**Evaluating a Case Study**

**Using the 5 Elements of *Writing at Fontbonne***

T

he first element of writing is **Focus**, which means the concentration or emphasis on a subject or objective. **Focus** may be addressed in the following terms: objectives of assignment, thesis, argument, main point, central theme, conclusions, or recommendations.

What is the **focus** of a case study and how is it evaluated?

Essentially, there are two types of case studies: analytical, which identifies a problem and analyzes why a problem occurred, and problem/solution, which identifies a problem and provides one or more solutions to the problem. However, within these broad areas of focus are subcomponents of a case study, all of which contain a specific focus, for instance, providing company background, conducting a SWOT analysis, or comparing/contrasting solutions, all of which are identified through section headings.

In order to determine whether or not the assignment meets the **focus** or to what degree it meets the **focus**, ascertain if the assignment meets both the broad and the section **focus** for the assignment.

T

he second element of writing is **Development**, in other words, support and/or elaboration of the **focus**. **Development** may include explanation, description, analysis, narration, exploration, source material or data use, or methodology discussion.

How is **development** assessed in a case study?

The *analytical case study* is **developed** by providing evidence for the identification of the problem, which could be in the form of data, analysis provided by experts, or in other ways, and by establishing essential rationale for the reasons why the problem exists. The *problem/solution case study* is **developed** by providing evidence for the identification of the problem, which could be in the form of data, other analysis, etc., and by supporting the solution through evidence and rationale.

To determine the degree of development, evaluate use of evidence and degree of rationale provided. If the case study provides minimal amounts of either, then it would lack **development**.

T

he third element of writing, **Organization**, applies to the coherent order and grouping of material. **Organization** may be addressed in the following terms: overarching structure, paragraph structure, or use of transitions.

How is **organization** employed in a case study and how is it evaluated?

In a case study, there exists an **overarching structure,** a **section structure**, and a **paragraph structure**, all of which can be evaluated. In the overarching structure, the writer will include all sections of the assignment as indicated by the assignment prompt/instructor guidelines using the same **organizational** plan that the prompt provides. Within the sections, the student will provide appropriate **focus** and **paragraph organization**, which should minimally consist of a topic sentence that indicates the focus (summary or analysis), supporting details/evidence that support the **focus**, transitions linking ideas together, and a concluding sentence. Further, some sections will be divided into two or more paragraphs.

If a student doesn’t provide an **overarching structure** and a **section structure**, then the **organization** suffers. If a student shifts focus within a section, for instance, providing a solution in the identification of the problem section, then the **organization** is problematic. If the student fails to connect points through appropriate transitions within the paragraphs, then the **organization** is not as strong as it could be. Keeping the **overarching, section, and paragraph structures** in mind will help you to evaluate **organization**.

T

he fourth element of writing is **Style**, which is the tone conveyed toward material and/or audience. **Style** may be implemented or be evaluated through the following means: word choice, sentence structure, voice, or persona.

How is **style** evaluated in a case study?

Regarding **style**, it would be appropriate to use academic diction and 3rd person point of view—not 1st person point of view—in a case study assignment. Sentence structure should also be evaluated in order to ascertain if there are clear and varied sentences. Further, if the point of view shifts, or the diction is problematic due to slang or incorrect word choice, then the **style** suffers.

T

he fifth element of writing—**Conventions**—is adherence both to standards of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and to discipline-specific rules of formatting and citation. For example: APA, MLA, AP Style, or other style guides.

Which **conventions** are utilized in a case study and how are they assessed?

Regarding **conventions** as it relates to grammar & usage, a student should use appropriate **conventions** for both the assignment and the discipline. For instance, it would not be appropriate for a student to write in fragments or use run-ons (grammar) or to adopt nonstandard capitalization (usage) in the assignment. Using discipline-specific terminology would also support **conventions.** Systems of documentation are also a part of **conventions**, so students should understand the rules related to citing in-text citations and other formatting rules—use of and style for headings—for a system of documentation appropriate to the discipline, which is usually APA for case studies.

In order to evaluate **conventions,** the instructor may wish to evaluate grammar/usage and system of documentation separately, especially if the student is following appropriate standards in one area but not in the other area. Regarding grammar/usage, those errors that impede clarity or detract from **style** would be more significant than errors that don’t hinder clarity or lessen style. Regarding employing a correct system of documentation, the most significant area to focus on would be inappropriate use of sources possibly resulting in plagiarism.

***If you have questions or concerns***, please contact Teresa Sweeney, M.F.A., Writing Specialist, Kinkel Center for Academic Resources, via email at [tsweeney@fontbonne.edu](mailto:tsweeney@fontbonne.edu) or phone at 314.719.3608.