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# The Perfect Case Study GUIDEBOOK

Tips & tricks for succeeding in  
the EPSO Case Study exercise



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# FOREWORD

WHILE WE READILY ADMIT THAT A 'PERFECT' CASE STUDY IS A SUBJECTIVE CATEGORY, OUR GOAL WAS TO PROVIDE A BENCHMARK STUDY THAT HAS ALL THE GOOD ELEMENTS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE A HIGH SCORE. THERE COULD BE MANY ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES, SO FEEL FREE TO BE CREATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO DRAFTING YOURS.

So I must admit: the title of this work is somewhat misleading, but still it covers the objective of getting the candidates – you – to come up with their best possible essay taking into account all the constraints and circumstances of this exercise.

1

**THE FIRST REASON** why a “perfect” Case Study is not possible is related to the way the essays are scored. With the current state of technology it is not possible to automate this process, so EPSO has to rely on human intervention to do the scoring. In fact, your essay will be reviewed by at least two different people (“markers”) and in an anonymous way.

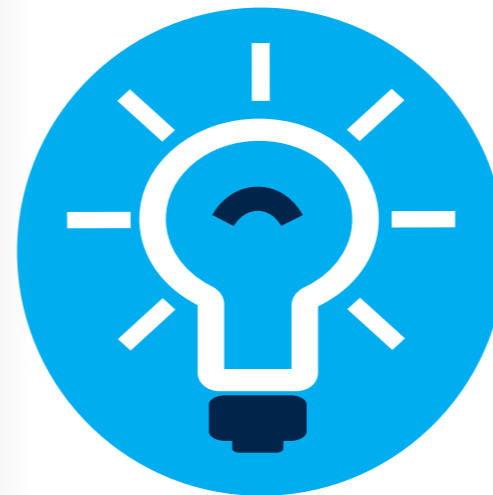
Even though there are very precise instructions on how to score the various aspects of your essay, there is still a margin for personal interpretation – and judgement. This also means that what may be “perfect” for one person, may very well not be for another. Being fully aware of this, EPSO takes into account the different scores by simply making the average, thus giving the candidate the benefit of the doubt. However, when the individual scores are too far apart (e.g. more than 3 points, but this is decided by the Selection Board) there is a “third marking”. The third marking is done independently, usually by a member of the Selection Board or its President, who knows the criteria even better than the markers as he or she actually participated in the creation of the exercise and the instructions to the markers. The result of all this is maybe not “perfect” but it has the benefit of being impartial – and the same for all the candidates.

2

**THE SECOND REASON** for imperfection has to do with the exercise itself. Even though it is the intention to create a “realistic” scenario – a scenario which puts the candidate in an environment that is as close as possible to their future working environment – it is not possible to do this in a perfect way. In the real world, officials have a wealth of sources at their disposal. They also have different professional experiences and education. This means that the setting has to be limited and that the candidates are to be asked to stay within the boundaries of the background information provided, and to avoid relying on their own knowledge of the real world to fill in the blanks. They can, however, use that knowledge when it is asked to come up with suggestions, solutions or recommendations.

3

**THE THIRD REASON** is related to the constraints of the environment. The user interface is a very basic text editor – without the “whistles and bells” one usually finds in a professional office environment. Also, the time is very limited (you only get 90 minutes to complete the exercise). All this constrains the candidate from coming up with a “professional” (or “perfect”) look-and-feel – and content. The markers are fully aware of this, don’t worry, but still their judgement may be influenced by these imperfections.



**As a conclusion, the “perfect” Case Study solution doesn’t exist.**

**HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAKE IT AS GOOD AS IT GETS. IT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS BOOKLET TO TELL YOU HOW.**

# THE CASE STUDY AS PART OF THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

GENERALLY SPEAKING, A CASE STUDY IS A REALISTIC AND RELEVANT BUSINESS PROBLEM.

Candidates are asked to analyse a problem, interpret data, consider alternatives and produce a written report describing their solutions or recommendations. Normally, at EPSO, the Case Study takes the form of a computer-based written exercise. In some competitions, however, candidates are asked to produce a hand-written document. As such this does not really matter because the content of your essay is more important than the overall format.

You will receive information about an EU-related scenario, presenting you various questions you will be asked to answer, solely on the basis of the materials available. For this exercise you will need to be familiar with the EU issues and the EU institutions, so that you quickly grasp the context of the simulations. The objective of the Case Study is to assess the candidate's general competencies and – for certain competitions - the candidate's proficiency in the field.

