

Recruiting the Case Writers

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Abstract

Case writing is a different art, the art of sharing the real-life situations through written cases. Readers of the case will be able to learn about the issue(s) and people contained in the case without having to be in the organization and interacting with the relevant people. Problem-solving or decision-making case study requires the reader to understand the scenario and respond to the guided questions. In this case study, Yasin Yahya, approached his peers and former students to write case studies independently or jointly. He adopted a few methods to encourage his targets to understand the basic characteristics of problem-solving case studies and start writing. He would be serving as a resource person, coach, and editor for each case. His efforts for a few months do not show positive outcomes. Being a new learning tool, even experience instructors need time to try. Readers are asked to evaluate which among the four methods Yasin used might be able to help his peers produce case studies for teaching purposes.

Keywords: Case writing, Coaching, Communication, Training

Abstract

Case writing is a different art, the art of sharing the real-life situations through written cases. Readers of the case will be able to learn about the issue(s) and people contained in the case without having to be in the organization and interacting with the relevant people. Problem-solving or decision-making case study requires the reader to understand the scenario and respond to the guided questions. In this case study, Yasin Yahya, approached his peers and former students to write case studies independently or jointly. He adopted a few methods to encourage his targets to understand the basic characteristics of problem-solving case studies and start writing. He would be serving as a resource person, coach, and editor for each case. His efforts for a few months do not show positive outcomes. Being a new learning tool, even experience instructors need time to try. Readers are asked to evaluate which among the four methods Yasin used might be able to help his peers produce case studies for teaching purposes.

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Yasin Yahya has been a co-author for several case studies. During the past 15 years, he edited and revised field case study assignments of a few of his former students in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management courses and incorporated these as part of the end-of-semester examination. He never published those cases in case study journals.

He started to publish joint case studies in a university case studies journal since the past eight years.

Case studies are not new to Yasin. His first exposure to case studies occurred during his undergraduate years. His graduate education also gave case studies as part of the academic assessment. It was in the Strategic Management course in both the undergraduate and graduate programs that Yasin learned through case method. His former instructors who graduated from ivy league business schools adopted case teaching method in the Strategic Management course. They used the Harvard Business School cases in the courses. The instructors alternated between lectures and case analysis every week. The cases were relatively long, amounting to almost the length of a book chapter.

Yasin enjoyed the case method approach as a student and proved competent in his course work and class discussions. He did not sit for the typical written examination in the classrooms for the case-based courses. He attended lectures, submitted a report on each lecture. He submitted the case analysis report every week and participated in the case discussion. The instructor gave no participation mark for students who remained idle in the classes.

When he became an instructor, Yasin did not actually replicate the case teaching method that he was exposed to during his student days. He taught mostly local students who tended not to engage actively in case discussions. Based on this background, Yasin adopted light case discussions in his classes.

Yasin was zealous to encourage his colleagues in the same and other faculties in the same university and former students to write independently or co-write with him problem-solving or decision-making case studies. He also communicated with his former colleagues and students overseas. Since September 2023 until the first week of December the same year, Yasin communicated with 15 target case writers. After his initial briefing on case writing, face-to-face and online, Yasin would send WhatsApp reminders to his targets.

Yasin observed that the people that he approached wanted to contribute a case study but their first attempt to learn the type of academic work could not compete with their more important daily chores. For the instructors, they had to manage their daily classes, giving lectures, marking assignments, giving, and marking the tests and mid-semester exams, attending meetings, and participant in their joint-research activities. For the students, submitting their compulsory assignments and preparing for their classes and exams takes a priority.

The instructors are familiar with cases during their student days. They also use cases with the students. The only difference is they have not written case studies due to lack of encouragement and experience.

Yasin adopted several approaches to brief his targets about the case study type and the steps to go through to collect and process the data and compose the field-based case in the form of storytelling essay. He did not explain much about the case writing conventions that may be

read in select guidance papers (see Exhibit 1). He also did not disclose the list to his target writers.

Exhibit 1 References on Case Writing

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<https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/1544-9106>
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<https://journals.iium.edu.my/ijcsm/index.php/jcsm>
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The different approaches of case writing that Yasin used are explained below.

Model 1

Explanation on case study writing with field-based data

Think of a problem that you have faced, or someone has faced and requires a solution. The problem might happen in the past, is current or will likely happen in the future.

Gather or recall information about something that you are familiar with.

Write on a piece of paper, or type in your laptop the following:

Describe in a few sentences the problem, issue, dilemma faced by a person.

Describe the actor.

List points related to the problem, the person, people who are directly related to the problem, his department, his organization.

Assemble related points under a 'working' subtopic.

If you think you have gathered adequate points, you may start composing.

After describing the above, Yasin requested the target writer to provide the facts. He types the writer's description on-the-spot. Before parting, he sends the file through WhatsApp so that the writer will compose the draft later.

His briefing took place between 10 and 30 minutes, to 60 minutes.

Model 2

Explanation on case study writing with field-based data as File 1

This briefing model attempts to relate the proposed case with the *The IIUM Journal of Case Studies in Management* (IJCSM) that requires the online submission of three related MS Word files.

File 1 – (a) Case title, (b) Abstract and keywords, (c) Body of the case, and (d) Discussion questions.

File 2 – Teaching notes: (a) Courses that may adopt the case and rationale; (b) Discussion questions and suggested answers.

