

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON  
*Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui*



# **Master of Information Management Programme**

## **MIM Case Study and Research Project Guidelines**

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## **Introduction**

All master's degrees, including taught master degrees, have a research component. A research master's degree is awarded on the basis of a thesis. In the case of taught master degrees, like the MIM, the research component takes the form of an empirical research project where the data can be industry oriented or theoretically based.

The objectives of the exercise are to enable the student to:

- demonstrate the ability to design and undertake independent research which meets a high academic standard
- demonstrate an in-depth understanding of a body of theoretical or conceptual material and/or its applicability in a relevant management arena
- demonstrate skills in the fresh and critical examination of Information Management issues
- become well-informed in the subject area(s) investigated for the project.

Successful completion of an independent research project is a long-established signal of graduate-level intellectual capability. The requirement helps mark the MIM as a coherent course of study. Many students find the challenge and accomplishment of a research project its own reward, as it allows them the freedom to pursue an idea unencumbered by someone else's ideas of how things should be done.

## **Research options**

Students can choose between undertaking a Case Study (MMIM 590) or the Research Project (MMIM 592). The Case Study is an investigation into a particular problem in Information Management to illustrate the application of theoretical principles. It is usually based on a real-life situation in an organization of the student's choice and follows the decision chain made by specified participants involved in the process. Instructions on how to write a Case Study are to be found elsewhere in this document.

The Research Project, on the other hand, is a more theoretical study based on the application of the principles of academic research methodology. As a result, the Research Project has as the pre-requisite of MMIM552 Research Methods. Topics covered will include: research design, the research cycle, qualitative methods, quantitative methods which may include descriptive statistics, properties of the normal distribution, hypothesis testing, elements of sampling, t-tests, regression and correlation, factor analysis, analysis of variance, use of SPSS. Any type of research approach that is supported by literature is acceptable.

## The Proposal: Topic Approval Form (Appendix 7)

All students need to submit a Topic Approval Form (TAF) illustrating the research topic they intend to investigate. This should consist of the following components:

- **A Proposed Topic.**
- **A Problem Statement** that identifies the question to be investigated, or the hypothesis on which the investigation is predicated. It should flow logically and may indicate a preliminary methodology to be followed.
- **Definition of Key Terms** in which terms used in the Proposed Topic and Problem Statement should be defined.
- **Objectives.**
- **References** in which literature resources referred are listed in alphabetical order according to the APA citation and bibliographic convention.

### The administrative process

Once the TAF is completed, it is sent to the MIM administrator and forwarded to the MIM Programme Director. The Programme Director is then responsible for the allocation of supervisors for research projects of this nature. A supervisor is then identified, the student is notified and the student from then on deals directly with the supervisor. At this stage, the student should either already be enrolled or enroll for the MMIM 590 or MMIM 592.

The final project must be submitted on the last day of the trimester in which the enrollment for the course concludes. Late submissions will be subject to a 5% penalty for each week of the following month only. It must be noted that enrollment for either the research project or the case study is for a period of two trimesters only. Any extension beyond that period requires the approval of the Associate Dean, re-enrollment and full fee payment. Requests for extension on medical grounds must be accompanied by appropriate certification from the relevant health professional. Withdrawals are permitted up to half-way through the scheduled research period (subject to the current University Calendar). Requests to withdraw require formal notification to the supervisor, the School and Faculty Office. They also require the Programme Director's approval.

### The role of the supervisor.

*The supervisory role involves an often-delicate balance between collegial support and cooperation, guidance and mentoring, responsibility for marking and the maintenance of academic standards. Students are expected to be self-motivated and to develop high levels of self-direction in the pursuit of their research (FCA Graduate Handbook 1995, p. 11).*

The supervisor is responsible for providing a theoretical sounding board and assisting the student to complete the investigation according to university requirements. It is a good idea at the first meeting with the supervisor to negotiate an agreement on the frequency of meetings and a timetable for completion of the research. One way is to decide when the final version is to be submitted and then work back to the start date

and schedule which bit must be in by what date. Some try to maintain meetings every two weeks with the student. Sticking to such an agreement will ensure that the project is completed in the time available.

The duties of the supervisor are:

- To guide the student in the refinement of a topic, including the consideration and approval of a formal written research proposal;
- To assist in the literature search, by giving guidance on relevant literature and how to access it;
- To advise on the selection of a relevant methodology to carry out the investigation;
- To meet with the student according to an agreed schedule, taking account of the progress and needs of the project;
- To make constructive written and verbal comments on the work submitted, within a reasonable period of time.

The obligations of the student are:

- To attend meetings with the supervisor at the arranged times;
- To undertake the work agreed with the supervisor within the time specified, or to indicate why this was not possible;
- To respond promptly to written or telephone messages;
- To keep the supervisor informed of changes of address or contact details or any other changes of circumstances;
- To be aware of the time constraints stipulated by the university for completion of the research project specifically and the programme in general.

Too many students fall by the wayside simply because of the research component. It requires discipline and commitment of a high order as the student is largely working alone, often with very valid distractions in their life. Most supervisors want to be supportive, without crowding the student. They expect to be consulted on questions of theory, logic, methodology, and structure, but the final submission is that of the student. Supervisors have other work to do and must fit their supervisory duties into a full timetable of other commitments. To a considerable extent, the student must therefore drive the pace.

It is also very easy to get lost in the mass of material being dealt with. Many supervisors insist on receiving a written update showing the progress made by the student since the last meeting. Usually this is sent two or three days before a meeting to give the supervisor time to read and reflect on the material to be discussed. Although supervisors may identify spelling or grammatical errors, their role is not that of an editor. Similarly, their role is not to correct poor bibliographies. Supervisors can be expected to read and comment on drafts of the student's work, but the final product is the responsibility of the student, just as it is the student's responsibility to complete the project on time.

## **Obtaining Human Ethics Committee approval**

The first task of the supervisor is to ensure that the student obtains the approval of the Human Ethics Committee for the proposed research. This step is mandatory for all research projects undertaken in the School. It usually takes about 10 days to two weeks, but if the HEC requires clarification or modifications, it may take longer to obtain final approval. The supervisor will assist with this process.