Not all competitions have a Case Study; for AST competitions this is often replaced by an In-tray exercise, which assesses more or less the same competencies, but at a different level.

The Case Study is only one of the tests you will have to do in the Assessment Centre. Typically, each of these tests are aimed at assessing four or five competencies (see later) and each competency is assessed through at least two different tests. This means that, in the Assessment Centre, you are "observed" from different perspectives (i.e. through different tests) in order to get as complete as possible image of you – and your competencies.

As such, the Case Study is not eliminatory; the scores you obtain for the various competencies tested will be added to the scores obtained for the other tests

aimed at assessing these competencies. Only if you don't obtain the pass mark for any given competency, or the minimum required total score (for all the competencies), will you be eliminated from the competition. There is one exception though: for those competitions where the professional competencies are only scored with the Case Study, your score for "professional competencies" has to exceed the pass mark (because there is no other score given by another test).

Despite its innocent looks the Case Study is a very important part of the Assessment Centre. Let's have a look at some figures. The table below gives you an overview of the relative importance of every exercise in an Assessment Centre for AD specialists (8 general competencies, 1 field competence):

Exercise	General (45%)	Field (55%)	Weight
Case Study	0.25	0.5	39%
Competency Based interview	0.25		11%
Oral Presentation	0.25		11%
Group Exercise	0.25		11%
Interview in the Field		0.5	28%

In this table, the second and third columns give the relative importance of every test as compared to all the tests. So for the general competencies all the tests have an equal "weight" of 0.25 (in fact this is not entirely true as the CBI tests up to 6 competencies, meaning that its weight should be higher, but that's not the point). For the field competencies there are only two tests with an equal weight of 0.5. However, your total score is calculated as a weighted sum of your scores for general and field competencies. The field competency having a higher weight (55% in this case), this yields a relative weight for each exercise as shown in the last column.

The exact figures will vary from competition to competition, but this simple calculation shows clearly that **THE CASE STUDY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT EXERCISE**, because it accounts for the most points as compared to the other exercises. This may all sound very complicated, but it isn't really. The important thing is that you know exactly for your competition how the Case Study is accounted for. This information will be clearly indicated in the Notice of Competition. You will also be informed about the details of your competition through your EPSO account.

**Before going any further, I suggest you have a closer look at the competencies, as this will allow me to explain some simple tips and tricks to optimise your performance for this important exercise.**



# GENERAL COMPETENCIES

It has been said before: the ultimate objective of the Case Study is to assess some (4) of your general competencies and, in certain cases, your ability to become a proficient official in the domain of the competition you are taking.

General competencies are a set of coherent and life-long abilities which an official needs to possess in order to have a successful career within the complex and multicultural environment of the European Institutions.

As such, the general competencies are at the base of a set of exercises which go beyond the immediate in order to assess the candidate's all-round abilities and therefore their potential for a long-term career within European public service. The 'case-study' is one of the exercises EPSO uses, set-up to assess the following general competencies:



Allow me to expand a bit more on each of these, more specifically in the context of the Case Study. Following a broad definition, I will give for every competence a list of "positive" and "negative" indicators, used to score every competency.

## ANALYSIS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

"IDENTIFY THE CRITICAL FACTS IN COMPLEX ISSUES AND DEVELOP CREATIVE AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS."

### + POSITIVE INDICATORS

- *Copes well with complexity.*
- *Challenges data.*
- *Identifies the root cause of issues.*
- *Considers multiple options.*
- *Suggests creative solutions.*
- *Makes practical and workable suggestions.*
- *Gathers only relevant information for decision making.*

### - NEGATIVE INDICATORS

- *Is confused by complexity.*
- *Accepts data at face value.*
- *Stays at superficial level.*
- *Focuses on single option.*
- *Comes up with conventional ideas*
- *Makes impractical or non-workable suggestions.*
- *Presents irrelevant or too detailed information.*

## COMMUNICATION (DRAFTING SKILLS)

"COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND PRECISELY."

