

# Case study teaching

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A brief description of case study as a teaching method to improve student critical thinking, collaboration, and communication in various disciplines.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Consider using case studies as part of your course curriculum with topics that have multiple perspectives and provide opportunities to apply theoretical concepts to real world situations. For information contact CET.

### Case study teaching method

Case studies are commonly used in business schools, medical schools, law schools and the social sciences, but they can be used in any discipline where instructors want students to apply concepts they are learning to real-world situations. The use of case studies provides opportunities for students to develop analytical skills using real world cases to apply their learning.

The case study method asks students to analyze a problem considering multiple perspectives, often working with peers to develop a solution with evidence and reasoning. A solution is then presented to the instructor or the class for further discussion and development of ideas.

### Considerations for use

Choose a case that aligns with your course learning objectives and provides a problem with multiple solutions or multiple stakeholder goals. Consider how you will implement the case study activity (refer to the CET tips below). Although group work is the norm in case study teaching, students can work individually, with each expected to have a solution for solving the scenario.

### Discipline specific examples

* In a biology course, students examine tropical deforestation in the Amazon from the perspective of three dominant stakeholders in the region: a farmer, logger, and environmentalist.
* In an education course, students grapple with whether universities should consider a student’s social media history as part of their admissions criteria.
* In law, students might read the judicial ruling on a court case regarding a property dispute, then summarize the case in a brief and prepare to answer questions posed by the instructor during class.
* In a business course, students read a letter written from a Black manager to a white boss explaining the stress Black employees face in a transactional, monotonous work environment. Students make recommendations on a course of action for the company.
* In the arts, students may grapple with the impact of COVID-19 on the operations and programs of museums, nonprofit arts organizations, or the music industry.
* In humanities, students examine the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, how the disaster was made worse by human action following the event, and its impact on the field of seismology.

### Case Study Types

The following descriptions of case studies were adapted from the National Center for Case Study Teaching.

*Analysis Case*: Sometimes referred to as an issue case, an analysis case focuses on describing and analyzing a problem, not making a decision.

*Dilemma/Decision Case*: A dilemma or decision case presents a problem that must be solved, often at the moment of crises. The decision-maker is at the center, and students consider possible solutions based on the developments leading up to the crises at hand.

*Interrupted Case*: Interrupted cases asks students to solve a problem in a progressive disclosure format. Common development includes selecting a research question from a scientific paper and asking students to develop a hypothesis, design and test experiments and present for critique. Finally, the instructor discloses how the actual author of the paper approached the problem.

*Clicker (Poll) Case*: Designed for larger introductory courses, students use a personal response system (e.g., clickers, phones, polls) to interact with the material presented.

*Flipped Case*: Designed as a part of a flipped classroom model, students learn the foundations of the case at home by watching videos, reading articles, etc., and then apply the material to the class discussion or group work.

*Laboratory Case*: Lab cases ask students to design their own laboratory approach to solve an experimental problem. Lab cases typically tell a story that is relevant to students. Working in teams, students solve problems with minimal guidance from the instructor.

*Discussion Cases*: Sometimes referred to as the Socratic method, discussion-based cases are common in business and law, whereby students are provided with decision or analysis cases while the instructor asks probing questions to enhance the analysis.

### CET Tips for implementing case studies in your course

1. Identify a case or problem to investigate. Consider the type of case study method that aligns with your course learning objectives.
2. Start with a simple case and explain to students how the case study process will help them learn. Model a case study with the entire class before asking students to analyze a case on their own.
3. Provide material and resources about the case for students (e.g., readings, multimedia). Students could prepare their analysis outside of class time individually or in groups. If working in groups, consider establishing group work etiquette and discussion norms.
4. Plan for the case discussion. Consider your role in facilitating case-based learning. How will you encourage students to ask and answer questions, summarize their work, and present their ideas?
   1. Ask students to explain their thought process and evidence used as they present their findings.
   2. Have students comment on each other’s ideas.
   3. Support students by creating a culture of psychological safety, where mistakes and risk taking are a desirable part of the learning process.
5. What is the issue and the context of the problem?
   1. Who are the stakeholders and what are their goals?
   2. What alternatives are available to the decision-maker?
6. What would you recommend and why? What evidence did you use?
   1. What assumptions are you making to get to your answer and how do you justify them?
   2. What are the consequences of the action you recommend?
7. Provide structure for presenting solutions.
   1. Will students present their analysis to the entire class or only to the instructor or the TA?
   2. When will the presentations take place?
   3. What will be the grading criteria?

### Resources

[Harvard’s Case Study Teaching Method](https://casestudies.law.harvard.edu/the-case-study-teaching-method/)

[The National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science.](https://sciencecases.lib.buffalo.edu/collection/types.html)

[10 Business Case Studies to Teach Online](https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/10-business-case-studies-to-teach-online)