The latest HEC policy documents are available at the following URL:

<http://www.sim.vuw.ac.nz/research/hec/>

Please also see Appendix One for the basic procedures to be followed.

## **Release of Marks**

Final marks for research projects will be released to the student just as with regular courses. Grades and assessment reports for research papers are reviewed by SIM research staff as part of a standard peer review process. This review helps to ensure consistency of grading across supervisors. The supervisor may, at his or her discretion, tell you your assessed grade, which will be subject to change in the review process. No grade reports will be released until the final grades are confirmed by the Programme Director.

## **Style**

With the rich variety of options available in word processing packages these days it would be invidious to specify a standard document style. So any form of headlining, numbering of topics or chapters etc. is acceptable, as long as it is consistent and the report is easy to read. Obviously, such ordering of the topics or chapters should be reflected in the Table of Contents. Furthermore, it should also reflect the logical flow of the information presented. Note other aspects of style, form and treatment referred to in Appendix 4.

## **Referencing (or Citation) of sources**

There are several conventions for the citation of literature resources in academic publications. The VUW Faculty of Commerce has decided that students in future should use the APA Style Guide. The “home page” of the APA can be found at <http://www.apastyle.org/>

Three points are important to remember:

- Academic writing is all about honesty – honesty about recording whose ideas and thoughts one is using and clearly indicating which ideas are those of the author. Therefore, credit must be given when quoting or citing other works;

- Adequate information must be given in the references to enable any reader to identify and locate the document referred to;
- Referencing should be as consistent as possible and according to the guidelines that follow.

The examples cover the source types most frequently cited in papers by undergraduate writers, using four citation styles.

## Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means **no cheating**. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. Plagiarism is **prohibited** at Victoria.

The University defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not.

‘Someone else’s work’ means anything that is not your own idea, even if it is presented in your own style. It includes material from books, journals or any other printed source, the work of other students or staff, information from the Internet, software programmes and other electronic material, designs and ideas. It also includes the organization or structuring of any such material.

If verbatim use is made of such material, without quotation marks, or if it is simply paraphrased and presented as a student’s own work, this constitutes plagiarism. The University views this practice very seriously. Those found guilty could be barred from graduating. If there is any doubt in a student’s mind as to what is acceptable practice when preparing and presenting any academic document in fulfilment of the requirements for a degree or diploma at VUW.

### ***Plagiarism is not worth the risk.***

Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct ([www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct)) and may be penalized severely.

Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning
- suspension from class or university
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course.

*Find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, on the University’s website at: [www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html).*

## Grading

<b>Grading standards:</b>
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Letter Grade	Number grade	Approx Dist'n *	Simple Description	More Complete Description**
A+	Over 84	4%	Outstanding	Far exceeds requirements, flawless, creative
A	80-84	10%	Excellent	Polished, original, demonstrating mastery
A-	75-79	14%	Very Good	Some originality, exceeds all requirements
B+	70-74	22%	Good	Exceeds requirements in some respects
B	65-69	26%	Satisfactory	Fulfills requirements in general
B-	60-64	18%	Acceptable	Only minor flaws. Unoriginal
C+	55-59	4%	Pass	Mistakes, recapitulation of course material
C	50-54	2%	Minimum pass	Serious mistakes or deficiencies
D	40-49	1%	Unacceptable	Little understanding, poor performance
E	00-39	1%	Fail	Below the minimum required

\* This is the hypothetical percentage of students that would attain the various levels of performance, over several repetitions of the course, under similar conditions. It is recognised that the distribution in a particular course, particularly with small enrolment, may differ markedly from the long-term distribution.

\*\* The lecturer will develop a more complete or specific description of the meaning of the various levels of performance based upon the specific nature of the assessment in a course. For example, performance may be determined by the qualities of a written report, a classroom presentation, or work in a group project. The words used to describe these kinds of assessments will obviously vary.

Evaluations using the standard evaluation form will include written comments on the content, structure and style of the assignment as well as the marks awarded. The evaluation form shown in Appendix 4 indicates typical criteria and weightings used in allocating the student's mark. Appendix 5 gives the standard evaluation method used with the evaluation form shown in Appendix 4.

## **The Research Project MMIM 592**

### **Planning the Project**

The first formal step in preparing any research project is to develop a plan. This is also the most important step in the whole process, because a well-researched plan is the essential basis for a successful product.

The plan should include the following:

- Working Title
- Area of Study
  - The particular problem area to be studied.
  - The objective(s) of the proposed essay or research.

- Why the specified problem is worth investigation
- Some possible conclusions and recommendations and/or the implications of the conclusions.
- Method of Study
  - The type of information used.
  - Sources of information - desk research, company interviews, field research, opinion surveys, etc.
- Outline of written project

A chapter outline, indicating clearly and in sufficient detail the primary topics to be addressed in each chapter, is recommended. The first chapter is always the Introduction and must introduce the topic. It must give a brief background and state the objective(s) of the report, the scope and limits of the study and the methods chosen to accomplish the objectives. Later chapters should follow in a logical and fluid sequence, ending with a Conclusion. The Conclusion relates to the Introduction because it flows from the Introduction by tying up any loose ends and reporting on the findings of the investigation. Obviously, in the planning stage there is no final Conclusion, but it may help to identify what the Conclusions are expected to be. The Conclusion can be built up as one goes along as this is the area of the document in which the author gives his or her own opinions, including perhaps recommendations for further research.

It is suggested you consider additional outcomes for your research project i.e.: published in publications or presented at conferences.

## **The Document Structure**

The final written document should amplify the topic outline in the plan, from problem specification to conclusions and recommendations.

**Title** - The form of the Title page is given below in Appendix 2. Obviously, it should be modified according to the title chosen or assigned.

**Length** - This will vary depending on the topic chosen and is often specified when the assignment is given. Length will not be a final criterion, although short documents lacking in substance and long documents full of repetition and padding will be downgraded. The grader bears in mind that a written report is the documentation of the student's effort, not the substance of it. Most research projects are between 55 and 80 pages in length. This length excludes the title page, the references and any appendices or agenda.

