BA200: WRITING AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & OTHER GROUP WRITING & RESEARCH TIPS

GETTING STARTED AS A TEAM

Successful teams will approach the analysis of their assigned company and the company’s industry sector with an open mind and will allow time for plenty of brainstorming as a group.

Before diving into the paper, get to know each other as a team. Fill out the Team Charter Template (available on the BA200 Research Paper Guide here: https://kresgeguides.bus.umich.edu/ba200/)

PLANNING YOUR REPORT

Business writing exists to inform, persuade and report. It should be clear, accurate, specific and succinct. As you prepare to write your report, after reviewing the assignment document as a team, consider what your report’s main message will be and how the report will be structured. Decide as a team how you will divide the work as well as how you will keep track of your sources.

WHAT IS AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY?

An executive summary provides a preview of a more in-depth report. An executive summary should be able to stand alone and make sense to the reader even if they haven’t read the full report.

The Executive Summary should:

- Capture the reader’s attention and make them want to read the whole report.
- State the purpose/aim of the report.
  - For example, the main purpose of this report is to explore the X industry landscape and understand how two major players in it, Company A and Company B, perform.
- Help the reader quickly grasp any major observations, conclusions, or recommendations.
- Be written after you have written the whole report so that it more accurately reflects the content of the report.
• Be approximately 5-10% of the length of the whole paper (about a ¾ page for an 8 page paper).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY STYLE GUIDELINES:

• Paragraphs should be short and concise and in a formal style. See below for additional writing style guidelines.
• Use section headings in the Executive Summary and refer to them in the rest of your paper to improve overall clarity and flow.
  o You can match the sections of the summary with the headings in your paper to help the reader navigate the entire report as well as to skim the summary.
• Present the key points in the executive summary in the identical order as they appear in the report for logical flow and cohesion.
• Avoid recycling sentences or paragraphs from the body of the report in the Executive Summary as this can be repetitious for the reader. You can repeat or emphasize major points, but don’t repeat word for word.

OTHER WRITING TIPS

See also the resources listed on the BA200 Research Paper Guide
https://kresgeguides.bus.umich.edu/ba200/BA200writingcitingtips

DETERMINING THE SCOPE

Clarity is important so, as a team, decide how you will define the focus areas of your paper (e.g. “This paper will focus on the Land’s End segment of Sears Holding Company within the US Department Stores industry.”) This clarity will not be immediately obvious to the team but rather will unfold (hopefully) as you progress with your research.

  o Explore the company’s website to identify how they describe their segments and market areas.
  o Explore relevant industry reports (keeping in mind that different databases may describe similar industries using different terminology and/or different levels of granularity (e.g. Department Stores vs. Retail vs. Women’s Apparel).
  o Extrapolate from what you find in the various resources but remember to clearly define your own terms throughout the paper so that the reader can follow and so that the data is comparable.
WRITING STYLE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

Your Team Research Paper should tell a story about your company through the lens of the Customer Value Proposition, so set the stage for the story and give the reader a description of the company overall and their customers.

DO:

- Use your own words but in a formal style, without any jargon (this is true for the whole paper).
- Use an impersonal/formal writing style and assume your audience is a supervisor/manager/professor.
- Use your paper to illustrate that the team understands the concepts from Unit 1: the firm profile ("square side") and the customer profile ("circle side") aspects of CVP, customer segmentation, stakeholders, value in business ecosystems, etc.
- Use descriptive headers to help you to tell your story—consider them "chapter titles" and use them both as a navigation tool for the reader (you can refer back or ahead to heading areas) and as a writing aid to make your paper more interesting and readable.
- Write the paper you and your team would like to read.
  - If you have a hard time reading it or getting through certain sections, chances are your instructor will, too.
- Cite your sources consistently.
- Give yourself and your team plenty of time for revisions and editing. You will see the payoff in the quality of the final draft (and, hopefully, the final grade).
- Keep track of your research!
  - Note down where you've looked, what you found, terminology you used, what you need to follow up on, etc. (Do this individually as well as a group).
  - There's no "right way" to do this--whatever works best. Don't overthink how it gets done, just don't neglect this important step
- Ask for help anytime!

DON'T:

- Write in the first and second person
  - Examples: "We did this…", "I think that...", “you probably do…”.
- Use lots of qualitative language (adverbs and adjectives) unless they directly relate to the topic at hand.
  - Words like “obviously” or “really” or “literally” or “absolutely” should be avoided.
Use vague words like “things” or “probably” or “anyways.” These weaken your sentences and make them less specific.

Assume that the reader knows about the nuances of your company, even if it seems well-known.

**REFERENCES**

Whenever you use information from other sources in your report, references must be provided both in-text and with a corresponding entry in a list at the end of the report. In general, APA style is preferred in business writing.

An APA in-text citation will use either an author’s last name (if citing an article) or a report publisher’s name. For example: (Smith, 2016) If you have a specific page number to include, that is helpful (but not required), e.g. (Smith, 2016, p. 23).

Here’s an example paragraph with (quite a few—you won’t necessarily need to cite every sentence—this is just for illustration) in-text citations and corresponding references:

For years, research has indicated that business values have shifted, resulting in companies placing an emphasis on ethics (Paine, 2002). Enron is a prime example of a company that epitomizes “all that was wrong with corporate America” (McLean and Elkind, 2013). With various scandals in the news highlighting a disconnect between business executives’ power and their accountability, some business faculty are calling for changes to the MBA curriculum (Hoffman, 2018).

References


**CLAIMS-BASED OUTLINING**

Use a “Claims-Based Outline” model for your paper to help you:

- Clarify what data you need
- Strengthen your argument and your writing
- Connect your claims back to main theme of paper to promote a cohesive flow overall

Example:

Claim: Uber drivers are dissatisfied.

⇒ Support: Drivers are not staying on as long (cite data that supports this)
⇒ Support: Drivers have formed a union. (cite source for this)
⇒ Support: A survey showed that compared to Lyft drivers, Uber drivers were not satisfied with their experience (cite survey)
  o Paper tie-in: Uber should recalibrate its value proposition to drivers to that the tensions do not impact other members of the ecosystem or Uber’s CVP.

WHAT IF OUR ASSIGNED COMPANY IS NOT SIMPLE OR STRAIGHTFORWARD?

- If your team has a “complicated” company (e.g. one with multiple, branded operations or with less of a consumer focus), your team has an even greater opportunity to excel through clear articulation and definition within your paper.
  o Consider the company overall, including the parent as well as all subsidiaries—the reader needs to have an understanding of the “big picture” before the team can home in on a particular area.
  o Consider, too, focusing in on one particular product area if your company is primarily a manufacturer and/or incorporate a discussion of the manufacturing and retail aspects of the company.
  o Include your rationale behind the focus areas you’ve selected if it helps to reinforce your discussion of CVP.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- When in doubt, always check with your instructor and/or your TA for additional guidance.
- Reach out to the Kresge Library for help with your research.
  o Ask for help anytime or make use of the Friday drop-in hours (1-2:30) starting Friday, September 21.
• Review the assignment itself and grading rubric for the paper (available on the BA200 Research Guide)
• Review your course materials and tie the concepts into your paper!
• Remember that your Team Project will focus on the same company your research for this paper and continue the story through a new lens of Stakeholder Analysis and Corporate Citizenship.