### + POSITIVE INDICATORS

- *Writes clearly and fluently.*
- *Uses proper balance of detail and conciseness.*
- *Writes for the right audience.*
- *Captures the attention of the audience.*
- *Conveys key points of arguments.*
- *Writes without spelling or grammatical errors.*

### - NEGATIVE INDICATORS

- *Writes in a way that is difficult to understand.*
- *Is overly detailed or too concise.*
- *Writes for the wrong audience.*
- *Fails to capture the attention of the audience.*
- *Fails to convey the key points of arguments.*
- *Makes many spelling or grammatical errors.*

## DELIVERING QUALITY AND RESULTS

"TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INITIATIVE FOR DELIVERING WORK TO A HIGH STANDARD OF QUALITY WITHIN SET PROCEDURES."

### + POSITIVE INDICATORS

- Takes responsibility to meet objectives.
- Maintains quality of an acceptable level.
- Follows guidelines and instructions.
- Takes initiative.
- Accepts challenges.
- Seeks to exceed expectations.

### - NEGATIVE INDICATORS

- Fails to take responsibility.
- Allows quality to degrade.
- Does not follow guidelines and instructions.
- Avoids challenges.
- Does only the minimum effort required.

## PRIORITISING AND ORGANISING

"PRIORITISE THE MOST IMPORTANT TASKS, WORK FLEXIBLY AND ORGANISE OWN WORKLOAD EFFICIENTLY."

### + POSITIVE INDICATORS

- Prioritises tasks appropriately.
- Set realistic deadlines and milestones.
- Monitors progress.
- Adapts to changes in a plan.
- Prepares in advance, is proactive.

### - NEGATIVE INDICATORS

- Makes incorrect priority judgements.
- Fails to set realistic deadlines and milestones.
- Does not monitor progress.
- Fails to adapt to change in a plan.
- Fails to prepare in advance, is reactive.

In theory, the markers have to look at all these indicators in your essay and justify their scores by listing the indicators they found. In practice, they have a clear set of instructions – or questions to answer when giving their assessment. This is materialized in a "Scoring Guide", a booklet the Markers receive along with a training course they have to follow when enlisting for a given competition. As you can see, this is not rocket science but purely common sense. You don't have to be a genius but just a well-balanced and true professional.

## MORE ABOUT KNOWLEDGE IN THE FIELD

For the "general administration" competitions only the "general" competencies as described above are assessed with the Case Study. **For administrators** (and assistants) in a certain domain (e.g. auditors, economists ...) and for specialists (e.g. IT, building and construction, archivists...) the Case Study also assesses what is known as "competencies in the field". In the first case this assessment is done exclusively with the Case Study and the competencies in the field count for typically 25% of the overall mark. **For Specialists** there is, besides the Case Study, also an "Interview in the Field". The average score you get for these two tests counts for typically 55% of the overall mark. In both cases there is a pass mark for the competencies in the field.

I frequently get the question from candidates who are worried about how deep their knowledge in the field will be examined during the Case Study. In fact, they are worried about how much they should prepare themselves (in their domain that is) for this exercise. My answer is invariably: rest assured, even though the topic of the Case Study will be related to your field, there will never be specific – or very detailed – questions to be answered. The Case Study will only assess your sound understanding of the domain and verify that you are still up-to-date in your domain.

**The indicators for "Competency in the Field" for the Case Study are as follows:**

### + POSITIVE INDICATORS

- Shows evidence of a sound understanding of the principles of the specialism area.
- Is aware of the latest developments in the domain.
- Displays breadth and depth of knowledge in the field.
- Refers to relevant knowledge sources.
- Demonstrates awareness of relevant legislation in the domain.

### - NEGATIVE INDICATORS

- Shows no understanding of the principles of their specialism area.
- Is not aware of the latest developments in the domain.
- Displays a narrow or shallow understanding of the field.
- Uses no relevant knowledge sources.
- Is unaware of relevant legislation in the domain.

You see, there is no need to dig into your university books and study everything again, as long as you can demonstrate that you are a savvy professional, that you are up-to-date, and that you are aware of the relevant legislation in your field (after all, the EU institutions are all dealing with legal matters in some way, and they also have to set the example for their internal operations).

# THE ASSIGNMENT

The most important document in the documentation you receive is the Assignment. In here you will find instructions about the purpose of the exercise, your role, the time and – most importantly, the questions you are asked to solve. A typical assignment looks something like this:

## ASSIGNMENT

### IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is a fictitious document only produced for the purpose of this exercise. All references to existing states, international organisations, private companies, departments, their representatives etc. should be considered as mere examples. They do not represent any position of these bodies or persons. Participants are therefore advised to rely solely on the information presented in the exercise and not on any prior expertise when responding to questions.