**Format** - Submissions should be typed with 1.5 spacing in a normal font (12 point Arial or Times Roman). Only word-processed or desktop published assignments are acceptable. Hand-written work will not be marked.

As can be seen from Appendix 5 on how marks will be allocated, incorrect spelling and grammar will be penalized. At tertiary education level and beyond, they are simply inexcusable. All students should ensure that use is made of the spell-check facility in the word-processing software and ask a literate friend to proofread the draft.

Use can also be made of the VUW Student Writing Support Centre for assistance with language.

As indicated above, the report should be 1.5 spaced, except in quotations of more than a few lines. Margins should be left on either side of the page - at least 3cm on the left hand side and at the top of the page. Pages should be numbered. Where presentation is below standard, students may be required to present a revised report.

**Layout** - Like any essay, the research project report should consist of the following, in the given order:

**Title Page** (Appendix 2)

**Preface** (Appendix 3) stating

- whether the report is confidential (this should be cleared with the convener before submission)
- what acknowledgements the author would like to make, such as editorial assistance, guidance in reading, etc.
- that the report is the author's own work and that all references and quotations have been properly identified unless so indicated.

**A synopsis/abstract** - a single paragraph of about 300 words summarizing the document's main points and findings. In essence this is a combination of the Introduction and the Conclusions. It is usually written right at the very end, when the assignment is completed. It serves to summarize the contents and findings of the document so that a potential reader can decide whether to read the full document or not. It is not the Introduction and should not be confused with the Introduction.

**Table of contents** – easily prepared in MSWord (Insert/Index and tables/Table of contents)

**List of tables**, list of illustrations

**Introduction**

This serves to explain to the reader what the objective(s) of the proposed essay or research are and why the specified problem is worth investigation. It should state, in about half a page to a page in length, what the researcher is trying to do, why it is important and, perhaps, what the findings are expected to be. The brevity of the Introduction is an indication of the researchers grasp of the essence of the project. It may start with a quote, if relevant, but normally is expected to be in the researcher's own words.

**Main body of text**, - with intermediate chapter or section headings appropriate for the substance of the document.

**Conclusions**

Relates to, and must be based on the Introduction in that it explains what the writer or researcher has done and, obviously, what are the conclusions that can logically be drawn. It must relate to the Introduction, as it must answer the questions posed in the Introduction.

## **References**

## **Appendices**

Included here should be material, graphs, tables, even perhaps a glossary, so that the information can be readily accessed by the reader without interfering with the logical flow of the main text or narrative.

## **The Case Study MMIM 590**

### **What is a case study?**

A case is a description of a business situation faced by one or more people in an organization. A Case Study identifies and describes in depth a specific organizational problem or issue. Usually a Case Study explores the decision sequence relating to a management problem. In the MIM, case studies are descriptive of an information management situation, held up to the light of the theoretical concepts dealt with in the MIM programme.

Other descriptions of what is a case

- A real life study of a situation that illustrates principles relevant to a teaching curriculum
- Someone else's story
- Meant to achieve educational objectives
- Reflects the information available to the decision-maker at the time
- Field based.

### **What is the purpose of a Case Study?**

The primary purpose is to develop a better understanding of the industry and environment in which the organization is operating. Cases contain relevant data about the issue available to the key person in the case, plus background information about the organization. Cases usually contain a number of pages of textual information, plus a series of exhibits to explain the environment in which the issues arose and against which background decisions had to be taken. This makes the situation relevant to students and simulates a real working environment. It also ensures that the MIM programme maintains contact with the practitioner environment and thus stays current with field developments.

### **Skills development in Case Study preparation**

- Analytical skills, including qualitative and quantitative frameworks for analysing business situations, developing problem identification skills, data handling skills and critical thinking skills;

- Decision-making skills, to assess what can be done and to make decisions. In the process students select decision criteria, evaluate alternatives, and formulate action plans;
- Application skills to practice using the tools, theories and techniques discussed in class;
- Oral communication skills, not only to listen to colleagues, but also to analyse and express ideas.
- Time management skills are an integral part of completing the Case Study within a given time period;
- Interpersonal and social skills flow from the preparation, development and presentation of case studies.
- Creative skills are exercised in the solving of real-life problems illustrated in case studies as there are usually multiple possible solutions to any given problem situation.
- Written communication skills, such as note taking, case writing and the preparation of academic documents enhance written communication skills by providing practical exercises and expert feedback.

It is intended that, given permission from the participants, Case Studies may become teaching vehicles (“case method” learning) for other students in later programmes and ensure that the MIM is up-to-date and relevant to I T management issues in New Zealand. This enables the academic staff to document events and strategies in information management, and provide information that can become the raw material for subsequent research.

### **What is an “issue”?**

An “issue” is a problem, a challenge, a situation, or an opportunity that demands a strategic decision from the individual or individuals responsible. Every good case study identifies several issues of complexity and depth where the answers may or may not be obvious. The issues identified should be able to sustain a class discussion of approximately 30 minutes. They may be technical, managerial, human, strategic, political, financial, or a combination of any or all of the above. The skill of case study preparation lies in identifying the fullest range of issues and exploring their complexities in a readable and descriptive style.

