page case study. The advantages of this method include 1) a shorter and more focused case to facilitate grading and 2) an outline that helps improve students focus on the recommendation.

The difficulty of implementing case studies is derived from the need for extensive exposure, rigorous preparation, and careful monitoring of solutions. Noting these difficulties and the lack of preparedness of many students to engage in the open-ended problem-solving process of the traditional case study, Klebba and Hamilton (2007) developed a program to improve students' case analysis effectiveness. Although effective, this is a multi-week, multi-case program that cannot be easily integrated into large class sections.

A key element to the Klebba and Hamilton (2007) process is teamwork. In fact, previous research has demonstrated that team-based learning develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills (MacGregor et al 2000). Based on these findings, the author predicted that an initial group case study would help develop students' case skills. Another concern noted by Klebba and Hamilton (2007) is the unstructured case analysis process can be overwhelming to students. Specifically, an unstructured case format often leads to students focusing too much on the situational analysis and not enough on the recommendation. This observation is supported by Wu and Law (2016) in their paper on MBA case writing skills. Reflecting on these findings, the author determined that a semi-structured case process that focused on recommendations might help focus students' analysis.

Drawing on previous research, the author designed, tested, adapted, and re-tested a one-page case format until the result was an effective one-page case format. The

written case instruction sheet and a sample case are shown next. Then, insights into the use of the one-page case method are discussed.

One-Page Case Instructions and Example Memo

Case Memo Instructions ~ Case Write Up	
<p>Professional communication is concise. Accordingly, the ability to make a persuasive argument in a single page is critical. This memo will require you to create a logical connection between facts and recommendations. Although content is critical, language is also important to persuasive writing. Both will be evaluated.</p> <p>Written Case Format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-page (max), 12-point Time New Roman font, 1 inch margins • Professional memo style, address memo to principal decision maker in the case (not the instructor). • 5 Headings (Problem/Solution, Problem Background, Basis of Recommendation, Recommendation, and Next Steps) should be included and each on a separate line. • Memos that exceed the page limit or do not comply with the format guidelines will have five points taken off. <p>Exhibits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits are required, should be referred to in the text, and should not contain content that belongs in the memo text itself. Two exhibits are necessary for full credit. • One exhibit must illustrate your SWOT analysis. • Exhibits should be created by YOU using data from the case—they should not be photocopies or reformatted replications of exhibits from the case. • Only use data/ information provided in the case to create exhibits (no online or other sources may be used). 	
Case Outline and Grading	
Problem/Solution: Problem definition reflects a critical concern in the case and is relevant to the class and current topic being discussed. This is followed immediately by a brief solution overview.	10
Problem Background: Highlights the key factors causing the problem.	15
Basis of Recommendation: Key analysis from your SWOT that highlights the reasons for the problem and suggests the effectiveness of the solution.	20
Recommendation: Overview and highlights of the recommendation. Ensure that the recommendation and next steps comprehensively solve the defined problem.	25
Next Steps – these are specific, actionable statements, that illustrate the how to of the recommendation. Any aspect of your implementation strategy (4Ps) that needs to be altered should be discussed.	15
Exhibit(s) impactful and support analysis/recommendation, referenced in text. One exhibit should illustrate your SWOT analysis. Two or more exhibits required for full credit.	15
	100

Case Memo Example	
TO:	Hilary Nolan
FROM:	Jonathan Trumbull (Mktg 614.001)
DATE:	September 14, 2016
RE:	Sergeant-Major's Pricing Strategy
Problem/Solution:	
Excessive discounting and price competition is eroding Sergeant-Major's profits, hurting brand equity and raising production costs. To address these issues, Sergeant Major's should move to an everyday-low price strategy.	
Problem Background:	
Flat growth in the dog-food industry and manufacturer overcapacity has created intense price competition in the market. The failure of retailers to fully pass through price discounts has reduced unit contributions without substantially increasing volume. Increased discounting (up to 15%) has eroded brand loyalty and threatens premium positioning.	
Basis of Recommendation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to take action now will lead to continued declines in profits and do long-term damage to our brand equity (See Strategy 1, Exhibit A). • Lack of a stable price structure increases the variability of demand for our products and production costs. • Alternative strategies risk alienating retailers and provoking competitors to undercut our prices (See Strategies 2a and 2b, Exhibit A). 	
Recommendation	
Sergeant Major's should stop discounting its products and switch to an everyday-low price strategy. In particular, Sergeant Major's should reduce its wholesale case price by 10% to \$16.65, eliminate promotional price discounts while holding other advertising expenditure constant (see Strategy 3, Exhibit A).	
Next Steps	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the sales force to educate retailers about the advantages of the new pricing policy. • In three months, lower the wholesale case price to \$16.65. • In three months focus advertising expenditures on informing consumers of the advantages of everyday-low pricing. • In six months, evaluate the effectiveness of the new strategy in terms of profits, brand equity and production costs. 	

The author has used the one-page case study at the undergraduate level. It is relevant to note that cases are not regularly used as part of the undergraduate curriculum. Consequently, it is common for over half the students to have not previously analyzed a case study. Given the percentage of students without previous case experience, an initial practice case is completed in groups. This team-based approach allows less experienced students to learn from more experienced students. Upon submission, the instructor leads the class in a traditional case discussion. Cases are graded and returned, and then, an individual case is assigned. Again, upon submission, the instructor leads the class in a traditional case discussion. Cases are then graded and returned.

Initially, the author compared the use of the one-page case study to a traditional open-ended case study within a course. Grades for the one-page case study were better than grades on the unstructured case study (M = 78, M = 85, respectively). Importantly, the instructor noted that time spent grading decreased by over 35%. Additionally, the author noted several improvements in case style including a more professional writing style and a better analysis with a more considered recommendation and implementation strategy. The author concluded that the one-page case structure reduced grading time and improved case writing.

Although the one-page case study was systematically tested, it was done so by a single professor with extensive case experience. Additionally, the testing was done predominantly on marketing students. Future research should duplicate these findings with a greater variety of students. The effectiveness of the one-page case study should also be tested using professors without extensive case experience.

Feedback is essential to the case process. Although the one-page case write-up reduced grading demands significantly, grading remains essential. Thus, this method helps reduce but not eliminate the grading demands on faculty enabling a faculty member to use cases in an effective and manageable format.

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Keywords: *case studies, experiential learning, concise writing*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners: The One-Page Case study is a semi-structured case analysis process that improves case writing and reduces grading time.

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TRACK: Marketing Education