

Case Competition 101

🏁 Introduction 🏁

Preparing for a case competition can feel overwhelming – especially if it's your first time. Don't worry, you're not alone – that feeling is something we've all been through. This document is meant to help ease your anxieties by offering some guidance (not rules) on how one might approach a case. Think of this document as a starting point: a collection of strategies, tips, and frameworks that have worked well for others.

If you already have a clear approach in mind, trust your instincts and go for it! If you're new to case competitions or looking for a bit of structure, feel free to lean on the ideas here to help shape your thinking and build out your work.

Ultimately, the best preparation is the one that works for you. Use this guide as much – or as little – as you need.

👩‍⚖️ Judging and Subjectivity 👩‍⚖️

Judging case competitions is a subjective process. All judges are different, and some styles will work well with one group of judges and fall flat with another. Even amongst ourselves, we rarely fully agree on how the teams should be placed.

The takeaway here is that your results in this case competition are subjective. Treat any feedback you receive as one data point among many you should use when considering how to approach a case and construct a presentation.

💬 Presenting 💬

For most of us, presenting is very scary! The first time I spoke publicly I was 13 years old, and I was so nervous that I completely blacked out. Since then, I've done public speaking many times, and I still get so nervous – every time I need to present or speak, I feel quite nauseous. I bring this up, so you know that I feel your pain and have empathy for the difficulties associated with public speaking. That vulnerability can be difficult to manage.

Luckily, there is some good news:

- The more you present, the better you get. Like any skill, improvement comes from practice.
- The more you present, the less nervous you feel.

These two form a virtuous cycle. As you get better, you feel less nervous because you trust yourself to do well and because you have a memory bank of successful presentations to rely on. The less nervous you feel, the better you'll do.

For those who are nervous about presenting, I admire and applaud your courage. Any opportunity to face your public speaking fear demonstrates strength of character, be proud every time you put yourself in a vulnerable and uncomfortable position like that. Keep practicing because building these skills early will be a huge asset to your career and in other areas of life.

Be the Consultant

Case competitions are usually designed using a consultant model. You as participants represent a consultant company and we as judges represent high-level decision makers from a company (in this case, Harbor Enterprise Liability & Property, or HELP).

Consider the company's background. For example, a mutually structured company doesn't have customers, they have members. This is not just a verbiage technicality – members own the company, and therefore any actions that support members will also support the company's owners. Some companies use direct distribution while others use broker networks. Some companies derive profits from selling insurance, others by selling products to insurance companies. Build solutions that are consistent with a company's structure and primary goals.

We can role play a little bit. You may assume that your executive report and presentation are part of a series of ongoing conversations between your consultant team and the company represented by your judges (in this case, HELP). That gives you the opportunity to push less-important topics off to "future meetings" (which of course will never happen). Why is this important? Because both your executive report and in-person presentation time are condensed into an incredibly small number of minutes. You simply do not have time to discuss everything important. However, you would like to show the judges that you thought of these topics and have cleverly identified them as low priority, to be discussed at another time. Find ways to demonstrate these two skills: brainstorming ideas, and prioritizing those ideas.

Here is an example of identifying an idea and assigning it lower priority: "*Our team noticed an opportunity to incorporate AI into the data analysis pipeline. However, this idea does not help solve the central problem of this study. We have included analysis in the appendix, and we would be happy to review with you during Q&A, or at a future meeting*".

Did you catch what just happened? You get credit for recognizing that an idea, while not top priority, is still a good one worth exploring.



Executive Summary



Business documents often begin with an executive summary. An executive summary is a concise overview of the larger document—typically placed at the beginning—that highlights the key points, findings, and recommendations. It is designed to give decision-makers and stakeholders a quick yet comprehensive understanding of the document's purpose and conclusions without requiring them to read the entire content.

In Canadian P&C insurance, executive summaries are especially valuable when presenting. They help bridge the gap between technical depth and business relevance.