### **What are the component parts of a Case Study?**

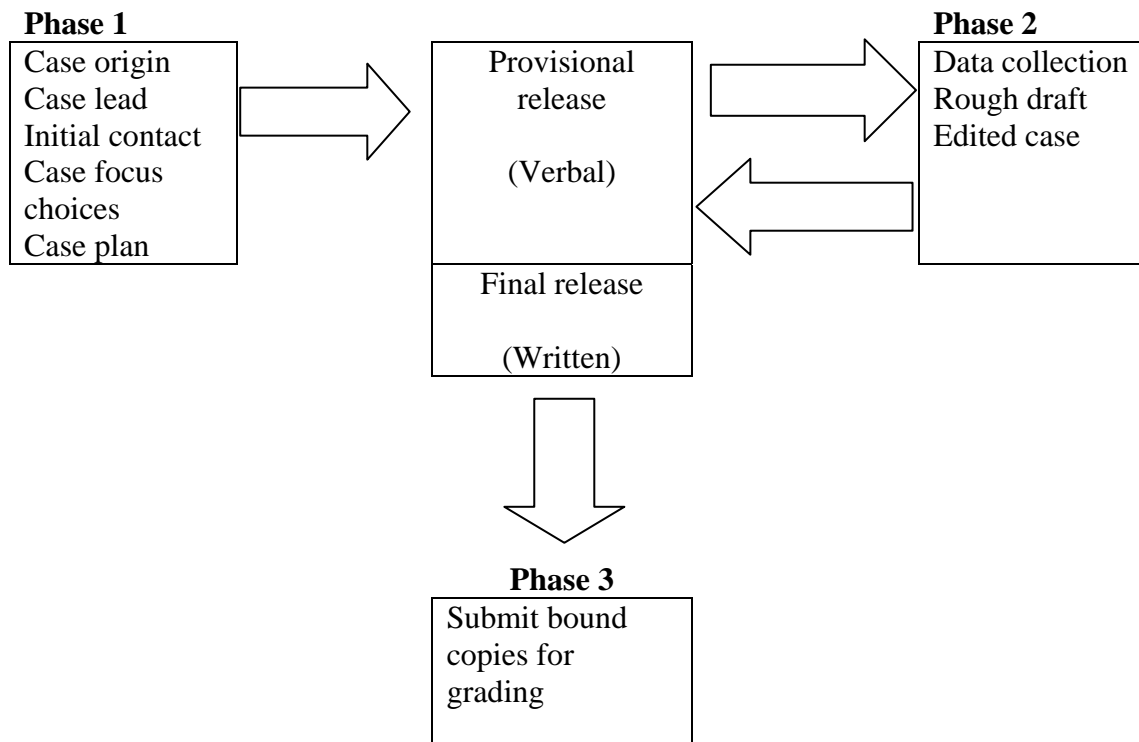
Unlike most other academic research investigations, case studies are written as an interesting story, so as to draw the reader into that situation. The writer tries to create a narrative in which the readers can put themselves into the shoes of the key personalities in the study. Being based on a real life situation the story requires very little “suspension of disbelief”. It always deals with a real organization, a real person, a real situation. A variation on this theme might be “armchair” cases that create imaginary or fictional situations, but these are considered less academic and are not acceptable as Case Studies in the MIM programme.

Accordingly, there are four parts to any MIM Case Study research submission:-

- **The case itself**, in which the readers are challenged to put themselves in the shoes of the participants and answer the question “What would you have done in a situation like this?”.
- **The literature review**, which places the investigation in the context of its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings and explores their relevance and validity in the decision-making process;
- **The industry analysis** that looks at the business in the context of the other players in the industry, the competition, and the legal and ethical framework that may be influencing decision-making or constraining the freedoms within which decisions can be made;
- **The case analysis**, which describes the company environment, its organisational structure, its financial, political and business structure insofar as they provide the framework within which the issues arise and the decisions are played out. It also provides an analysis of the case in the light of the theoretical foundations identified in the literature review above, reporting the student’s views on what should have happened or have been decided.

Each of the parts identified above will be dealt with in more detail below. Before doing so it is important to give an overview of the phases in the process of undertaking a Case Study Research Project.

### Phases in the MMIM 590 Case Study Development and Analysis Project



## **Table 1. The Case writing process (based on Irskine *et al*, 2005)**

Jim Erskine from the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario, is considered the doyen of Case Study writing. His book *Writing cases*, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) by Michiel R. Leenders, Louise Maufette-Leenders and James A. Erskine (London, Ont.; Richard Ivey School of Business. ISBN 0-7714-2270-9) is recommended to all students preparing Case Studies, but it should be noted that it deals with writing from the perspective of an academic wishing to prepare case studies for teaching purposes. What follows below is based on the Leenders, Leenders & Erskine book, but modified for meeting the requirements of students in the MIM preparing a research case study for the MMIM 590 course.

### **Phase 1. Generating leads and topics for investigation**

The first step involves identifying a topic for investigation. This usually involves identifying an aspect or topic of the MIM programme that the student found particularly stimulating. It may be a theory that was discussed, or a project that was assigned for investigation. Alternatively, it may be a problem that the student is working on, or has worked on in the business environment. It may be a stimulating topic that arises from something the student has read in the newspaper or the current literature of the field. The purpose is to turn this into a possible case. Each student should be able to identify several topics as this will give them some flexibility and choice initially – especially if they have difficulty identifying people or businesses around whom/which they can build their case.

Identify leads from the topic selected by investigating who in the business environment might be able to help explore or analyse the topic or issues involved. Then shop around for businesses or people who might be able to assist you. Make a list of the three or four people you have selected and then make a list of the questions you plan to ask them. The questions should relate directly to the topic or topics you have identified above and should start with “Have you recently decided or are you currently considering ....?” This will indicate the areas of your interest to the people on your contact list and serve as a form of negotiation process.

This first interview enables the case writer to determine whether the material for a case exists and whether the contact or organisation is willing to supply the data. It is usually exploratory; if the contact person is willing, and there is sufficient scope for a case, it enables the writer to set up a second meeting within a few days. This second meeting presents the Case Plan and provides an opportunity to get preliminary verbal release from the contact or organisation to proceed further. That way the student avoids spending too much time and effort on a project only to find that release permission is not forthcoming.

The Case Plan outlines the process and time commitments you consider are likely to be involved in the data gathering process, what information you have already and what you will require. It indicates to the contact person what is required of the organisation, what your thinking is and tests the understanding of the information given in the first interview. It also places in the open the issue of using real names or whether any disguise would be needed.

Follow the second meeting with a letter confirming the provisional release and any other agreements reached and undertake to provide the contact with the provisional written version as soon as possible after the interviews.

