

Writing the Forensic Case Study

Start with the case as the title of your report:

Case Citation Example: *Myers v. United States*, 272 U.S. 52, 135 (1926)

Followed by your name.

The body of the report should be written in outline structure: 1., 2., 3., etc. in which each number provides a specific set of information as detailed below. Most report outlines will not be more than 5 pages long, not counting the reference page.

1. **Facts of the Case:** Pinpoint the determinative facts of a case, ie., those that make a difference in the outcome. Your goal here is to be able to briefly tell the story of the case without missing any pertinent information but also not including too many extraneous facts either. Above all, make sure you have clearly identified the main players. State the parties' names and positions in the case (Plaintiff/Defendant or Appellee/Appellant, and victims or agencies involved).
2. **Forensic Psychology or Scientific Issue Presented:** Formulate the main legal issues and forensic psychology questions embedded in the case. Write them in the form of questions. For example, "What is the level of competence needed to stand trial when the defendant is mentally retarded?" Later you will need to explain how these issues are argued in the case, so clearly stating the question(s) will make writing that section easier.
3. **Review of Literature:** What does the scientific research say about these issues? Like any other research paper, conduct a brief review of literature to see what professional journals say the issue at the heart of the legal question. What does behavioral science know about this issue? For example, when the legal question is the competence of a mentally retarded defendant, you would need to find three or four research articles describing the cognitive capacities or limitations of individuals with intellectual deficiencies. Are there a lot of differing opinions or conflicting research results? Is this an issue with little scientific information about it? If there is a clear consensus of professional opinion, what is it?
4. **Court Decision:** What was the judgment in this case? Who did the judge or jury decide was right? If the opinion says, "We hold..." that's the majority opinion. Just state the decision in a sentence or two.
5. **Rule of Law:** What was the legal standard that comes out of this case? In some cases this will be clearer than others, but basically you want to identify the principle of law on which the judge or jury is basing the resolution of the case. This rule of law will be used in future cases to make judgments. For example, the Rule of Law in *Miranda v. Arizona* is that '*evidence obtained by police in a custodial interrogation of a suspect is not admissible in court to prove guilt unless the suspect was given warnings about his constitutional rights. Those rights included....*'
In other words, state why this case is important.
6. **Reasoning:** What were the judges' reasons for deciding the case the way they did? How were the issues argued? There may be dissenting opinions as well, which is important to state why some judges disagreed. Did the majority opinion consider the scientific research or expert opinions in reaching their decision? If not, why did they disregard with the experts or best practice evidence? Remember, legal

facts are different from scientific facts. What were the facts that persuaded the court to make their decision?

7. **Reference Sheet:** APA style

Depending on the case, your paper will be anywhere from 5-6 pages. Make sure you use APA format in the body of the paper as well as in the Reference pages. Please review the rubric for the best outcome.