**For this exercise you will assume the role of X at Y within the Unit responsible for Z.** The documentation you need is integrated in this booklet. You will find in it a certain number of e-mails, reports, articles and other documents that you will need to analyse and integrate in order to be able to properly deal with the assignment given to you.

**It is important that you accept the simulated situation as it is presented to you.** Although in a real life situation you would have access to other sources of information and would be able to consult your colleagues, in this exercise you are limited to the information contained in the exercise documents. You are, however, allowed to make logical assumptions where information is missing or incomplete.

**You may rearrange the documents in any order you wish and add remarks or make notes as necessary.** However, remember that the assessors will base their evaluation exclusively on what you write. Therefore, be sure to write down all the information on which you wish to be evaluated and be sure to explain the reasoning behind your ideas.

**The Case Study aims at assessing the following competencies:** Analysis and problem solving, Communicating (drafting skills), Delivering quality & results and Prioritising & Organising.

In addition to the general competencies, it assesses your ability to apply specific knowledge to a particular situation in your domain.

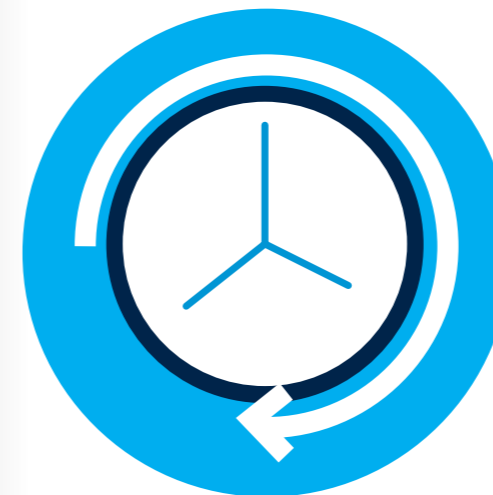
Your concrete task will consist of answering questions concerning the situation described in this exercise:

- **Question 1**
- **Question 2**
- **Question 3**

In total, you have 90 minutes for this Case Study. Please answer as precisely as you can and write as clearly as possible.

**Please note:  
Today is Friday, 29 June 200X  
Last year was 200X-1, next year will be 200X+1**

(source: EPSO)



**YOUR TIME IS VERY LIMITED**, so I would suggest you have a closer look at this example during your preparation (right now), and take note of what's in it, so that you don't lose time during the "real" exercise itself.

All assignments look the same, and they only differ for the parts that are put in bold in the above example. Obviously, you have to read – and be aware – of this information during your "real" exercise.



# THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ESSAY

YOU CAN DECIDE ON THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ESSAY RIGHT AFTER READING THE ASSIGNMENT.



**In fact, a good structure should always look like this:**

1. INTRODUCTION
2. TITLE OF YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 1
3. TITLE OF YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 2
4. TITLE OF YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 3
5. CONCLUSIONS

**When putting this structure on paper, leave some blank lines in between the titles.** Don't worry about what you are going to write at this point, you will "fill in the blanks" later on. It is a good idea to write your titles in **ALL CAPITAL LETTERS**, and even number them, just to make sure that the structure of your text is visible at first glance. You could also leave a blank line between the titles and the actual portions of text, to make the structure even more visible.

**Now why is this a good structure?** Well, because the markers will undoubtedly be looking for the structure, and will try to find out if you have answered all the questions. In fact, they will probably go through your essay in a "speed reading" way (at least in a first reading). You can help them with this by using this structure. The **INTRODUCTION** and the **CONCLUSIONS** are there to make your essay complete. Even though not absolutely necessary, it will show the reader that you are delivering a completed work, and that you did not run out of time while writing it. This will be even more the case if you write a compelling introduction and a well-thought-out conclusion.

For the "body" of your chapters it is advised to **USE LISTS** wherever it is possible to do so. This further enhances the visual appearance of your work and makes it very easy for the markers to verify that you have not missed any important information. Do not confuse "lists" with enumerations of incomplete sentences or mere keywords. Try to make concise but grammatically correct and comprehensive sentences. In other words, make your text fluent and readable. Make your text **READY FOR PRESENTATION**. Imagine that you will use it as a hand-out for an oral presentation you will give to the audience.