## **Phase 2. Collecting the data, drafting the case**

Once the research proposal has been accepted, a supervisor allocated and approval given by the HEC, data for the Case Study data is primarily collected through interviews with the key players in the organization being investigated. The interviews need to be designed to capture different types of information, including

- Factual data about the issues and other background
- Opinions/biases
- Useful quotes
- Appendix data/exhibits

In preparing the interview questions, careful attention must be paid to the theoretical underpinnings of the study as explored in the literature review that makes up an important part of the research proposal. The student may well be led to undertake other secondary research in order to obtain documentary material to clarify important points of the investigation. Usually students will find that the people being interviewed have access to much of the internal, original documentation required. Secondary sources would usually relate to the company and industrial analysis.

Once a clear idea has been obtained of the issues to be investigated, the case plan should be prepared. The case plan starts with the opening paragraph of the study. This is very important as it sets the stage for all that follows. In a way it is like the Introduction of an academic report in that it covers in a narrative way what the investigation is setting out to do and why it is important. The opening paragraph in Case Study convention sets the stage. It should therefore contrive to give the name and title of the main protagonist, while indicating the case company, the date and time of case, and provide a brief synopsis of the main case issue indicating why it is important. In this way, the opening paragraph of a Case Study fulfils the same function as the Introduction of any other academic report. It is important to weave into the narrative as much company background as possible, basic industry information, a description of the competitive situation, etc. A useful device would be to provide personal background information for key players in the case, so that “colour” can be added to the descriptive passages. This information can also be useful for later analysis.

Thereafter, it is helpful to set out provisional section headings and an outline of the balance of case, noting any additional information needed. Using the section headings and the outline of the case plan as building blocks, the case should then be written from the information obtained in the interviews and the literature review. Care must be taken to record the source of all quotations, tables, diagrams and references both in the text and in the References at the end of the Case Study using standard bibliographic and academic citation methods. The same principles that apply to the writing of all other academic documents similarly apply to the Case Study.

At the editing stage, the focus will be on data completeness, structure and finally polishing the presentation in terms of grammar, spelling, format, etc. It is a useful tactic to record in the Conclusions section all the items that need to be done, all the thoughts and ideas that occur as the project proceeds, and all the additional bits of information that need to be gathered to make the report complete.

### **Phase 3. Finishing off and gaining release.**

Once the case is written, final written release needs to be obtained from the contributing organization or individuals. Leenders, Leenders & Erskine (2005, p 29) recommend approaching the organization as follows: “Here is the case the way we planned it. We would very much appreciate your checking it for accuracy and completeness and we welcome your formal permission to use it.” This ensures understanding and acceptance of the findings as well as confirmation of the initial approval for the study. Such an approach should meet few problems with the release process. If minor changes are required, these should be dealt with immediately to ensure that the necessary release process is not hindered in any way.

It is important to note that for MMIM 590 projects it is assumed that the case will not be shared widely, so the student can promise confidentiality to the organization. This undertaking is endorsed by the Human Ethics Committee.

At this stage a number of other issues may emerge, especially when dealing with the representatives of the organization being investigated. These include:

- the need for disguise to ensure that neither the organization or any individual associated with it is identified:
- the “I want to look good” syndrome, which is related and is intended to protect correspondents from any negative consequences of the release of the Case Study.

It is important to reiterate the assurance of confidentiality given right at the beginning of the study. Any problems in this regard should be reported to the study supervisor.

In situations where case events happened a while ago there is always a temptation to provide an explanation of what happened after the decision point. This should be avoided, as in a way it becomes part of a separate and subsequent study. If required the explanation can be given as a separate chapter isolated from the main Case Study document.

Finally, if questions arise about the use of the material in a subsequent teaching case, it is important to reassure the organisation or individuals involved that their approval will be sought should that be a possibility.

### **Operational aspects of writing cases**

The operational aspects of writing case studies can be simplified for the novice by applying a number of techniques. These include the mechanics of recording interviews, writing according to style and other common conventions.

- **Case study project proposal** Once the student has identified a topic in Phase 1 above it is appropriate to prepare and submit the Case Study research proposal according to the format described in Appendix 7 of this document. This ensures that the research proposal is soundly based on academic theory dealt with in the MIM programme, and that the student undertaking the investigation has a clear idea, not only of that theory, but of how it is applied in a practical situation. The research proposal also enables the Programme Director and the Head of School to allocate the supervision of the study to someone with an interest and expertise in that area, and to ensure that the proposed research fits in with the statutory requirements laid down by the relevant research committees of Victoria University of Wellington. On the basis of the proposal a supervisor will be allocated and this initiates a monitoring and support process to ensure that the student can complete the investigation in the quickest and most efficient way possible.

During the period while the Case Study Proposal is being approved, a start can be made with the preparation of the more detailed Literature Review, and the gathering of information for the company and industry backgrounds. This information will later inform the preparation of the interview guide, the interpretation of the interviews and therefore the final written document. This is a long process and should not be superficially dealt with for fear of missing relevant information or important issues.

- **Getting H E C approval** In addition to the Case Study research proposal the student needs to submit an application to the SIM Human Ethics Committee. The latest HEC policy documents are available at the following URL

<http://www.sim.vuw.ac.nz/research/hec/index.aspx>

Please also see Appendix 1 for the basic procedures to be followed.

It is useful to prepare both the Case Study Research Proposal and the HEC application forms at the same time. This ensures that the Proposal and the HEC forms get seen and approved by the supervisor before they go to the HEC. However, the HEC usually requires the student to attach any questionnaire to be used in the course of the research. The questionnaire cannot be finalised until the literature survey is completed, and that means that the supervisor needs to be happy with the student's HEC submission. Of course, the HEC may require modifications to the proposal not identified by the supervisor, but by including the supervisor's check process unnecessary delays may be avoided. This whole process has been known to take up to six weeks, but methods are being considered for ways to reduce the time taken to obtain approval. Ultimately, it is the student who is responsible to the HEC for obtaining the necessary permission and abiding by any constraints imposed. Without the approval of the HEC the student may be vulnerable to litigation in case of any violations of the Privacy Act, or of breaches of contract or other legal requirements. So obtaining HEC approval is an important pre-requisite before the research begins.

