Guide to the Case Analysis and Business Writing in General

For the case analysis, please use the Guide to Case Analysis. Please note that there is no page requirement. In the business world, there is no page requirements for reports. Rather, it is up to the individual writing the report (in this case, you) to astutely judge what the appropriate page length is.

A report can be too short if it leaves out key details, does not cover the whole intended scope of the report, or presents information in bullet points rather than full sentences. A report can be too long if it is redundant, covers issues outside the scope of the report, is excessively wordy, or otherwise adds unnecessary material. In a business, a report that is too long will not be read. If someone requested the report and it is too short, they will tell you to go back and answer the question fully. Finding the appropriate balance takes practice and revision, but it will yield dividends for your career.

The report should also be well-structured. Unless you are writing a quick memo or briefing that is one page or less, structure means not only organizing the material in a coherent and sensible manner, but also creating sections and headers. You can look at the structure of the Guide to Case Analysis for ideas, and you may ask me (Bryan) about how to properly organize your report if you would like. Note that there are essentially two schools of thought for organizing a written work. One is to begin with the key takeaways and then write decreasingly relevant support (some call this newspaper style). Another is to begin with an introduction and background and build to the conclusions (some call this traditional style). A popular compromise in the business world is to write reports that have a summary/key findings section before a traditional-style paper that begins with an introduction and builds but may or may not include a conclusion at the end. Regardless of how you write, make sure you use your structure to engage, guide, and inform your reader.

Grammar and syntax are critical. A poorly written sentence causes the reader to stop and reread and work to understand. Good grammar and syntax are like good referees in sports – everyone complains when it’s bad, but no one notices when it’s good. Make sure your reader is thinking about your content, not your grammar.

Finally, there are some things you should absolutely never do in business writing. One is using first-person wording. That means not using “I,” “We,” “Me,” “Us,” “My,” “Our,” etc. [The exception is in emails, when clearly this is necessary. Even there, minimize it.] It is also important to not use informal language, which includes contractions. Do not use “don’t.” Other informal language is much more difficult to single out, but it is important to think about whether this sounds more appropriate at a dinner with friends or in a meeting with the top executives of your company. See the slides for a pair of examples.