One last remark on the user interface of the tool you will have to use at EPSO: this is a very simple text editor (similar to Notepad) and you have very few possibilities to enhance the visual aspect of your work. It is not possible to put words or sentences in **bold**, *italic* or to underline them. You can't even use different fonts or font-sizes. The only way to make your text somewhat clearer – or more attractive – is through what I told you before (capitalisation, numbering, lists, blank lines).

**NOTE:** Even though this is not mandatory it is a good idea to add a header, and a footer to your work. These would then typically contain the recipient, a title for the document, the date (header) and a "signature" of the sender (you). Make it look as if you are writing an email – or a memo – about the subject. By doing so, you make it clear that you have understood the context of the exercise.

**NEVER, EVER PUT YOUR (REAL) NAME ANYWHERE IN THE ESSAY. Your work will be marked anonymously (using a "secret" ID). If the document can be linked to a candidate you will be excluded from the competition without further ado.**



# THE CONTENT OF YOUR ESSAY

IT IS CLEAR THAT THE CONTENT OF WHAT YOU WRITE IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR TEXT.

The markers are specialists in your field themselves, so you have to demonstrate to them that you have really understood the questions that are asked and that you can come up with acceptable and realistic solutions or recommendations.

## **A first and important remark can be found in the assignment:**

*"It is important that you accept the simulated situation as it is presented to you. Although in a real life situation you would have access to other sources of information and would be able to consult your colleagues, in this exercise you are limited to the information contained in the exercise documents. You are, however, allowed to make logical assumptions where information is missing or incomplete".*

You will have to **ACCEPT THE CONTEXT** as confined in the documentation and stay within this context. So, if your Case Study is about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of cars in the EU, you should not start talking about greenhouse gases that are emitted by households or industrial activity worldwide. This does not, however, mean that in your solutions or recommendations you cannot suggest anything that puts things in a wider perspective.

You will also have to **ACCEPT THE DATA**. The position of the various stakeholders, the facts and the figures as presented in the background information may not correspond to reality. Even if you know "the truth" you should rely on what's in the documentation to build your arguments. However, when there is information missing or incomplete you can add details of your own. In fact, in doing so, you demonstrate your knowledge in the field.

You should also **FOCUS ON THE QUESTIONS**. It happens frequently that, somewhere in the background documents, somebody asks for something more – or something else – than what is asked for in the assignment. This is a trap!

**USE THE RIGHT SOURCES**. Sometimes, the background documentation is "enriched" with information coming from less relevant sources. A typical example could be a report that has been published by an "interest group" or lobbyist. I am not saying that this information is not relevant, but it certainly is less important than what is said by "official" sources (institutions, governments, scientists, etc.). You may find some interesting ideas for your solutions or recommendations though.

As a collaborator who is asked to produce a report for your hierarchy **YOUR OPINION MATTERS**. It is by bringing your personal assessment of the situation that you show that you have the depth and breadth of knowledge in the field. When your opinion is deviating from the treaded paths especially, you should argue the point with strong and verifiable evidence, using facts instead of assumptions.

Try to use **SMART** solutions and recommendations (see Annex 1). Nobody is served with vague statements having no quantifiable elements in terms of outcome or timing. Ideally, one can also measure and monitor the progress of time-bound objectives.

**ENCOURAGE COMPROMISE**. Usually, there are different stakeholders with very distinct positions and arguments. Very few "real life" situations are clear and obvious. Don't let yourself be confused by the complexity of the file and try to find a good compromise; a compromise that marries the interests of all stakeholders but without jeopardising the "greater interest" of a community, society or humanity as a whole.

One last tip about the background information: you may find one or two press articles (extracts from newspapers, magazines or news sites) in the documentation. It is a very good idea to have a look at these first. Why? Because (good) journalists are very good at summarising a situation and inform their public in layman's terms. You may in fact find all the answers to the questions right there. All it takes, then, is to reformat the information and make it stick to the assignment of your Case Study.



# THE LENGTH OF YOUR ESSAY

THE LENGTH OF YOUR ESSAY IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT USED FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ITS QUALITIES.

Nobody likes to read texts that are too long, especially when they are badly structured. On the other hand, when your essay is too short, one might suspect you to have ran out of time, yielding a bad score for "Prioritising and Organising".

But what is an **"APPROPRIATE" LENGTH?**

I used to recommend a total length of around 1000 words (the equivalent of four pages of A4), but I have recently come across a few jewels, very good essays that were much shorter than that. These essays contained all the necessary elements, were very well structured, and written in a fluent and clearly understandable language. I felt compelled to give good scores for all the competencies and realised that the overall length was of little concern.

