

**POCKET STUDY SKILLS**

**Vanessa van der Ham**

# **ANALYZING A CASE STUDY**

## **ANALYZING A CASE STUDY**

# POCKET STUDY SKILLS

Series Editor: **Kate Williams**, Oxford Brookes University, UK

Illustrations by Sallie Godwin

For the time-pushed student, the *Pocket Study Skills* pack a lot of advice into a little book. Each guide focuses on a single crucial aspect of study giving you step-by-step guidance, handy tips and clear advice on how to approach the important areas which will continually be at the core of your studies.

## Published

14 Days to Exam Success  
Analyzing a Case Study  
Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and More  
Brilliant Writing Tips for Students  
Completing Your PhD  
Doing Research  
Getting Critical (2nd edn)  
Planning Your Dissertation  
Planning Your Essay (2nd edn)  
Planning Your PhD  
Posters and Presentations

Reading and Making Notes (2nd edn)  
Referencing and Understanding Plagiarism  
Reflective Writing  
Report Writing  
Science Study Skills  
Studying with Dyslexia  
Success in Groupwork  
Time Management  
Where's Your Argument?  
Writing for University (2nd edn)

## Pocket Study Skills

### Series Standing Order

**ISBN 978-0-230-21605-1**

*(outside North America only)*

You can receive future titles in this series as they are published by placing a standing order. Please contact your bookseller or, in case of difficulty, write to us at the address below with your name and address, the title of the series and the ISBN quoted above.

Customer Services Department,  
Macmillan Distribution Ltd,  
Houndmills, Basingstoke,  
Hampshire, RG21 6XS, UK

**POCKET STUDY SKILLS**

**Vanessa van der Ham**

# **ANALYZING A CASE STUDY**



palgrave

© Vanessa van der Ham 2016

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2016 by  
PALGRAVE

Palgrave in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave is a global imprint of the above companies and is represented throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-1-137-56620-1 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>vi</b>	<b>Part 3 Analyzing the case</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>vii</b>	10 What are you trying to find out from the readings?	43
<b>Part 1 Understanding case study assignments</b>	<b>1</b>	11 Selecting relevant readings	44
1 What is a case study?	1	12 Applying theory and research to the case	47
2 What will my assignment involve?	4	13 Diagnosing underlying causes of problems	53
3 Reading the assignment brief	7	14 Discussing best practice	72
4 What if I have to find my own case to analyze?	14	15 Brainstorming solution options	82
<b>Part 2 Reading the case and making notes</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Part 4 Selecting a solution</b>	<b>85</b>
5 Reading with a critical mindset	17	16 Evaluating solution options	87
6 Identifying key facts/issues in a case	19	17 Justifying your solution	92
7 Formulating your aims and objectives	29	18 Developing an action plan	94
8 Interrogating the facts	31	<b>References</b>	<b>97</b>
9 What if there's information missing from the case?	34	<b>Useful Sources</b>	<b>98</b>
		<b>Index</b>	<b>99</b>

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the students at Massey University who've shared their case study assignments with me over the years. Your questions, concerns and insights helped to generate many of the ideas for this book. Thank you also to my colleagues and friends for their assistance with researching the book and for critical review – particularly Jane Terrell, Jenni Beckett, Lisa Stewart, Fiona Diesch, Lynn Randall and Jay Smith. Thanks also to Massey University for permission to use my Moon Dust case study and notes.

Special thanks to Kate Williams, Helen Counce and Georgia Walters for their advice and encouragement. Thanks also to Sallie Godwin for her fabulous illustrations that contribute so much to the book, and to Maggie Lythgoe, copyeditor, and the editorial and production teams at Palgrave for making the book happen.

Finally, a huge thank you to Mark for all his support and feedback during the writing process.

# Introduction

Case study assignments have become a regular feature in university courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study.

The thinking behind using case study assignments is that you get a deeper understanding of the theories, concepts and strategies being taught on the course if you actually *use* them instead of just reading about them. So, your tutors give you descriptions of real-life situations or ‘cases’, which fit with the material being taught in the course, and ask you to apply your understanding of this material to analyze the situation in the case.

A case study assignment might ask you to:

- ▶ **Provide a solution to a problem:** Speech and Language Therapy students, for example, are asked to design an intervention programme for a client with a particular condition.
- ▶ **Provide an explanation for *why* something happened:** Engineering students might be asked to provide a group report explaining why a particular building collapsed during an earthquake.

This book concentrates mainly on cases requiring a solution to a problem but much of the advice can also be applied to cases requiring an explanation for why something happened as well. In both situations, your tutors are looking for an analysis of the **causes** of the problem. Without a clear understanding of causal factors, any solution is likely to fail.

If engineers don't have a clear understanding of **why** buildings fail to stand up to earthquakes, they are likely to make the same mistakes in designing new structures.

Answering the why questions is really what case study analysis is all about:

- ▶ **Why** is this happening/has this happened?
- ▶ **Why** would my proposed solution work?

And answering these questions involves providing a **critical analysis** of the situation using what you're learning in your coursework.

Don't be intimidated by the term 'critical analysis' here. You use critical analysis all the time to solve problems in your own life. For example, you go for a few job interviews and don't get the job. So you start asking the why questions and trace back the reasons or causes for your failure to get the job. Was it the clothes I was wearing? My CV? The interviewer's attitudes? And maybe you go online to consult the experts in interviewing techniques (recruitment agencies perhaps) and then

compare what you've been doing with what they say you *should* be doing – best practice in interviews. In this way, you're critically analysing the interview situation in the light of what the experts say, drawing your conclusions about what you're doing wrong, then working out solutions to your problem, weighing up these solutions (suit/no suit?) and deciding on a course of action.

And that's pretty much what you'll be doing in case study assignments – except that the expertise you turn to for answers to the why questions will be the theories, concepts and strategies from your coursework.

This book will take you step by step through the process and provide suggestions for dealing with some of the main concerns students have shared with me in answering case study assignments:

- ▶ How do I identify the most important facts in the case? There's so much information!
- ▶ What do I do when there's information missing from the case?



- ▶ How do I know which theory and concepts to apply to the case? There are so many of them in the textbook!
- ▶ The tutor keeps telling us to make sure we're analyzing the case instead of just describing it. What does she mean? How much of the case should I include in the analysis?

The book uses sample case study assignments throughout to illustrate advice provided on these and other concerns.

# UNDERSTANDING CASE STUDY ASSIGNMENTS

## 1

## What is a case study?

You may have seen cases used as examples in textbooks. The cases are descriptions of real-life situations or events and they're included to help students understand theoretical principles by seeing them *applied* in real-life situations.

You'll find that tutors are using cases more and more in their teaching, not only as examples, but as the basis for classroom activities and assignments. The tutor provides a case that mimics a real situation you might encounter in the workplace and you apply what you've learned in the course to study (analyze) the situation.

So:

- ▶ A **case** is a real-life situation or event
- ▶ A **case study** is an analysis of that situation or event using course materials.