- **Recording** case interviews is not as easy as it sometimes seems. Because one wants to minimize disruption to those being interviewed, planning and attention to detail beforehand can prevent problems at the time. For example, when interviewing, use a tape recorder. (This must be specified in the HEC application and in the consent forms given to the people being interviewed.) Check the batteries and have a spare recorder or set of batteries – or some other backup plan. If not using a tape recorder for the interview process, try to have more than one interviewer to ensure efficient note-taking. This also facilitates recollection of specific statements, but, of course, more than one interviewer is not always possible. In any event, it is important to write up the interview immediately afterwards while details are fresh in the mind. Record as much information as possible and make an effort to collect the maximum amount of background data at the case site before leaving. This may extend from recording physical details of the layout of the organization for enriching the narrative, to collecting annual reports and other relevant statistics and documentation.
- **Writing style** in any academic document is subject to important conventions. In a case study, unlike an academic report, the style should be approachable, easy to read, journalistic, and enjoyable. This is because the target audience and motivation of the readers differ in both cases. In the Case Study, the author is telling a story which will grasp and retain the attention of the reader. The narrative should be transparent to the reader without the use of flowery phrases, unusual grammar or punctuation. Minimal use should be made of technical terms or jargon but where this is unavoidable, jargon should be explained, while references and dates are given for all citations and statistics. It is especially important to spell out all acronyms the first time they are used. If necessary, this can be done by using an appendix or a glossary in order to preserve the readability and logical flow of the narrative. Similarly, as this is a Case Study, always use past tense to indicate that the events described occurred in the past. Judicious use of footnotes can be made, but avoid over-use of footnotes. Do not use footnotes for bibliographic references. A different convention applies to them.
- **Finishing off** the case description is simplified by a restatement of the central issue(s) in such a way that the reader can relate the conclusions with the statements made in the opening paragraph. This has the effect of rounding off the document as a whole so that it completes a full logical circle. As the opening paragraph began from the perspective of the main protagonist, it is useful to finish off from the immediate perspective of the same individual. To protect the pace of the narrative, provide exhibits and appendices, including financial information if appropriate, at the back of the document.

## **The Literature Review**

Students should note that there are two literature reviews to be prepared:-

- the initial literature review and References which goes with the Topic Approval Form to provide an indication of the theoretical basis of the proposed research and the issues to be explored;
- the final and more comprehensive literature review and references that is an integral part of the Case Study. The final literature review is expected to be between 5 to 10 pages in length and reports on the theoretical base for any secondary information provided and any assertions made.

Both literature reviews as well as the Company Analysis and the Industry Analysis should be supported by a properly recorded references using the APA bibliographic Style Guide. The “home page” of the APA can be found at <http://www.apastyle.org/>

It is important not to list in the references any items that are not referred to in the text. Similarly, do not cite in the text any items that do not have full bibliographic details given in the references.

## **The Industry Analysis.**

The Industry Analysis, like the Case Analysis forms a distinct part of the Case Study. It is an examination of the broader industrial environment within which the organization operates. It should include the competitive environment (local and international), the regulatory environment, the impact or role of any new technology, and so on. Normally it would be largely descriptive, but some interpretation and opinion may be appropriate also. For a public sector or similar, the “competitive” environment may be limited or nonexistent, but government policy and regulation issues may be more significant. They should therefore be covered in this chapter.

The Industry Analysis provides comprehensive information on the national or regional business environment within which the company operates. Graphs, charts, and similar contemporary information are appropriate here, such as legal or other environmental factors, an analysis of the competition, the suppliers, the market, or any other factors relevant to the issues covered in the Case Study. This chapter is intended to assist the reader’s understanding of the parameters in which decisions were made, or the situation was perceived by the main protagonists.

## **The Case Analysis.**

The Case analysis provides the organisational structure and business environment in which the issues/decisions/challenges featured in the case were played out. It is interpretive, analytical, and opinionated. The Case Analysis is intended to reveal what the student makes of the study, providing an analysis of the details featured in the case and a personal interpretation illustrating the theoretic features and foundation of the study. It reveals what the student thinks the protagonists should have done and why? Strong justification for the opinions expressed is essential here and they should reflect

the theoretical and academic foundations of the literature survey. Naturally, this part employs any tools, frameworks, or models introduced and discussed within MIM courses or elsewhere. As such reference to the literature review and references are appropriate parts of this section or chapter and should conform to standards and format defined for all academic writing. Note that the same approach applies for both private and public sector cases.

### **Length of final case study document.**

Using single-sided pages, with one and a half spacing, the following rough guidelines apply:-

Case Study	15-30 pages (exhibits extra)
Literature review	5-10 pages
Industry analysis	10-15 pages
Case analysis	15-20 pages

It is entirely possible that the Literature review may be incorporated into the Case and Industry analysis sections, or brought out as a separate section. However, it is as important as any of the other sections.

### **Structure of final document.**

The final document, like any other piece of academic writing, will have the usual standard academic components as follows:

- Title page
- Abstract (a.k.a. Executive summary)
- Preface (a.k.a. Acknowledgments (if any))
- Table of Contents
- Case Study
- Literature review (which may be incorporated into other sections)
- Industry analysis
- Case analysis
- References

### **Submission of final document.**

Three bound paper copies of the final document should be submitted to the Programme Director on completion of the research. Examples of the binding format are available for scrutiny in the office of the MIM Programme Director. In addition, an electronic version of the final document should either be sent by email as a file attachment in Word format to the Programme Director or should accompany the paper documents on disk.

## **Case study evaluation form.**

A case study evaluation form has been developed and is available at Appendix 10. It identifies the criteria and weightings allocated to those criteria in the evaluation process.

## **Case Signoff**

There are several sign-offs necessary for all Case Studies. These are:-

- Proposal signoff by the supervisor.
- HEC approval
- Case study signoff by the source organization.
  - Testifies to factual correctness as well as organizational awareness of the project.
  - Confirms case confidentiality to the organization.
- Final signoff by supervisor to hand to Programme Director.
- NOTE: no need to have Industry Analysis or Case Analysis signed off by the company.