Typical elements include:

- Purpose of the document
- Key issues or problems addressed
- Summary of analysis or findings
- Main recommendations or conclusions

❓ Problem Identification ❓

“Why do we care?”

Even if problem identification is not specifically mentioned in a scoring rubric, it represents a huge opportunity to set the stage for a winning case. It is helpful to define a ‘central problem’ that we are trying to solve. Then, every piece of information presented and every sentence you speak should be clearly linked to solving the central problem. Identifying the central problem(s) correctly sets the stage for the rest of your report/presentation to be successful.

Identifying the central problems correctly means that:

- Your time spent on analysis is more targeted to supporting issues that the company (HELP in this case) cares about.
- Your proposed solution(s) are more aligned with the company’s (HELP’s) main problem(s). This might be reflected in weights and results of a decision matrix.
- In presentations, you have a default fallback plan for some tough questions during Q&A.
- Your subjective decisions are all supporting solving the problem statement.

During your presentation, you should be consistently tying everything back to the central problem. Essentially, consider “**why do we care**” on every section in the report and every slide in the presentation.

Problem identification can and should be very quick within the report/presentation. 30-45 seconds is plenty.

Cloud Quality of Analysis Cloud

Strong case competition teams have excellent analysis supporting their work. Your goal here is to support each decision and recommendation with good quality analysis. Data and logic adds credibility to your message.

A team with *ok* analysis will have done most of following:

- Aggregated or organized data into basic summary statistics.
- Identified some important data visuals.
- Used decision criteria to compare alternative recommendations.
- Used logic to connect a potential problem to their proposed solution.

A team with *good* analysis will have done most of the above plus some of the following:

- Linked decision criteria to the business problem(s) and business environment.
- Found data/statistics that support a key focus of the presentation.
 - Data was used to identify a central problem.
 - Data was used to help identify or weigh the decision criteria.
 - Data was used to analyze how various solutions (marketing, pricing, technology, etc.) perform under the chosen decision criteria.
 - Data was used to support an implementation plan, key performance indicators (KPIs), or timeline.
 - Data was used to quantify and measure important insurance measures such as price, profit, risk, market share, loss ratio, conversion ratio, NPS, etc.

A team with *outstanding* analysis will have done most of the above plus some of the following:

- Provided research that achieved some of the following:
 - Added immense clarity to the problem statement.
 - Developed compelling decision criteria or alternatives. These selections would not be defensible without the support of the research.
 - Provided compelling evidence that a proposed solution/approach has low risk and/or a high chance of success.
- Noticed patterns in the data missed by judges and/or most other teams. Used that knowledge to support creative decisions or recommendations. Usually, these creative options are not available without the supporting analysis.
- Analysis was performed for work not directly included in the presentation but included in the appendix. This shows judges that the team understands not just how to analyze data, but how to prioritize its importance within the framework of a business proposal.
- Data was used to support an argument centered on ethics.



Quality of Visuals

This case limits the judges to 15 minutes of reading for your executive report. We recommend leaning heavily on visuals since humans communicate information faster using pictures than text. In general, presentation slides should not have much text. Why not? Because if slides have a lot of text, then the judges will spend time reading. You're better off having us listen to your words than read them.

Reports and presentations should have a consistent feel throughout. If judges have trouble following logic or a train of thought, it is likely that you missed an opportunity to add clarity through visuals. Take any opportunity to turn data into a picture. Computers like to ingest information through data tables, humans like to ingest information through pictures. Consider the important parts of each visual and make sure the audience's eyes are drawn to those parts.

A team with *ok* “quality of visuals” will have done some the following:

- Presentation/report felt thematic - colour, text, and shapes are used consistently.
- Slides/pages are free of clutter and excessive text.
- Slides/pages draw the audience's eyes to the most important concepts being discussed.
- Charts are legible (for an actuary of course).
- Charts do not misrepresent the underlying dataset (this is a BIG no-no. Never do this. Seriously, never ever do this.)
- Identified some of the more important data visuals provided in the case.

