



Knowledge to lead

Case Study

What is a case study?

A case study is a type of learner-centered activity that can practically demonstrate concepts or policies. It generally encourages critical thinking and can reinforce course contents. A case study is normally presented in narrative format, reproducing either an actual event that has occurred or presenting a possible scenario of an event. The in-depth exploration of the event (actual situation or scenario) contributes to gain understanding into selected aspects enshrined in the learning experience. As such, case studies can comprise the application of principles or concepts to simulated or real-life situations to give learners practice in applying analytical skills and theoretical knowledge. Case studies tend to be used when the goal is to enable learners to apply known theories or practices to a certain circumstance, decide what is pertinent, identify the real issues, decide what should be done, and develop a plan of action. In this sense, they have as major objectives the development of skills such as critical analysis, decision-making, communication, group working, problem solving, time management and information gathering.

Developing a case study

This type of activity is suitable for both face-to-face and e-Learning contexts.

Structure

Case studies generally have four sections:

- Situation
- Problem
- Solution
- Evaluation

General guidelines

An effective case study is one that:



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- tells an engaging and compelling story to learners
- raises thought-provoking issues
- provides meaningful insights about the characters and the context
- features elements of conflict and portrays actors in moments of decision
- encourages students to think, express their opinions and find potential solutions to problems

Step by step

Planning stage

- Determine the area and/or issues you want to address
- Plan your analysis techniques and data gathering
- Whenever required, collect field data and carry out interviews
- Carry out evaluation and analysis of the collected data.

Writing stage

- Structure your case into different sections (e.g. introduction, background, description of problem or conflict situation, indication of possible solutions)
- Use a compelling style and present information so that learners are in a position to form their own opinion freely and are not bound by pre-determined solutions.

Implementation

- Introduce the case and provide learners with guidelines on how to approach it
- Make sure you break down the steps you want learners to take when analyzing the case
- Create groups and ensure everyone is involved
- Have groups present their solutions and opinions about the case; ask questions and encourage communication in order to stimulate a lively discussion
- Synthesize the issues raised and bring the strands of the discussion together so that learners can visualize the bigger picture of what they learnt.

Common problems with case study writing

- Lack of clear objectives
- Poor organization of content
- Lack of conciseness and presence of irrelevant/unnecessary information
- Lack of clarity or writing style that puts too much strain on the reader

Practical tips

- When planning your case study keep your audience in mind: consider what their interests are and what their knowledge of the subject is



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- Try to formulate the case problem in a few sentences: if it takes longer than that, it might be too complicated and therefore not easily understandable by learners
- Present your ideas logically
- Prepare thoroughly in order to be able to anticipate where students might encounter problems
- Write your case study using a compelling writing style and draw from short-story writing techniques: this will help keeping learners interested and involved
- Including conflicting situations or scenes is the most effective way to depict a problem: portraying characters in situations of contrast or disagreement stimulates learners to find potential solutions
- Describe characters who learners can empathize with and provide insights into their personality and reasons for behaving in a certain way
- If you present potential solutions, avoid suggesting that one might be preferred to the others
- Leave some questions open and keep readers challenged to find their own path and solutions.



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