



# BUSINESS RESEARCH

BUSINESS RESEARCH

The **Business Research** event provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate business and marketing research skills needed by management personnel. Students will work with an existing local business or organization to conduct business and marketing research about a specific topic, with the ultimate goal of improving business operations, profitability, visibility, etc. A new research topic, or area to improve, will be presented annually in the event guidelines.

The Business Research Event involves one to three students conducting business and/or marketing research for an existing business or organization based on an annual topic. While the term “business” will be used in these guidelines for the purposes of clarity, any type of organization, or even a department, division or specific location of a business, may be the focus of the research. Upon completion of the research, the student (or student team) will make recommendations to the business owner/manager/operator to improve operations based on the research findings.

## BUSINESS MANAGEMENT + ADMINISTRATION

## MARKETING

### EVENT OVERVIEW

The Business Research event consists of two major parts, both evaluated by the judge, for a maximum 100 points:

- The **written entry** is limited to 15 pages, and will account for a maximum 50 points.
- The **oral presentation** by the students, limited to 15 minutes including set-up, presentation time and answering questions from the judge, will also account for a maximum 50 points.

For the presentation, the students are to assume the role of management trainees in a single-unit of a large business/organization or in an independent operation. The judge, in the role of owner/manager/operator of the business, will evaluate both the written entry and the presentation.

Read carefully the Format Guidelines for the Written Entry, Guidelines for the Presentation, Penalty Point Checklist, Prepared Event Statement of Assurances and Evaluation Forms.

Preliminary round competition will consist of an evaluation of the written entry (minus deductions from the Penalty Point Checklist) accounting for 50 points, and one presentation, also accounting for 50 points. Students/teams will be ranked according to their combined score, and a predetermined number of students/teams will be named finalists. Finalists will again be evaluated based on their written entry (minus deductions) and presentation to determine final rankings.

### 2025-2026 BUSINESS RESEARCH TOPIC

The 2025-2026 topic is for participants to collaborate with a local business or organization to seek and incorporate customer feedback into the company’s corporate social responsibility initiatives and overall business strategies. Using the research findings, participants will develop a CSR strategy to achieve internal/external results.

This means understanding what customers value, what concerns them, and how their opinions can inform a company’s CSR actions and practices. Some examples may include:

- Environmental Initiatives
- Social Impact Programs
- Ethical Sourcing and Manufacturing
- Diversity and Inclusion

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

In addition to developing and demonstrating specific knowledge, through the development and presentation of a business research project to the judge, the students will develop or reinforce the following areas in relation to business research:

- Communication skills—the ability to exchange information and ideas with others through writing, speaking, reading or listening
- Analytical skills—the ability to derive facts from data, findings from facts, conclusions from findings and recommendations from conclusions
- Production skills—the ability to take a concept from an idea and make it real
- Critical thinking/problem-solving skills
- Teamwork—the ability to be an effective member of a productive group
- Priorities/time management—the ability to determine priorities and manage time commitments and deadlines
- Identification of competitive conditions within market areas.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

Students will also develop many 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, in the following categories, desired by today’s employers:

- Communication and Collaboration
- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Information Literacy
- Initiative and Self-direction
- Leadership and Responsibility
- Media Literacy
- Productivity and Accountability
- Social and Cross-cultural Skills

## FORMAT GUIDELINES FOR THE WRITTEN ENTRY

The student(s)/team must prepare a written entry. Read carefully and follow the instructions for: Title Page, Format for the Written Entry, Checklist Standards and Penalty Point Checklist.

**PREPARED EVENT STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES.** This must be signed and submitted with the entry. Do **not** include it in the page numbering.

**TITLE PAGE.** The first page of the written entry is the title page which lists the following:

### BUSINESS RESEARCH

- Title of the Project
- Name of Chapter/School
- Name of Chapter Advisor
- Chapter Advisor's Address
- City, Association, ZIP/Postal Code
- Country
- Students Name(s) and Address(es)
- City, Association, ZIP/Postal Code
- Country
- Date

A page number will not appear on the title page; however, the title page does count as one of the maximum 15 pages allowed. The page following the title page will be numbered "2."

### FORMAT FOR WRITTEN ENTRY

The body of the written entry should include:

#### I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A one- to two-page description of the research, findings and conclusions.

