

Assignment Type: Case-based Studies

What is it

This method presents students with a problem for them to analyze. The case presented can either be based on real events or can be a construction of events that could reasonably take place. The case presented has issues or conflicts that need to be resolved, though there is often no single obvious or clear solution.

Why use it

With case-based teaching, students develop analytical skills by reading and discussing complex, real-life scenarios. Used as individual or group work, students have a chance to develop and use problem-solving and decision-making skills by applying the material they are learning to a real or fictitious scenario or “real-world problem”. Students often find value in case study and analysis, as they often see a clear application of what they are learning to issues and problems they currently encounter or will encounter in the future. In this way, case studies often help organize and bring to life abstract concepts by forcing students to make difficult decisions about complex dilemmas. What cases do that lectures can’t is test to see whether students are cable of using the information that they have been learning and studying. If students work in groups, they also are developing interpersonal skills and the capacity to work well in a team.

Use case studies to teach reasoning and decision-making skills, to prepare students to move on to a professional practice in-situ learning situation. With case studies students can see how their learning and skills can be applied in a real-world situation, without the pressure of being actually involved in that situation with constraints on research, discussion and reflection time. Case studies and scenarios are particularly useful where situations are complex and solutions are uncertain

How to use it

Step 1: Build the Case

Determine the specific goal you hope to accomplish. In general, cases can assess the application of concepts to complex real world situation, including building analytical skills that distinguish high priority from low priority elements. To save time, build cases on actual events or experiences. What complex issues in your own research or teaching have you confronted? Can they lead to a story? Turn experiences into cases.

Step 2: Build the Discussion

Review basic info, then have students move to centering on objectives and solutions. Good discussion can be generated by the kinds of questions that you ask to make sure that all the angles of the case are carefully considered. Open-ended questions are useful because they demonstrate you don't have a predetermined conclusion you're aiming for. Ask exploratory and relational questions that probe into the reasoning behind conclusions that some students may want to jump to without carefully examining the evidence or their assumptions. Have students identify key concerns then possible actions.

Step 3: Reflect on Responses

After students have discussed the case and proposed recommendations or solutions, reflect on students' responses as a group; students are able to see others points (that they may not have considered), as well as new perspectives on the problem. Also, take a moment to personally reflect on the discussion and responses to see if the case needs to be developed further, if more background information should be provided, if assignment instructions need adjusted, etc.

Considerations

Acknowledge that some students may feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and so may be hesitant to participate. Some may also fear suggesting inadequate solutions, and wait until someone else figures out "the right" response. Prepare students well for what is expected of them.

Instruction and Assessment

The case study encourages practical thinking and assists learners in identifying key ideologies or rules and after examining the facts of the case, then applying those rules to new situations. Used in problem-based learning, case studies place the student in the role of a problem solver who must analyze the issue as well as potential outcomes based on recommended actions. Consider using a range of question types to enable the class to move through the stages of analysis.

You can assess students' interaction with other members of a group by viewing their responses to open-ended questions or observing their teamwork and sharing of resources as part of a discussion.

Level of Bloom's Taxonomy: Sample Learning Objectives

Case study assignments focus on assessing a student's demonstration of deeper understanding and cognitive skills. Here a few examples of objectives from the

critical thinking levels of Bloom are that align to the main components of a case analysis:

- Identification of the issues.
- Stating the main problem.
- Analyzing the problem.
- Interpret the findings.
- Constructing recommendations to solve the problem.
- Evaluate the resolution of the case.

Resources

- [National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science \(University of Buffalo\)](#)
 - This site offers resources and examples specific to teaching in the sciences. This includes the “UB Case Study Collection,” an extensive list of ready-to-use cases in a variety of science disciplines. Each case features a PDF handout describing the case, as well as teaching notes.
- [The Case Method and the Interactive Classroom - Research Article](#)
 - First-person account of how a sociology faculty member at University of California, Santa Barbara began using case studies in his teaching and how his methods have evolved over time as a professor.
 - **Reference:** Foran, J. (2001). The Case Method and the interactive classroom. *The NEA Higher Education Journal*, 17(1), 41-50. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/TAA_01Sum_05.pdf
- [Using Cases in Teaching \(Penn State\)](#)
 - Tips for both teachers and students on how to be successful using case studies in the college/university classroom. Includes links to several case repositories, organized by discipline.