As a result, **my recommendation would now be to aim for around 500 words – or two pages of A4** – or preferably a bit more, just to show that you did not run out of time and be potentially penalized for "Prioritising and Organising".

Is this a **GOLDEN RULE?**

Not really, as long as you stay aware that somebody actually has to read your work and form an opinion on it. It is a good strategy to make the life of your readers as easy as possible, because after all, they are human beings as well, and they have to cope with their own time constraints. And don't forget: they will probably be speed-reading too.



# TIME MANAGEMENT

**1 Start by writing down the structure of your essay** (you can do so right after reading the assignment). Read more about this in "The Structure of your Essay".

**2 Go through all the documents in a "diagonal" way** (see Annex 2 – Speed Reading) and try to find the information which is relevant to the questions asked. While "skimming" the documents you add this information in the proper "chapter" of your text. Use lists with short but complete sentences. There is no problem with literally copying sentences, as long as they convey your ideas.

**3 Review your text and try to come up with some good recommendations** (if asked for). You may find interesting ideas in the documentation, but it is permitted to be creative and come up with ideas of your own. Ideally, your recommendations should be SMART (read about this in Annex 1).

**4 Write an introduction or executive summary** which explains to the reader what the context and the content of your essay is ("abstract"). Be compelling.

**5 Write a conclusion.** Repeat in your own words what the general ideas of your essay are. The markers will be "speed-reading" your essay, so make it stick.

**6 Review your text** to weed out superfluous information, spelling errors and other common mistakes.

# THE IT TOOL FOR THE CASE STUDY

At EPSO you will have to use an IT tool to prepare your essay, and you will only have 90 minutes for doing so.

The user interface of the tool is a “split screen” with the Case Study assignment appearing in the top window while the window you will be typing in your answer appearing in the bottom half of the screen. The various background documents appear as popup windows when clicking on the exhibit buttons (icons) at the bottom of the screen.

Before you start the Case Study, you will receive a 5-minute tutorial. This tutorial instructs you on how to navigate through the test. After you have finished the tutorial and are ready to start the test, please press “END”. This will transfer you to the Introduction screen of the Case Study.

Before you start your Case Study you will be able to view the assignment and scenario for 3 minutes. Please note that you will be able to access this assignment at any time during the exercise by clicking on the assignment exhibit button.

The Case Study is to be drafted in your language 2 (see your invitation letter). It is not possible to change this option. You will be provided with the keyboard you have indicated in the on-line questionnaire.

The editor is very simple, similar to Notepad, and **IT DOES NOT ALLOW FOR TABLES, GRAPHS OR DRAWINGS.**

**In order to ensure that the exams are marked anonymously, you should not add any name, signature or distinguishing marks (initials, remarks unrelated to the context, phone numbers, email addresses...) anywhere in your essay as this may bring about the Selection Board’s decision to remove you from the competition.**

The Case Study simulations at [http://www.eustraining.eu/case\\_study\\_simulations](http://www.eustraining.eu/case_study_simulations) are very similar to the real IT tool that is used by EPSO, so it is a very good idea to try at least one in order not to come unprepared at the day of the exam.

# THE ROLE OF THE “MARKERS”



**A MARKER is a specialist in the field of the competition.** As such, markers are not members of the Selection Board. They are regular officials (volunteers) provided by the recruiting institutions. Their role is to assess the Case Studies of the candidates. They mark the Case Study for knowledge in the field and general competencies.

Imagine that for a given competition there are 1000 candidates, therefore 1000 Case Studies have to be marked. As every Case Study has to be marked twice, this adds up to 2000 marked Case Studies. When the marks given by two markers for an individual Case Study are too far apart, a third marking is required.

The markers are usually present on the premises where the Case Study takes place. Markers receive a special training in which marking of the Case Study is explained. Markers also get clear and written instructions on how to do their work.

**The number of markers and their presence during the exercise is dependent on the competition.**

Once the exercise is finished, markers get a **LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME** to provide their markings. Usually, this happens in parallel with the rest of the Assessment Centre (which is performed by other people, the members of the Selection Board).

Nevertheless, the marking task is on the “critical path” in terms of the planning of the whole competition; when the marking is delayed, the whole Assessment Centre is delayed.

# HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF

1

**Practice "SPEED READING" as described in Annex 2.**

You can do this in advance, the more you practice the better you will get at it.

