# HOW TO DO A CASE STUDY

A case study is an inquiry into an event by either an individual or an organization. It is produced through systematic research, analysis and reporting. Case studies cite professional or scientific sources and they are often used in developing new procedures or improving organizational operations and services. They are designed to ask the questions “how” and “why” of an event, procedure or phenomena. If you are about to begin a case study, it is important that you devote plenty of time to accurate data gathering and analysis. Case studies can take place over a few weeks to a few years.

## 1. Develop your research question.

This may be given to you in advance by a professor or employer, or you may develop it on your own. Make sure the question is specific and can be analyzed by scientific or modern research methods.

- Do not choose a question that is inherently subjective. For example, instead of a question like "What is the favorite social media website for people aged 18 to 20?" you may want to use "What is the most visited social media website for people aged 18 to 20."
- Case studies are classified into different categories. An instrumental case study will seek to find a deeper understanding into a question. A collective case study analyzes cases in order to find understanding about a phenomenon. An intrinsic case study looks more deeply into an already established case.

## 2. Map out the protocol, strategy or structure for the case study.

This will allow you to create an outline for how you will start at your question and end with a well-thought-out paper. The following are sample steps in a case study strategy.

- Develop a purpose and rationale for the case study. Create 4 or 5 bullet points that you intend to answer, if possible, in the study. Consider perspectives on approaching the question and these bullet points.
- Decide how you will collect data. Depending upon the question, you may want to consider 1 or more of the following data collection processes: report collection, Internet research, library research, interviewing scientists or research subjects, other fieldwork and mapping concepts or typologies.

Using more than 1 data collection process will add authority and accuracy to your case study.
- Describe the entire case and then analyze it systematically. This will require time and a word processing program. You should become familiar with citing sources. The process should include a step that confirms interviews or findings before it is published.

**3. Create your interview or research questions.**

They should each aim to work through a portion of your question. This is especially important if you plan to interview experts and/or research subjects.

- Make sure that each question you ask is a question that cannot be answered with a yes or no answer, unless you are confirming identity or participation. For example, "What changes have been made to improve this process?" rather than "Did you make changes to improve the process?"
- These questions can also be in statement format, such as "Please explain how the current procedure was developed."

**4. Collect your data over a period of weeks or months.**

Make sure to take your time to ensure you have ample data when you need to analyze and respond to the research data. Research new avenues only if they apply directly to the case study question you are asking.

**5. Collect all of your data in 1 place and analyze it.**

After reading and referring back to your original bullet points, you may find that the data reacts in a surprising manner. You need to pull your information together and focus it before writing case studies.

- If you are working with more than 1 person you will want to assign sections for completion together to make sure your case study will flow. For example, 1 person may be in charge of making charts of the data you gathered, while other people will each write an analysis of 1 of your bullet points you are trying to answer.

**6. Write your case study into a narrative.**

Unlike scientific studies, a case study is created to be used across fields. It should provide a beginning, middle, end and theme that can be understood by people with intimate or cursory knowledge of the subject.

- Begin by describing the research question in your introduction. It can be referred to as a problem or mystery that needs to be solved.
- Explain the setting and the key players that will be referenced throughout the paper. Include any information that needs to be defined or background that should be given in order for the reader to understand the data analysis.
- Continue the narrative in sections explaining your research methods and the results of your research. Include charts, graphs, photos or any other explanatory devices that will give the reader a better understanding of your research.
- Detail questions that your research raised or potential problems.
- Write a conclusion that details the hypothesis that attempts to answer the research question. You must make sure that you suggest a theory, not a factual answer about what you have found. You may also want to suggest further avenues of study that would help to continue research on the subject.

**7. Proof and fact check your case study.**

If you are using quotes from sources or data from an unreliable source, you should attempt to find a better source or remove it.

- This is sometimes called “establishing rigor.” Make sure your case study is credible, transferable, verifiable and dependable.