

# Using Case Studies

# Teacher's Guide

Adapted from

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University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

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## Why use cases?

There are many documented reasons to use cases. Some of the reasons or beliefs about using cases are listed below. How many do you agree with?

### Cases...

1. Create the need to know.
2. Provide a space to think about practice.
3. Raise the level of critical thinking skills (application/synthesis/evaluation, not recall).
4. Enhance the listening/cooperative learning skills.
5. Prompt deeper diagnosis and meaning making.
6. Develop problem-solving skills.
7. Help learners connect theory and practice.
8. Facilitate the social learning process of learning judgment.
9. Are "inefficient transmitters of facts.
10. Provide a vehicle for examining multiple points of view/hearing various voices.
11. Build partnership/collegiality among learners and teacher.
12. Encourage attention to and self-consciousness about assumptions and conceptions.
13. Allow students' naive questions to precipitate profound change in approach.
14. Help students learn to monitor their own thinking.
15. Reflect the contextual, situated, complex nature of knowledge.
16. Help students see connection to their own goals.
17. Help teachers become aware of their own tensions and ironies.
18. Teach students not to take things literally.
19. Teach students that there may not be one "right" answer, after all.
20. Illustrate interaction among variables (especially human ones).
21. Teach that it is easy to overlook important details.
22. Get you thinking and brainstorming.
23. Simulate passage of time, so you can integrate real life consequences and developments.
24. Get students to be active, not passive.
25. Can be structured and convergent, or unstructured and divergent.
26. Encompass an enormous range of possibilities.
27. Create a rich ambiguous learning environment.
28. Provide possibilities for all learners to be successful and a variety of roles.

## **Case-based Process**

Here is a process you can use to help your students use cases to their best.

1. Determine the facts of the case.
2. Understand the dynamics of the situation. (e.g. What is the context?)
3. Define the presenting problem. (e.g. What is the problem?)
4. Generate a possible course of action or generate, assess, and propose a number of possible solutions.
5. Evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to each course of action.
6. Make a decision regarding a satisfactory or at least workable plan of action.

## **Underlying Procedures for Using Cases**

- For effective discussion, students need to familiarize themselves with the case ahead of time.
- Students will understand the case better, if they are given careful introductory directions.
- Unless there are specific pedagogical reasons, key facts should be introduced in the written case and not added during the discussion.
- Cases need to be complete enough so that the problem can be defined.
- The size of the group should allow for free exchange among all participants. If the workgroup is too large it will tend to exclude some members from participating.
- If the case is assigned as a project, a leader might be chosen to provide direction.
- Teachers need to remain focused on the learning objectives of the case and should avoid getting emotionally involved in the process.
- Facilitators should ask questions designed to ensure that discussion focuses on the ways to solve the problem.
- Role-playing can help clarify some concepts by engaging students in problem solving from the perspectives of different key players.

## **What makes a good case?**

- Is related to the important curricular and pedagogical aims of the curricula.
- The incident entails difficult choices.
- The incident has emotional power.
- Is open-ended, allowing multiple interpretations and solutions.
- Entails fundamental/underlying value conflicts.

## **What Can You Use for Cases?**

The following might be used as cases in your discipline.

- Problem Sets
- Problem-based Learning Activities
- Critical Incidents
- Slice of Life Accounts
- Ethnographic Studies
- Clinical Descriptions
- Appraisals/Consultant Reports
- Personal Stories/Narratives
- Newspaper Stories
- Case Histories
- "Armchair" Cases
- Scenarios
- Video Cases/Trigger Films

## **How Do I Choose and Use a Case?**

- Identify clear learning objectives.
- Know your learners...
- Understand how the concepts of the case fit into the overall concept map for the course or unit.
- Choose the best strategy for using the case materials.
- After reading a case, outline at least three questions that would broaden the scope of discussion around this case.
- What would you do to wrap up this discussion in a class period?
- What are some ways in which you could test students on the "knowledge" learned through this case?
- What would you ask them to do? How would you score them?