#### II. INTRODUCTION

- A. Description of the business or organization (if the research study is limited to a specific "part" of the overall business or organization, identify the specific department, division or location)
- B. Description of the target market (demographics and psychographics) of the business or organization
- C. Overview of the business or organization's current business strategy relating to corporate social responsibility initiatives

#### III. RESEARCH METHODS USED IN THE STUDY

- A. Rationale and description of research methodologies selected to conduct the research study
- B. Process of conducting the selected research method(s)

#### IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

- A. Findings of the research study
- B. Conclusions based on the findings

#### V. PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN

- A. Goals and objectives
- B. Proposed activities and timelines
- C. Proposed metrics or key performance indicators to measure plan effectiveness

#### VI. PROPOSED BUDGET

Costs associated with proposed strategies

#### VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### VIII. APPENDIX

An appendix is optional. Include in an appendix any exhibits appropriate to the written entry, but not important enough to include in the body. These might include sample questionnaires used, letters sent and received, general background data, minutes of meetings, etc. Provided that the appendix includes such "exhibits" and is NOT used for "content" that should be included under previous sections, **the appendix does NOT count as one of the maximum 15 pages.** Any such misuse of the appendix may result in penalties under the Penalty Point Checklist.



1-3 PARTICIPANTS



15 PAGES  
ALLOWED



PRESENT PROJECT



15 MINUTES  
PRESENTATION TIME

## CHECKLIST STANDARDS

In addition to the items outlined above, students must observe the following rules. The purpose of these rules is to make the competition as fair as possible among all students. Points will be deducted for each violation. Refer to the Penalty Point Checklist.

1. All written entries must be submitted through the online competition submission portal March 13-23, 2026.
2. The Prepared Event Statement of Assurances must be signed and submitted with the entry.
3. The written entry must be limited to 15 pages, including the title page, which is not numbered. The pages must be numbered in sequence, except for the title page, which is not numbered. The title page does count as one of the maximum 15 pages allowed. The page following the title page will be numbered "2." One page will be counted for each 8.5 x 11-inch panel or fraction thereof (foldouts, brochures, etc.). Extra pages added as dividers or additional title pages (even if blank) are included in the maximum 15 pages.
4. The title page information has been provided as requested in the guidelines.
5. The body of the written entry follows the sequence outlined in the guidelines. Additional subsections are permitted.
6. Body copy of the written entry must be at least double-spaced (not space-and-a-half). Title page, executive summary, bibliographical references, appendix content, footnotes, long quotes, material in tables, figures, exhibits, lists, headings, sample letters, forms, charts, graphs, etc. may be single-spaced. Material may appear on one side of the page only.
7. Entry must be typed/word processed.
8. The appendix (if applicable) only includes appropriate content for the appendix.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE PRESENTATION

- Students will have up to **15 minutes** to set up in the presentation area, present their research, findings and strategies for improvement; and answer questions from the judge(s).
- Only materials (computer equipment, visual aids, etc.) that can be easily carried to and from the competition areas will be permitted. Only the students may handle and set up their materials. No outside assistance will be allowed.
- Self-contained, state-of-the-art technology (personal or laptop computers/hand-held digital organizers) may be used. However, students must use battery power even if electrical outlets are available in the room.
- Visual aids (poster paper, flip charts) may be used.
- When using a presentation aid, sound may be used, as long as the volume is kept at a conversational level. If this guideline is not followed, the presentation will be interrupted and the students will be asked to follow the sound policy.
- All materials, equipment, supplies, etc. must be provided by the students. DECA assumes no responsibility for damage/loss of materials, equipment, supplies, etc.
- All presentation materials must be prepared by the students with the exception of sample materials related to the topic developed by the business or organization that is the focus of the research project.
- Materials appropriate to the situation may be handed to or left with the judge. Items of monetary value may be handed to, but may not be left with, the judges. Items such as flyers, brochures, pamphlets and business cards may be handed to or left with the judge. No food or drinks allowed.
- Students may bring copies of the written report to the presentation.
- Competitors are also responsible for following the information provided in the Collegiate DECA General Rules and Regulations for competition.
- Failure to follow guidelines may result in disqualification.

## WRITTEN ENTRY JUDGING

Students have worked with an existing business of their choice to conduct a research study of the business or organization's corporate social responsibility initiatives. Participants developed a corporate social responsibility strategy to achieve internal/external results. Playing the role of the business owner/manager/operator, you are to read the written entry as if you were considering implementing their recommendations.

While the term "business" will be used in these guidelines for the purposes of clarity, any type of organization, or even a department, division or specific location of a business, may be the focus of the research.

Please familiarize yourself with all of the guidelines before reading any of the written entry. Penalty points (see Penalty Point Checklist) have already been assessed. Your job is to evaluate the written entry based on the Evaluation Form.

- Evaluate the written entry using the Evaluation Form. Refer to the Evaluation Criteria section for guidelines.
- On the score sheet provided, please mark the appropriate score and verify accuracy. Please make sure not to exceed the maximum score possible for each item.
- Please make sure to score all categories and verify the total score. The maximum score for the written entry is 50 points.