## **Examination/Evaluation**

Both the supervisor and another SIM faculty member will examine the final Case Study submission, in accordance with practice in other VUW masters programmes. The MMIM 590 counts 30 points, equivalent to 2 course points for the MIM overall. Rigour and high academic standards will be expected. If the Case Study is not accepted – i.e. if it does not achieve pass grade marks – a new investigation will have to be done, with the student concerned submitting a new Case Study research proposal on a different topic to the Programme Director. Two unsuccessful Case Study submissions will result in the student not being eligible for the MIM degree.

## **Follow-on use**

It is possible, if the Case Study is well written and well researched, that it might be used for classroom discussion. That way the MIM programme can be up to date on current management issues in information management in New Zealand. Alternatively, it may also be considered for publication elsewhere, such as in a book of New Zealand case studies in IS management...! However, before any consideration is given to those possibilities, each Case Study will be dealt with in terms of the reason for which it was originally prepared – in partial submission of the requirements for the Master of Information Management degree.

It is important that the student, and especially the company and the executives who form the basis of the investigation, know that any other possible use of a Case Study and the associated analyses will not occur without full consultation and granting of

appropriate permissions between the student, the source organization, and SIM. It is suggested you consider additional outcomes for your research project i.e.: published in publications or presented at conferences.

## **Consultation**

At any stage, students may consult with the Programme Director. The smooth and efficient completion of the Case Study research project is in everyone's interest. The loneliness and difficulty of the process is not underestimated. While every attempt will be made to assist students, the project remains their responsibility, and they are held responsible to the Human Ethics Committee and the University for any commitments undertaken.

## SIM HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

This summary of procedures should be read in the context of the SIM HEC Policy documents, and the VUW Human Ethics Policy at:

<http://www.sim.vuw.ac.nz/research/hec/index.aspx>

1. The SIM Human Ethics Committee (SIM HEC) has delegated authority from the VUW HEC; a VUW HEC representative is also present on the Committee. Any staff member or student engaged in research which involves interviewing or surveying people requires approval from the SIM HEC.

2. If the applicant is a student, their supervisor must review and approve the application before it is submitted.

3. Applications are submitted as one electronic file, with any information sheet, consent form, questionnaire or necessary permission from organizations attached to the SIM HEC application form. This is to ensure that when numbers of applications are being processed by the HEC individual applications are able to be circulated for comment as one file.

4. A form of the school letterhead is to be used on all information sheets, letters and questionnaires:

<http://www.sim.vuw.ac.nz/research/hec/documents/HEC%20letterhead.DOC>

5. The application should be initially forwarded to one of your School HEC representatives, available from the HEC web page.

6. If the HEC representative thinks the application is satisfactory and complete, they will forward it to the HEC Administrator for consideration by the SIM HEC. If the HEC representative does not approve the application, then it is sent back to the applicant for revision until the representative is satisfied. It is then sent on to HEC Administrator.

7. The HEC Administrator circulates the application to three members of the SIM HEC, who comment using a review form provided for the purpose.

8. The HEC Administrator co-ordinates the comments for scrutiny by the SIM HEC chair, and a decision is made about the application. This will result in one of the following responses (also forwarded to the applicant's supervisor);

- a) Approved outright,
- b) Approved subject to minor change/s.

- c) Application accepted, but approval is subject to the following required changes.
- d) Application is not accepted, applicant asked to revise and resubmit.

9. In the case of the first category **(a)**, the hard copy is then signed by the applicant, the supervisor and the Chair of the HEC Committee, and forwarded to the VUW's Research office for permanent filing. Approval is not confirmed until the signed hard copy of the application is received, but the applicant may proceed with data collection once they are notified.

10. In the case of **(b)** and **(c)**, the revised hard copy, signed by the applicant, and the supervisor, is sent to the HEC Administrator for the SIM HEC Chair to review and approve (if all the required changes are made). It is then sent on to the VUW Research Office for filing, and the applicant is notified they may proceed with data collection.

11. In the case of **(d)**, the revised application must be sent electronically to the HEC Administrator, who will re-circulate it to the original HEC panel. The application will then continue as in 5.

12. Anonymous surveys should be sent through the supervisor and an HEC representative to the HEC Administrator as above. Once it is confirmed by the SIM HEC chair that the application meets all the criteria for 'anonymity', the hard copy can then be signed and forwarded to the HEC Administrator. The Chair of the HEC approves and signs the application, and it is sent to the VUW research Office for filing.

(Revised 23 April 2008)  
School of Information Management

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON  
*Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui*



# Title

MMIM592 / MMIM590

by

Full Name

ID Number

Supervisor: Name

Submitted to the School of Information Management,  
Victoria University of Wellington  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Information Management

Date

**FORMAT FOR PREFACE**

**Preface**

This Report is not confidential.

I wish to thank the Assistant General Manager (Management Services Division), Mr. XX, and the Information Systems Manager, Mr. XXX, for giving me unrestricted access to information systems information and Data Processing staff.

I also wish to thank the following Data Processing staff members with whom discussions were held: Messrs XXXX, XXXXX, XXXXXX and XXXXX.

Finally, I wish to record my appreciation to Mrs. XXXXXXXX for typing the Report.

I certify that except as noted above, the Report is my own work and all references are accurately reported.

**A STUDENT** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4

### ASSIGNMENT EVALUATION FORM

**Title** .....

**Marker** ..... **Date** .....

**Total Mark** .....

#### A. VALUE OF CONTENTS

	Not Acceptable	Poor	OK	Good	Excellent	SCORE
DEPTH OF TREATMENT						/15
Coverage of subject	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Conciseness	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Focus of topic	0	1	2-3	4	5	
ANALYTICAL HANDLING						/15
Objectivity	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Incisiveness	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Argument/logic	0	1	2-3	4	5	
RESEARCH APPROACH						/15
Contribution	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Rigour	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Reading/writing strategy	0	1	2-3	4	5	
REFERENCING						/15
Readings - quality, extent	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Citation of sources	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Bibliographical standards	0	1	2-3	4	5	
STRUCTURE						/15
Synopsis	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Introduction & Conclusion	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Logical development	0	1	2-3	4	5	
STYLE						/15
Clarity of expression	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Flow of ideas	0	1	2-3	4	5	
Maturity of treatment	0	1	2-3	4	5	
SUB-TOTAL						/90



### **How marks will be allocated in research project assignments**

For each assignment an evaluation sheet as shown in the previous section of this document will be completed with the student's name, the marker's name and the date. Often it will be stapled to the original document in a prominent place. The marks will be allocated as follows:

#### **Depth of treatment (Marks /15)**

This is done last, after the other sections have been evaluated.

