

Teaching with Cases Tip Sheet

This tip sheet outlines some of the ways that cases can augment or diversify teaching and learning.

What Is A Case?

According to Howitt, Leonard, & Giles, a case is “a collection of information that can be shared with the members of a class to stimulate discussion and debate about policy or management principles *or* about a specific decision that a manager must make.”

Why Should You Use Cases In Your Teaching?

- Cases provide a targeted mechanism for applying concepts and frameworks to practice.
- Cases illustrate coherent links between theory and practice.
- Cases give students the opportunity to build selected and relevant skills.

When & Where Can Cases Be Useful?

- Courses with a practice-centered focus or approach.
- Courses grounded in theoretical concepts with explicit practical applications.
- Courses where skill development is a critical component of the learning experience.
- Courses that deal with particularly complex or contentious topics or areas of practice.
- Cases may be of particular use in core courses, where students’ prior knowledge, interest, and enthusiasm can vary widely.
- When you want to introduce opportunities for students to leverage their own professional experience.
- When you want to vary instructional methods.

Finding (the right) Case For Your Course or Class

- Cases must be selected with the overarching themes and goals of the course in mind, as well as the particular learning objectives of the class(es) in which the case is being taught.
 - Key questions are: “*what do I want my students to learn?*” and “*what do I want my students to be able to do after this class?*”
- Think about the practical relevance of the case. The applicability and relevance of the case will guide your teaching plan and help motivate students and reinforce their sense of purpose in the work.
- Cases usually come in two different forms:
 - Retrospective or narrative cases, which “present a comprehensive history of a problem” and ask students to analyze outcomes and explain the reasons behind them.
 - Decision-forcing cases, which tell the story of a problem without revealing the outcome and ask students to “identify and assess the range of possible options for action” (Golich, Boyer, Franko, and Lamy, p. 1).
- Other considerations in case selection:
 - Age of the case
 - Availability of teaching notes
 - Industries/Practice areas
 - Organization/Group size
 - Stage of the organization’s/group’s development
 - Diversity of protagonists
 - Location/Geography
 - Case complexity
 - Case length
 - Cases used in other courses

- The more enthusiastic you are about a case, the more enthusiastic your students will be. Don't choose cases that you don't find personally interesting or professionally stimulating.

Things To Think About When Using Cases

- There are a variety of ways in which you can teach a case. The two most well-known models are the faculty-centered Socratic Method and the student-centered Case Discussion model. These, however, are by no means the only ways for you to bring cases into your course and your classroom. How you teach a case can and should be adjusted to fit your course, your learning objectives, your students, your experience and expertise, and your preference for managing a class.
 - For more information, see T. Grandon Gill (2011) *Informing with the Case Method*, pp. 10-15.
- Cases can be used successfully to teach both qualitative and quantitative subject matter.
 - For more information, see Espen Andersen & Bill Schiano (2014) *Teaching with Cases*, pp. 173-189 and William L. Carlson (1999) "A Case Method for Teaching Statistics," *Journal of Economic Education*, pp. 52-58.
- "The case teacher's task is to 'frame' the case with questions that compel students to 'inhabit' the case in [order to] seek the best available answer under similar decision-making constraints as those prevalent in the 'real' event" (Tower in Golich, Boyer, Franko, and Lamy, p. 12).