

**SSU Writing Center**  
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**Some Well Crafted Writing Prompts  
(for more formal assignments)**

from John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996)

**The Business Case Study (for an upper-division business course)**

The Situation

You have recently been hired as a research assistant to business consultant Wilbur Jones, who has just taken on a new consulting project for Steamboat Beer, a growing regional firm that hopes to go national. One morning, Wilbur sends you the following memo:

Before my meeting next week with the Steamboat people, I need information on beer companies that have recently lost market share. I want you to find out what went wrong with Pabst. Pabst Blue Ribbon was a major company when I was in college. Now you hardly even hear about it. Get back to me with an analysis ASAP. What happened at Pabst and why?

You have heard that Wilbur likes his reports succinct and to the point, with meanings highlighted up front. He is a “scan reader” who wants to get the gist of a report quickly.

Your task

After reading, studying, and analyzing the assigned case materials on the Pabst Brewing Company, prepare your report for Wilbur. Make sure that it has two parts: (1) a brief chronological narrative showing what happened at Pabst, and (2) an analysis of what went wrong.

Process Stages for the Assignment

1. Read the case materials on Pabst.
2. Analyze the case materials in small groups (we’ll do this in class).
3. Write rough drafts; complete out-of-class peer reviews.
4. Submit “executive summaries” to the instructor.
5. Rewrite drafts after peer review and comments on executive summaries by instructor.
6. Submit final product.

Grading Criteria

Quality of narrative (brief but clear picture of what happened at Pabst): 10 points

Quality of causal analysis (clearly stated causes, good support, plausible and convincing argument based on data): 30 points

Readability (top-down organization, good use of headings, clear sentences with no confusing passages): 20 points

Grammar and correctness: 10 points

**The Formal Scientific Research Report (for biological or physical sciences)**

The formal scientific research report is a piece of professional writing addressed to other

professionals who are interested in the investigation you conducted. They will want to know why you did the investigation, how you did it, what you found out, and whether your findings were significant and useful. Research reports usually follow a standard five-part format: (1) introduction, (2) methods, (3) results, (4) discussion of results, and (5) conclusions and recommendations.

*Introduction.* Here you explain briefly the purpose of your investigation. What problem did you address? Why did you address it? You will need to provide enough background to enable the reader to understand the problem being investigated. Sometimes the introduction also includes a “literature review” summarizing previous research addressing the same or a related problem. In many scientific disciplines, it is also conventional to present a hypothesis--a tentative “answer” to the question that your investigation will confirm or disconfirm.

*Methods.* This is a “cookbook” section detailing how you did your investigation. It provides enough details so that other researchers could replicate your investigation. Usually, this section includes the following subsections: (a) research design, (b) apparatus and materials, and (c) procedures followed.

*Results.* This section, sometimes headed “Findings,” presents the empirical results of your investigation. Often, your findings are displayed in figures, tables, graphs, or charts that are referenced in the text. Even though the data are displayed in visuals, the text itself should also describe the most significant data. (Imagine that the figures are displayed on a view graph and that you are explaining them orally, using a pointer. Your written text should transcribe what you say orally.) Your figures and tables must have sufficient information to stand alone and include accurate titles and clear tables for all meaning-carrying features.

*Discussion of results.* This is the main part of the report, the part that will be read with the most care by other professionals. Here you explain the significance of your findings by relating what you discovered to the problem you set out to investigate in your introduction. Did your investigation accomplish your purpose? Did it answer your questions? Did it confirm or disconfirm your hypothesis? Are your results useful? Why or why not? Did you discover information that you hadn’t anticipated? Was your research design appropriate? Did your investigation raise new questions? Are there implications from your results that need to be explored? The key to success in this section is to link your findings to the questions and problems raised in the introduction.

*Conclusions and recommendations.* In this last section, you focus on the main things you learned from the investigation and, in some cases, on the practical applications of your investigation. If your investigation was a pure research project, this section can be a summary of your most important findings along with recommendations for further research. If your investigation was aimed at making a practical decision (for example, an engineering design decision), here you recommend appropriate actions. What you say in this section depends on the context of your investigation and the expectations of your readers.