2

**Do some reading on the EU INSTITUTIONS and the LEGISLATIVE procedures.**

Places to start could be:

- [http://www.europedia.moussis.eu/books/Book\\_2/2/4/3/?all=1](http://www.europedia.moussis.eu/books/Book_2/2/4/3/?all=1)
- <http://europa.eu/eu-law/>
- [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/institutional\\_affairs/treaties/](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/)
- <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/007c895f4c/Powers-and-procedures.html>

3

**Refresh your GENERAL KNOWLEDGE of your field (only if applicable).**

You may be very specialised in one particular aspect of your domain and could have forgotten about some of the underlying "bigger" concepts.

Keep yourself informed about the EU 'hot topics': the real Case Studies are invariably linked to the current situation (and often based on real sources), so you can give yourself a head start for the exercise. Possible sources of information are:

- <http://europa.eu/rapid/>
- <http://euobserver.com/>
- <http://www.euractiv.com/>
- <http://www.presseurop.eu/>
- <http://www.europeanvoice.com/>

4

**Check out the booklet "HOW TO WRITE CLEARLY" published by the European Commission.**

- [http://ec.europa.eu/translation/writing/clear\\_writing/how\\_to\\_write\\_clearly\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/translation/writing/clear_writing/how_to_write_clearly_en.pdf)

5

**Improve your DRAFTING SKILLS by writing some more texts** and having them verified with free tools like:

- <http://www.online-utility.org/>
- <http://www.grammarly.com/>

6

**Ask a friend or colleague to REVIEW your texts**, make sure you address the right audience.

7

**Take at least one of the CASE STUDY SIMULATIONS on eutraining.eu.**

These simulation exercises have been prepared by me, and I personally correct every single one of them as if I were a real 'marker'; the only difference is that you will also get my comments and suggestions.

8

**Carefully read the "INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES" you will receive from EPSO** with your invitation to the Case Study exercise.

9

**Read this booklet again, THE DAY BEFORE YOUR EXAM.**

## FINAL REMARKS

**MAKE YOUR ESSAY INTERESTING.** A Case Study is an article. It has to earn the reader's interest and attention. Write good headlines and compelling texts. Use good, powerful quotations. Avoid hype, clichés, jargon and corporate business speak. Think very hard about what your reader wants to know about a Case Study. Use the conventions of a newspaper article, not a corporate press release.

**BE SPECIFIC.** Details do matter. Not only do they make the Case Study more credible, they answer the reader's questions and show that you master the topic.





# ANNEX 1

## BEING SMART

**SMART** is a mnemonic for the 5 steps of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based solutions or recommendations. It's a simple tool used by businesses and organisations to go beyond the realm of fuzzy goal-setting into an actionable plan for results.

- S Specific.** Great goals are well-defined and focused. "A further emission reduction to 95g CO<sub>2</sub>/km" is more meaningful than "decrease the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions." The moment you focus on a goal, your goal becomes a magnet, pulling you and your stakeholders toward it. The more focused your energies, the more power you generate.
- M Measurable.** A goal without a measurable outcome is like a sports competition without a scoreboard or scorekeeper. Numbers are an essential part of politics. Monitor the evolution to know if you're on track. A goal keeps yourself and your stakeholders focused on the targeted results you want to attain.
- A Attainable.** Far too often goals are set beyond reach. Dream big and aim for the stars but keep one foot firmly based in reality.
- R Relevant.** Achievable goals are based on the current conditions and climate. You may want to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> emission down to zero but if the industry and the public opinion are not ready, then your goals aren't relevant.
- T Time-Based.** Goals and objectives just don't get done when there's no time frame tied to the goal-setting process. You have to choose a time-frame with which to accomplish your goal.

In the complex environment of the EU it is not always possible to set SMART goals and objectives. However, keeping these criteria in mind will help to move toward a better world.

# ANNEX 2

## SPEED READING

The amount of documentation you have to go through, summarize and digest in a very limited amount of time for the Case Study is huge. It is virtually impossible to get a deep understanding of all the information provided, and that is intentional.

Now, how do you tackle this? The answer is "**SPEED READING**" or "**DIAGONAL READING**".

**Speed reading is about skimming** the reading material to gather its general meaning and purpose. Flip through the documentation and read the titles, pull-out quotes and any diagrams. Then go back and read the table of contents and the summary, if applicable. This sets your mind up to better understand the purpose and terminology before you delve into the text.