Coverage – assessed from 2, 3, 4 & 5 below. This is done last so that it integrates with those earlier assessments.

Conciseness – assessed from 3, 5 & 6 below. This is done last so that it integrates with those earlier assessments.

Focus of topic – assessed from an overall assessment. Did the student author keep to the topic, keep focus, and keep your interest? This is done last so that it integrates with those earlier assessments.

#### **Analytical handling (Marks /15)**

Objectivity – maintains a distance from the subject and analyses carefully and thoroughly what has been read and included in the document.

Incisiveness – cuts through excessive verbiage and simply gets to the point.

Argument/logic – has the argument been developed in a logical way? Is it rational?

This section is closely related to Style and Research approach.

#### **Research approach (Marks /15)**

Contribution – assessed from a comparison of the Introduction with the Conclusion. The Introduction tells what the student set out to do. The Conclusion tells what the student found out and what his/her thoughts were on the subject. Markers will ask “What did the author do?” “Was it worth doing?”

Rigour – assessed from the main body of the text, this is determined by examples of how critical the student author was of other writings on the subject and how those writings fitted in with the student author's own perceptions.

Reading/writing strategy – assessed on the basis of the Introduction and Conclusions, in terms of what the student intended to do and actually did, but includes the main body of the presentation. Markers will ask the question “Was it done well?”

#### **Referencing/References**

This section indicates immediately how seriously a student has approached the topic, the extent of his/her reading and perspective and any creative connections that the student made between the topic under discussion and other related works. It immediately indicates a student who has not dealt seriously with the assignment, has plagiarized or has been limited in research methodology or perspective. The following are guidelines as to what is important and the sort of mark that may be awarded.

Readings – quality and extent. According to subject of enquiry and number of items in the references – 0 = 0 marks; 1 to 5 = 1 mark; 6 to 10 = 2 marks; 11 to 15 = 3 marks; 16 to 20 = 4 marks; 20 plus = 5 marks. This applies to individual assignments. Double the number of references are expected for group assignments.

Citation of sources in the text – should have name of author followed by date in brackets next to each citation reference. Page numbers are even better.

### **Bibliographic standards (Marks /15)**

Alphabetical order by author.

Date in brackets after the author's name.

Title underlined (or in italics) for books and journals – article title in “..”.

Place of publication for books/Publication in which article appears for articles.

Publisher for books.

### **Structure (Marks /15)**

Synopsis or abstract – is there one and does it cover the subject of the assignment/project?

Introduction and Conclusion - are they included? Do they relate to one another?

Logical development of the presentation?

### **Style (Marks /15)**

Clarity of expression - past tense, passive voice, third person. No journalism or sensationalism.

Logical flow of ideas.

Maturity of treatment – objective, analytical writing.

### **Correctness (Marks /6)**

Spelling

Grammar

### **Quality of layout (Marks /4)**

Typing

Layout – 1.5 spaced 12 point

### **Comments**

Comments are added to show where any inadequacies were, to try to help the student to do better next time, to be encouraging, or to congratulate.

**Steps in a Case study development and analysis project**

<b>Step</b>	<b>VUW and target organisation</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Timeline (at a guess/worst)</b>
1	Identify target organisation and get initial in-principle release from relevant executive		3 weeks
2		Do initial literature review for Case Study proposal to frame theoretical base for detailed investigation	3 weeks
3		Prepare draft proposal and submit to MIM Director	2 days – maybe less
4	Supervisor allocated who opens discussion by commenting on proposal and requesting HEC application		2 weeks
5		Prepare full literature review, industry background and target company background	2 weeks
6		On basis of literature review, target company background and industry background, prepare interview guide, with interviewee names and questions to be asked of each.	2 week
7	Get supervisor approval for progress made to date and interview guide. Obtain sign-off of supervisor for HEC application		2 week
8	Submit HEC and approved Case Study proposal to HEC	Modify and resubmit if required	4 weeks
9	HEC approval given		
10	Get sign-off approval of target interviewees for topics to be explored in the interviews		3 weeks
11	Carry out interviews in target organisation	Transcribe interviews in appropriate format for analysis	3 weeks
12		Analyse transcripts for	3 week

		coverage, issue identification and exploration, “quotable quotes”, etc.	
13		Write up final Case Study from interviews, and information gained in literature review and background studies	3 week
14	Get sign-off of target organisation executive for final Case Study document		2 week
15		Do final write up of target company analysis and industry analysis.	3 week
16		Ensure structure, format, bibliographic and citation style, and writing style conforms to specified requirements. Prepared two bound copies and one electronic copy for MIM Programme Director.	2 days
17	Supervisor signoff and submission to MIM Programme Director		Depends on supervisor availability
18		Write to interviewees to thank them for their cooperation and send copies of Case Study if so requested	2 weeks

**Topic Approval Form - MMIM 590 & 592**

**Name:** Insert Name & Surname

**Student ID:** Insert ID

**Address:** Insert postal address

**Phone:** Work: Work Tel No      Home: Home Tel No      Fax: Fax No

**Email:** Insert current email address

**Enrolment:** Trimseters enrolled in                      **Year:** Year enrolled in

**Type of Project** :( tick appropriate category)

**Supervised Research Topic:**       **Supervised Case Study:**

**Proposed Topic** (one sentence): Insert Proposed Topic

- **Problem Statement** (including significance of project): Insert Problem Statement
- **Definition of Key Terms** (used in Proposed Topic and Problem Statement): Insert definition of Key Terms
- **Objectives:** Insert Objectives
- **References:** (at least five):Insert List of Publications

<p><b><u>Approval</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Coordinator:</u></b> .....</p> <p><b><u>Supervisor:</u></b> .....</p> <p><b><u>Date:</u></b> .....</p>
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