

Types of Case Studies

Case studies can be written to address a range of curriculum objectives.

Classical case: A holistic approach to a problem. It includes a great deal of information about the situation or problem. Information-rich cases can involve multiple actors or stakeholders with different perspectives and desired outcomes.



Critical incident case: A critical event is described. Learners are asked to predict an outcome or devise means of preventing an undesirable outcome.

Unfinished story: A cliff-hanger approach to the problem. The problem is given and the learners come up with solutions for what a person or group in the problem might do in the situation.

Baited case: Significant parts of the problem are withheld enabling learners to search further and/or insignificant or irrelevant material is added to the problem requiring learners to sort out the unimportant.

Embryo case: Just enough information is given to establish a problem.

Ex post facto case: An already developed solution to a problem is analyzed and evaluated.

Report analysis case: Learners study and evaluate data and conclusions in various kinds of reports or cases.



What are Case Studies?

Case studies are stories - real or realistic scenarios or models-in-brief of problems or questions that arise in a discipline. Case studies provide learners the opportunity to practice and develop **critical thinking, analytical, and decision making skills** – a bridge between theory and practice. Widely used in professional education in law, medicine, communications, business, social work, nursing, etc., as a teaching method in the STEM fields, and as a research tool in the social sciences, case studies have been adopted as valuable active learning experiences across undergraduate curricula.

Paul Lawrence, an early writer and theorist of case studies described them as a “... vehicle by which **a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor**. A good case keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations. It is the anchor on academic flights of speculation. It is the record of complex situations that must be literally pulled apart and put together again before the situations can be understood. It is the target for the expression of attitudes or ways of thinking brought into the classroom.”

Lawrence, P. R. 1953. The preparation of vase materials. In K. R. Andrews, ed. The case method of teaching human relations and administration. Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, MA.

1 Using Case Studies

Individual: Learners read and analyze cases on their own. The instructor calls on selected students to answer questions about the case, solicits responses from volunteers, or asks for written responses to the case or specific questions about the case. This method is especially effective for brief cases or scenarios but can be employed with more extensive cases (e.g., law, business).

Group: Students analyze cases and questions in groups of three to five. The instructor may solicit feedback from selected students, volunteers, a group spokesperson, or a written response from the group.

Shared facilitation: Students analyze cases and questions in groups of three to five. After the groups have had time to read and discuss the case, new groups are formed by mixing students from the initial groups. After discussion in the new groups, the original groups reassemble to share perspectives gained from the other groups.

Jigsaw: A case is broken down into four or more components with each group of students researching and discussing one component of the case. After these “expert groups” have completed their work, new groups consisting of one student from each expert group come together to complete the case.

Role playing: In cases involving several actors or stakeholders group members research and evaluate aspects of the case from the perspective of a particular stakeholder or participant.

Scope of Cases

Single: The entire case is read, evaluated, and responded to without interruption or research

Interrupted: Parts of the case are presented sequentially with questions and discussion after consideration of each piece.

Researched: An interrupted case where learners are obliged to research additional information after each part of the case is presented.



Cases



Cases should be as realistic as possible - one or more scenarios that have occurred or could very likely occur. Published and online case study collections are available in many disciplines, and textbook publishers often provide complete cases or case ideas in their instructor materials. To maximize alignment with your course objectives and learning outcomes you may select to write your own cases. Having students develop and write case studies as a course assignment is an even more powerful use of these teaching and learning tools.

Elements of Case Studies

Organization of a case study will vary according to the type and scope of the case, how it is to be used, and the specific desired learning outcomes. The following are some of the elements commonly used in organizing instructional cases:

- **Introduction:** Establishes the problem to be addressed, and the context and parameters of the problem. Relevant theories and models, technical considerations, and ethical concerns may be introduced. Alternatively, identification of these aspects may be presented as challenges or questions for students to address.
- **Scenario:** The story – written to engage the reader and to provoke questioning.
- **Questions:** Even if the only question is “What questions to you have about this situation?”
- **Supporting Materials:** Tabular or graphical data, maps, technical information, or other material pertaining to the case at hand.

Resources

Please contact TennTLC if you would like to discuss case studies or are interested in assistance in developing and using case studies in your classes.