



Common Case Teaching Challenges and Possible Solutions

CHALLENGE		POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
Student Concerns	Students will not read the case in advance making it difficult to have a productive case discussion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Set expectations up front as to preparation required to effectively participate in class. 2) Enforce the classroom contract by resisting the temptation to explain the case in class. 3) Consider cold calling. 4) Consider basing a substantial portion of the course grade on the quality (and to some degree the quantity) of class participation while keeping ex-post notes on the few best and worst comments in each day's class.
	Students will not be equipped with the required analytical skills to effectively analyze cases.	<p><i>Teaching with cases is a great way to build students' analytical skills through practice.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Consider beginning the course with a case analysis and a debrief to help students understand what an effective case analysis looks like. 2) Ask students to read one of the many memos or books designed to teach them how to effectively analyze a case. 3) Try pairing readings or frameworks with a case and ask the student to apply the framework to analyze the case. 4) Consider giving students a blank grid/matrix and ask them to fill in the matrix as a means of tackling the central challenge of the case.
	Students will not feel comfortable speaking in front of peers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Set clear expectations that speaking in class is required of all students. 2) Consider asking students to answer warm-up questions about the case in advance of class on a shared website to increase their engagement and preparation for case analysis. 3) Consider warm calling students (emailing students in advance of class and letting them know that you will call on them during the class so they should be prepared to respond). 4) Consider setting aside part of a class session for small group discussion in teams of 4-5 students which may provide a less intimidating setting for students who have a fear of public speaking. Then ask the groups to report out to the full class a synopsis of their small group discussion.



	<p>Students prefer to learn from the professor, not peers.</p>	<p>1) Remind students that the ability to think independently, analyze evidence, form and articulate theories, and work in groups are critical 21st century professional skills. There will be few settings in students' professional lives where they can expect to receive all the answers from an enlightened authoritative source.</p> <p>2) Be explicit with your students that your aim is to support them in constructing their own knowledge. Research shows that learners retain information much longer if they actively participate in discussion and debate and are directly involved in forming and reforming their own analysis. Case method teaching is all about learning by doing.</p>
--	--	---

	CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Course Design Issues</p>	<p>I have too much material to cover in my course: I don't have space for cases.</p>	<p>1) Keep in mind that your students are often taking multiple courses at once and they may also be juggling work and family commitments. Because we face information overload, much of the information we're exposed to is committed to short-term memory and then lost. By framing authentic exercises that look a lot like students' past and or future professional experiences, cases can increase student motivation and engagement. Once we have their attention, cases challenge students to actively curate information, formulate and defend decisions, and engage in reflective discourse to assess the impacts of their own choices.</p> <p>2) While case method is not appropriate for every type of course and many fields require a baseline knowledge of the domain, cases can effectively be paired with other approaches to teaching to help students apply concepts, retain information, and internalize their own evolving skills and knowledge.</p>
	<p>Cases are idiosyncratic; how can I teach the fundamentals of a subject by looking at many specific examples/cases?</p>	<p><i>If framed appropriately and taught skillfully, cases are a highly effective means of helping students internalize deep lessons that are generalizable well beyond the case.</i></p> <p>1) At the end of a case discussion, it is important to wrap up the class session by explicitly stating the core lesson, approach, or framework you intended to convey in the class session. It is helpful to explicitly underscore the fact that the learning goal/strategy applies well beyond the case.</p> <p>2) You might consider having students apply a certain strategy or framework across several cases which will further underscore the fact that the core lessons are broadly</p>



	<p>How will I assign individual grades when case discussion is inherently a group exercise?</p>	<p>generalizable.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Set student expectations that class participation is required of all students and will be evaluated based on the quality (and to a lesser degree the quantity) of their contribution to the class discussion. Ideally, students should shoot for a high-quality to quantity ratio. The goal is to advance the discussion, not hog airtime. 2) Actively track class participation - who spoke and what was the general quality of the contribution (high, medium, low). A simple approach might be for the instructor at the end of each class to briefly note the handful of most insightful comments made as well as the few comments that delivered little if any value. 3) Bravery counts. Students who are willing to provide perspectives that contrast with the majority in the room can be valuable contributors to the group's understanding and this should be reflected in the class participation grade.
	<p>I can't find cases that address the topics I want to cover.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) There are more than a dozen case producers of various sizes. Harvard Business Publishing and The Case Centre serve as clearinghouses for many small case producers. Their holdings are tagged by topic area and learning goal. The Harvard Kennedy School (www.case.hks.harvard.edu) is home to the largest collection of teaching cases on public and nonprofit management, many which come with teaching plans and or associated short videos. 2) If, after searching existing case repositories, you are still unable to find cases that serve your unique teaching needs, you may want to consider developing your own cases and associated teaching plans.

	CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
Teaching Challenges	<p>Managing a case discussion requires more upfront work on my part because I need to be prepared for anything students may throw at me.</p>	<p><i>Planning an effective case discussion does indeed require upfront investment yet it can pay off in terms of student engagement learning and lasting retention.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Shifting your teaching approach from content delivery to questioning, listening, and responding can take a little practice. 2) Many existing cases come with written teaching plans to aid instructors in devising a game-plan for class discussion. 3) Once you have taught a given case 2-3 times in the context of your particular student body, you will find that you have a good sense of how the teaching plan plays



		<p>through and typical responses that your students will likely offer.</p> <p>4) Some of the most skilled and experienced case instructors love teaching cases because the class discussion is slightly different each time which reduces the drudgery of teaching. Case teaching also offers instructors an opportunity to get to know their students and to harness the students perspectives and prior work experience to create a richer learning environment.</p>
	<p>Case discussions are hard to control. The conversation could end up all over the map.</p>	<p>Effective case discussions are not as unscripted as they might appear to the untrained observer. A strong case discussion will have a preplanned structure covering key discussion blocks, questions and prompts, the board plan, time allocations, and a wrap up. Having a strong sense of the ground you wish to cover in the 2-3 main discussion blocks and enacting strategies to contain or set aside comments outside the bounds of those predefined discussion topics is a key discussion facilitation skill.</p>
	<p>What can I do to prevent a few students from dominating the discussion, crowding others out?</p>	<p>1) Let students know that class participation is required of <u>all</u> students in the class, and <u>quality</u> of comments is valued over quantity. You might define quality in terms of value per minute of airtime taken per comment. Air hogs will be penalized.</p> <p>2) Be clear about the fact that high-quality comments advance the discussion and add new perspectives.</p> <p>3) Track participation, both quality and quantity, by student during or after each class session. It can be helpful to analyze both comment patterns and instructor calling patterns by frequency, age/race/gender/nationality/ESL, and even seating area in the room to ensure equality of opportunity for class participation.</p> <p>4) To avoid hub-and-spoke calling patterns where every student comments is punctuated by an instructor comment, you may want to encourage students to directly address one another.</p> <p>5) Every few weeks, you may want to reach out to individual students who have participated too much or too little and give them feedback about their performance as compared to the course requirements.</p>