File 3 - (a) Case title, (b) Name of author(s), (c) Organizational affiliation, (d) E-mail address, (e) * *Corresponding Author*, (f) Abstract, and (g) Keywords

Yasin emphasizes that the writer ignores (a), (b) and (d) in gathering the information. After the information is gathered and organized, writing the body (c) will be easy. The discussion questions (d) will be created by referring to the body of the case.

Model 3

Explanation on case study writing with field-based data as File 1 and sample published cases

This briefing model repeats Model 2 and explains the structure of two sample published cases in the *The IIUM Journal of Case Studies in Management* (IJCSM). The first case is based on field information, whereas the second case is based on the literature.

Yasin encourages the writer to write the field-based case because he thinks it can be composed in a story form, interesting and natural. The literature-based case seems to resemble a scholarly work which academics are familiar with.

Budi Sejahtera, Reliance and Resilience at Mak Teh Enterprise

IIUM Journal of Case Studies in Management: Vol.14, No.1, January 2023, pp.32-36

ISSN: 2810-2327 e-ISSN: 2710-7175

Received: 31 December 2022 Revised: 13 January 2023 Accepted: 28 January 2023

Integrating ‘Sejahtera’: A Holistic Approach at Agoda

IIUM Journal of Case Studies in Management: Vol.14, No.1, January 2023, pp.27-31

ISSN: 2810-2327 e-ISSN: 2710-7175

Received: 30 August 2022 Revised 3 November 2022 Accepted: 3 December 2022

Model 4

Explanation on case study writing with W format

“W” refers to the journalistic line of questions – What, Who, When, Why, and How?

Yasin shows the format below to the writer and explains the items accordingly. He uses either pen and paper or his laptop to illustrate.

Exhibit 2 Model 4 Case Writing

<p>? SWIFTEST GUIDE TO WRITE A problem-solving case study ?</p> <p>STEP 1 State a problem in a few sentences.</p> <p>STEP 2 Next, write briefly on each of these questions?</p> <p>What</p> <p>When</p> <p>Who</p> <p>Who</p> <p>Where</p> <p>How</p> <p>STEP 3 With the 'answers' provided ...</p> <p>STEP 4 ... I will ask related questions to help you provide additional points, if</p>

necessary.

With the cumulative info/points, you can start writing the case study.

STEP 5

The approach is adopted for learning by doing instead of giving explanations on the case writing conventions. etc

I will review, edit, and exchange the working Word file with you, *insha Allah*.

Coaching Model

Yasin tested a few models on different targets with the objective of facilitating the prospective case writer to produce a draft based on the information available or to be gathered. He thinks briefing on 'theory', conventions, concept, guidelines, and the do's and don'ts will make the writers apprehensive.

Yasin used Google Meet to discuss with his target writers in the same university, other universities, within Malaysia and outside.

He believes that if a writer has produced relevant facts on the working draft, he can guide the person to compose. This is like learning *while* doing or learning *by* doing. He could impart some advice on case writing conventions while reviewing and editing the draft in progress.

In fact, there was a writer who produced similar scholarly like versions, not the story like case study briefed earlier.

Another writer has provided paragraphs under some subtopics for a literature driven case study. But the writer has not incorporated supporting secondary data and expands the draft yet.

Writers who are pursuing studies requested postponement of their draft for review. This is because they have deadlines for assignments and tests. Full-time instructors could not submit due to work commitments.

Interestingly, a first timer who has never studied business or management was able to submit drafts within three days and requested to submit his pre-final draft 2 days later due to assignments and tests. The target went through Model 4.

Case Writing Conventions

Yasin did not explain much about case writing conventions. However, he conveyed some of the points during the briefing, follow-ups, and when he was reviewing the draft.

He said to the writers to produce a 3000-word case, approximately 5 pages of A4, Times New Roman, 12-point font size, and single-line spacing. Yasin conveyed information about case conventions more orally than in writing, see Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3 Select Case Writing Conventions

<p>Problem or decision-focus</p> <p>At least one decision-maker</p> <p>Provide background information</p> <p>Include facts</p> <p>Retain only inter-related information</p> <p>Write in past tense</p> <p>Avoid using full proprietary information, utilize the gist</p> <p>Create enhancements, e.g., dialogue, exhibits</p> <p>Create sub-topics</p> <p>Consider the draft as tentative until finalized</p> <p>End but do not conclude</p> <p>Disguise the final version of the case study</p>

It is the first week of December, Yasin decided to write a case himself. He could fill in if his faculty's case journal is short of cases for the next issue.

He enjoys interacting with the prospective case writers because this gives him the opportunity to learn about their commitment, the current engagements, the personal and family challenges they face, and the fact that they decide when to start writing their cases.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What might be the motivation of Yasin to launch his case writing campaign among his colleagues and former students? Could you please suggest one factor with his colleagues, and another factor with his former students? Discuss.
2. In your opinion, which consumes less time for a writer, writing a case study or an academic (scholarly paper) that is based on the literature (without using questionnaire, time series)? Why?
3. If you desire to write a case study, which among the four methods do you prefer and why?
4. Do you think based on the contents of the case study, you are confident to write a case study independently without the face-to-face assistance or/and online discussion with coaches like Yasin? What is your opinion?
5. What might be the feeling of a person who uses his own created case and a case authored by others in class teaching?