

Common Problems in Case Analysis Papers

Writing Like We Talk

Some of us write like we talk (maybe this is an effect of “e-mail”). This gives a “rambling effect” to the paper

- e.g., beginning a sentence with “Well, now the employer must . . .” or “Now to fill the position, the employer must . . .”

Grammar and Punctuation

In the past, I have focused on grammar and punctuation so much in some papers that the analysis gets lost.

- Use proper punctuation
- Use vocabulary that is meaningful and explanatory
 - e.g., say “tremendous explosion” rather than “a really big and loud explosion”
- Use paragraphs to separate thoughts, or the paper is difficult to follow
 - You may use several paragraphs to answer one question
 - Don’t assume that you need only one paragraph to answer one question
- Verb tense
 - Maintain the same verb tense throughout the paper
- Person
 - Don’t mix 1st person and 3rd person in the same paragraph.
- Separate prepositional phrases used at the beginning of a sentence from the remainder of the sentence by using a comma.
- Please make your pronouns agree with your nouns. Below I have provided a typical example of what I find on many papers in my Principles of Management course.
 - “A secretary could enrich their job with skill variety and feedback.”
 - “A salesperson has lots of autonomy. A salesperson is not going to be reprimanded if they are selling a large amount of their product and they aren’t working as many hours as other salespeople.”
 - ♦ The problem in both of the instances above is that the subject in each sentence is singular, but the pronoun (their or they) is plural. We speak this way, but this isn’t proper English. There are two ways to handle this problem. First, you could simply decide if the salesperson or secretary is going to be male or female and then be consistent. For instance:
 - o “A salesperson has lots of autonomy. She is not going to be reprimanded if she is selling a large amount of her product and she isn’t working as many hours as other salespeople.”
 - ♦ You could also get around the problem by using plural nouns instead of singular nouns. For instance:
 - o “Salespeople have lots of autonomy. They are not going to be reprimanded if they are selling a large amount of their product and they aren’t working as many hours as other salespeople.”
 - *Whatever you decide to do, please be consistent!*

- I have one other piece of advice. A company is “singular.” Therefore, do not write the following: “The company 3M allows their employees lots of freedom to invent products.” Any company or organization (e.g., 3M, Wal-Mart, MSUB, etc.) is singular, so you need to say “it” or “its” when using pronouns or possessive pronouns in relation to the company or organization.

Too Little Analysis

- You are analyzing, therefore, summarize and make sense of the details in the case
- Point out patterns
- Don’t simply restate many details from the case

Organizing Your Thoughts

- Start your paragraph by making a topic or thesis statement, and then fill in the next sentence or two with supporting material from the case.
 - The first sentence should be a roadmap for the paragraph. It tells me what you will discuss and/or makes the general analysis statement.
 - ♦ e.g., “Chet has trouble managing his time in the areas of . . .” This would be a sentence that might begin a paragraph for the case in Chapter 2.
 - ♦ You would not want to start the paragraph by providing examples of Chet’s stressors and then have me “connect the dots” to determine which principle or concept you were illustrating.
- Provide examples from the case to back up your opening “topic” sentence and analysis.
- DON’T GIVE ME LITERARY CUBISM. I don’t need to read “Picasso in words”.
 - Put the pieces where they belong!
- Don’t repeat analysis in several different places.
 - If you say it once, that is enough. I will not “double count” the same thought if it is placed in two different places.