## PRESENTATION JUDGING

- Please familiarize yourself with all of the guidelines before interacting with students. Your job is to evaluate the presentation based on the Presentation Evaluation Form.
- Students will be scheduled for presentations at 20-minute intervals.
- Students will have up to **15 minutes** to outline the research, findings, conclusions and answer questions. Remember, you are role-playing as the owner/manager/operator of a business.
- You may ask questions of the students to determine their ability to think spontaneously. To ensure fairness, you must ask all students the same standard questions. After asking the standard questions, you may ask other questions for clarification specific to the current students.
- To ensure fairness, at no time should students be asked where they are from (school, state, country, etc.).
- Following their interaction with you, please thank the students and state that a decision will be made soon and the students will be notified of the decision. Please give no indication of their performance/score.
- During the last **5 minutes**, after the students are excused from the judging area, you may score the students. Refer to the Evaluation Criteria section for guidelines. On the bubble sheet provided, please bubble in the appropriate score and write the score on the corresponding line to verify accuracy. Please make sure not to exceed the maximum score possible for each item.
- Please make sure to record a score for all categories, add them for the total score and then initial the total score. The maximum score for the presentation is 50 points.

During the presentation, ask yourself, "Will this work? Is it realistic given the budget limitations? Do the students sound knowledgeable? Are the students communicating clearly?" Ultimately, you must decide, "Would I hire this team to design and create a strategic plan to attract and retain employees?"

## JUDGING SUMMARY

Maximum score is 100 points. A score of 70 or better will earn the students a Certificate of Excellence.

Thank you for volunteering your time to evaluate our emerging leaders and entrepreneurs.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

A score under the heading

**Exceeds Expectations** in any category means that, in your opinion, the information is presented in an effective, creative way; in effect, nothing more could be expected of the students, and the decisions/recommendations have been presented well.

A score under the heading **Meets Expectations** in any category means that, in your opinion, the information is presented well. There may be a few minor problems or omissions, but they are not significant. Decisions/Recommendations that earn this level in every category for the presentation would probably receive strong consideration for implementation.

A score under the heading **Below Expectations** or **Little/No Demonstration** in any category means that some major flaw has been noted which damages the effectiveness of the presentation. This may be a major omission, a serious misstatement or any other major flaw.



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## WRITTEN ENTRY EVALUATION FORM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	BELOW EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	JUDGED SCORE
1. One-to-two page description of the project	0-1	2-3	4	5	

INTRODUCTION	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	BELOW EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	JUDGED SCORE
2. Description of the business or organization	0-1	2-3	4	5	
3. Description of the target market (demographics and psychographics) of the business or organization	0-1	2-3	4	5	
4. Description of the business or organization's current corporate social responsibility initiatives and overall business strategies.	0-1	2-3	4	5	

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	BELOW EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	JUDGED SCORE
5. Findings of the research study	0-1	2-3	4	5	
6. Conclusions based on the findings	0-1	2-3	4	5	

PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	BELOW EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	JUDGED SCORE
7. Goals and objectives	0-1	2-3	4	5	
8. Proposed activities and timelines	0-1	2-3	4	5	
9. Proposed metrics or key performance indicators to measure plan effectiveness	0-1	2-3	4	5	

APPEARANCE AND WORD USAGE	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	BELOW EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	JUDGED SCORE
10. Professional layout, neatness, proper grammar, spelling and word usage	0-1	2-3	4	5	

**WRITTEN ENTRY TOTAL POINTS (50)** \_\_\_\_\_

JUDGE \_\_\_\_\_



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## PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM

	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	BELOW EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	JUDGED SCORE
1. Research explanation	0-1-2	3-4-5	6-7-8	9-10	
2. Research findings	0-1-2	3-4-5	6-7-8	9-10	
3. Conclusions	0-1-2	3-4-5	6-7-8	9-10	
4. Proposed strategic plan	0-1-2	3-4-5	6-7-8	9-10	
5. Overall performance: Appropriate appearance, poise, confidence, presentation, technique, etc.	0-1-2	3-4-5	6-7-8	9-10	

<b>PRESENTATION TOTAL POINTS (50)</b>	
WRITTEN ENTRY (50)	
PRESENTATION (50)	
SUBTOTAL (100)	
LESS PENALTY POINTS	
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	

A score of 70 or better will earn the student a Certificate of Excellence.

For tie-breaking purposes, the following evaluation form ranking process will be used. Beginning with the Presentation Evaluation Form, the students with the highest score for item #1 wins the tie-break. If this does not break the tie, the process will continue for the remaining presentation items in the following order: 2, 3, 4, 5. If this does not break the tie, the process will continue using the Written Evaluation Form, beginning with item #5. If this does not break the tie, the process will continue for the remaining written entry items in the following order: 1, 8, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 3, 10.

JUDGE \_\_\_\_\_