**Most of the diagonal readers give the content a first pass by reading a text "passively"** - just like one would browse a magazine, look at photographs, or watch television, i.e. they are not really paying attention to the small details, rather they are waiting for something to really pop out at them.

The average reader reads about 240 words per minute, where as a diagonal reader 'scans' closer to 15 words per second or about 900 words per minute. So, there are at least three, and up to five important sections of an article that a diagonal reader will see in the approximately 10 seconds they will initially allocate to a text:

- *The title or headline of the article.*
- *The subtitles or subheadings within the text.*
- *Any bold, underlined, quoted, or otherwise highlighted text.*
- *Pictures, graphs, charts, or images of any nature.*
- *A summary of the article.*

Speed reading takes a lot of practice, typically years, and it is not the purpose of this booklet to turn you into a proficient speed reader. There are, however, some ideas you can usefully apply when doing the Case Study exercise:

- *Don't read everything.*
- *Don't read in order.*
- *Don't try to understand everything.*

Let us now expand a bit further on these ideas.

## DON'T READ EVERYTHING

There seems to be this strange idea (especially amongst translators, lawyers and engineers), that you have to read absolutely everything. This is just not true; you don't have to read everything!

The idea behind this is that when you read, you read with a purpose. Usually, this is the extraction of information from a piece of text. Once you have that information – you're finished. There's no need to read any longer.

In fact, I would say that most of the texts you will encounter are simply filler (or "payload") – you don't need to read all of it, just the relevant parts. I have a rule: if I start reading a text and if after a few sentences I still haven't found what I am looking for, I move on.

## DON'T READ IN ORDER

Another mistake is the idea that you have to read from start-to-finish. There is absolutely no reason you can't start by reading the conclusion or summary, then go back to the introduction or jump around through different paragraphs or chapters. Sometimes it's worth picking out what you're interested in from the table of contents or index and starting from there.

## DON'T TRY TO UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING

The other common, but erroneous, idea is "perfect" comprehension. There's no such thing. Of course, your comprehension will go down a bit when you speed read, but that is not really a problem. When you read, you read for a purpose and for certain bits of information anyway – no one cares if you remember every single fact from a text, or what the 7th word in the third sentence on page two was. A corollary to this is that you don't need to understand absolutely everything in a piece of text. We mostly read to understand main concepts anyway. If you really absolutely must understand everything, you should be taking notes (or drawing a mind map), and you can always reread certain sections to note down facts and figures.

**A couple of other ideas** that will help you with speed-reading:

- **SUMMARIES** are often as good as the whole text itself. If you are lucky, there will be a press article (or even more than one) in the documentation. It is a known fact that journalists are good at explaining complex matters in layman's terms. So, if there is a press article, and you can detect that rapidly, first have a look at this, as it may provide you with all the answers you need right away!
- **ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS.** If you are surrounded by noise, even background noise like music, do everything you can to get rid of it. Isolate yourself with nothing but the material and a comfortable reading position. By getting rid of the potential distractions, your mind can better focus on absorbing the words on the pages. Earplugs are available on request in the Test Centre, use them!
- **FOCUS THE RIGHT SENSES ON READING.** Although many people are used to reading out loud or imagine a voice attached to the words, your mind may absorb the material faster by "cutting out the middle men" and connecting them straight from the eye to the brain. Read without moving your lips. In fact, by using your finger – or a pen – as a guide, you can actually read and comprehend the material faster. Your finger can act as a pace-setter for your brain, going as fast as you can retain the information.

- **READ FASTER BY USING YOUR PERIPHERAL VISION TO FOCUS ON SEEING THE WORDS AS A WHOLE BEFORE UNDERSTANDING THEM INDIVIDUALLY.** By using an imaginary line down the middle of the page, your mind can start to group the words. You will start to read the pages in a diagonal fashion, rather than a linear way. This also allows you to focus on key words, rather than spending time on decorative phrases.
- **TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS BY PACING YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.** By taking breaks, you give your mind a chance to rest and recoup as it is absorbing information much faster than it is used to. Read the supporting material one by one, and take a small break in between.

NOT SPEED READING ALL THE TIME

**These speed reading tips should only be used when going through the background material.**

When you are revising your own text, trying to make sense, coming up with good solutions or recommendations, or just weeding out the spelling errors, you should NOT speed-read. At this point you have to pay close attention to every word and idea to tidy up your essay and make it as good as it gets.



**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?**



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