A team with *good* “quality of visuals” will have done most of the above plus some the following:

- High quality / creative visuals that are more in-depth than simple line charts and histograms.
- Visuals supporting the case were created or collected through research.
- Visuals effectively communicate key sections of the case (executive summary, problem statement, SWOT analysis, alternatives, decision criteria, implementation, etc.)
- Presentation/report roadmap was displayed professionally in each slide.

A team with *outstanding* “quality of visuals” will have done most of the above plus some of the following:

- Developed a particularly clever way of visually representing data results or trends. This representation allowed the team to communicate a large volume of complex information quickly and intuitively.
- Multiple visuals are used in the same slide to reveal conclusions that would be difficult to notice when viewed independently.
- Used visuals to integrate multiple concepts simultaneously.

 

Quality of Proposed Solution

In most case competitions, the judges want teams to put forth at least 2 alternatives, assess them, and show one to be the best choice.

Realistically, with 15 minutes, 2-3 options is safest. 4 options is probably too many simply due to time constraints. If you had more than 3 options, this would be a good time to include them in the appendix.

It didn't matter too much what the actual end decision was. We want you to demonstrate an objective and logical process for coming to that decision. In other words, a correct answer is primarily about the analysis / process / logic used to generate that answer.

Here are some ways to score points in this category.

- Many teams use a decision matrix to evaluate options. This is an effective tool and is appropriate here. Weighted categories with checks and Xs are good. Numeric evaluations of alternatives against weighted decision criteria are excellent. If you've never used a decision matrix before and would like to try, we recommend enlisting your favourite AI chatbot to help you draft one.
- Propose and compare a diverse range of alternatives. For example, lowering the price is not significantly different from introducing a discount.
- Including quantification element(s) for ethical / responsible business practices.
- Identifying (and weighting) decision criteria by using some of the following:
 - Linking back to the central problem or key issues.
 - Results of the organization's SWOT analysis. If you've never made a SWOT analysis before and would like to try, we recommend enlisting your favourite AI chatbot to help you draft one.
 - Insurance knowledge and logic: product pricing, product design, risk identification and quantification, risk reduction (diversification etc.), cash flows (size and timing), laws and regulations, etc.
 - Marketing knowledge: market segmentation, growth, loyalty, net promoter scores, communication preferences, customer touchpoint patterns, etc.
 - Ethical considerations: environmental protection, community building, promoting equality and fairness, etc.
- Evaluating various alternatives by using some of the following:
 - Central problem or key issues
 - SWOT (above)
 - Insurance and marketing knowledge and logic (above)
 - Results of data analysis.
- Any team that includes one or more ethical considerations into the decision criteria and/or the final recommendation will score additional points

If you can see a need for it, adding an implementation timeline can elevate the quality of your proposal. While not necessary, the timeline adds great clarity to your proposal. A good quality timeline can score you points in multiple categories the judges care about.

🏁 Don't Remove your Appendix 🏁

The appendix is an excellent and highly under-utilized resource in the business world.

For a 15 minute executive report, you only have time to show us ‘great’ content. Much of your ‘good’ content simply won’t be prioritized. Each valuable piece of analysis or logic that doesn’t fit neatly into the report should be stored in the appendix. This is an excellent way to demonstrate that you had many ideas, and that you know how to prioritize those ideas properly. An especially cool result can happen if a judge has a question while reading the report, and you’ve already done analysis. Nothing is more impressive to a judge than thinking of a question, then finding the answer in appendix c showing the work has already been done!

Another use can be for in-depth analysis. Again, time is a major constraint. You likely don’t have time to show off all your analysis. It is perfectly OK to write something like the following:

“Here you can see weather data over the past few years. Our analysis indicates that while it’s generally stable, there are regions where the weather was quite volatile. That analysis is available in appendix b.”

Enjoy the competition!

If you have questions, feel free to reach out!

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