

Writing Good Case Studies

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Steps for Getting Started

The first two steps in preparing a case study are reversible in order, in fact they follow the pattern of the classic “which came first, the chicken or the egg” question. Does one think of an interesting ethical question or learning objective and then find or construct a scenario to illustrate it, or does one come across an interesting ethical situation or scenario and then construct the question or learning objective.

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Example

For example, one might read about a drug that was withdrawn from experimental trials because it was not viewed as having as much overall profit potential as an alternative drug although it is more effective for a small percentage of the population. This might spark a series of ethical questions about who are the stake holders in a problem: shareholders in a drug company, the majority of the people involved, the most disadvantaged of the people involved, and so on. Or one might be interested in ethical issues related to loyalty to family versus friend versus country and construct a scenario about surrendering information to a terrorist group at the threat of loss of life to one's family.

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Realism

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Ethical Issues and Learning Outcomes

- Make a list of well defined ethical issues and learning objectives for the case study.

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Ethical Issues and Learning Outcomes

- Make a list of well defined ethical issues and learning objectives for the case study.
- Identify the key ethical issues that will be presented in the case study.

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Ethical Issues and Learning Outcomes

- Make a list of well defined ethical issues and learning objectives for the case study.
- Identify the key ethical issues that will be presented in the case study.
- Decide on your pedagogical goals for those who will analyze the case, whether in terms of being able to analyze a given ethical issue, or gain new ethical insights.

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- Learning outcomes specify what participants are expected to know and what they are expected to be able to do, value, or feel at the completion of the exercise.

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Learning Outcomes

- Learning outcomes specify what participants are expected to know and what they are expected to be able to do, value, or feel at the completion of the exercise.
- That is to say, you have to think about or list the learning issues you would like participants to engage in while studying the case, and the learning outcomes that will be achieved after completing work on the case.

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- Learning outcomes specify what participants are expected to know and what they are expected to be able to do, value, or feel at the completion of the exercise.
- That is to say, you have to think about or list the learning issues you would like participants to engage in while studying the case, and the learning outcomes that will be achieved after completing work on the case.
- Eventually, the learning outcomes help you determine the content of the case in terms of the concepts, rules and principles needed.

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An effective case should make participants interested in and motivate them to acquire a deeper understanding of the concepts and principles that have been taught or they are going to learn.

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Find and/or construct a scenario

- Find and/or construct a scenario that presents the ethical choice situations you have identified for the case study.

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Find and/or construct a scenario

- Find and/or construct a scenario that presents the ethical choice situations you have identified for the case study.
- The best cases are based on events that are typical of everyday life, ones that everyone can recognize and to which they can add their own experience or insights.

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Find and/or construct a scenario

- Find and/or construct a scenario that presents the ethical choice situations you have identified for the case study.
- The best cases are based on events that are typical of everyday life, ones that everyone can recognize and to which they can add their own experience or insights.
- Use as much factual information as possible. Quotes, exhibits and pictures can be included to add realism and life to the case.

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Useful Questions for Scenarios

Here are some questions that are often useful in deciding about the usefulness of a given scenario.

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Useful Questions for Scenarios

Here are some questions that are often useful in deciding about the usefulness of a given scenario.

- Can the story be portrayed as a web of decisions leading to certain consequences?

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Useful Questions for Scenarios

Here are some questions that are often useful in deciding about the usefulness of a given scenario.

- Can the story be portrayed as a web of decisions leading to certain consequences?
- Can the story be told by, or seen from the viewpoint of, a central player acting under pressure and caught in a situation which requires the exercise of judgement in choosing a course of action?

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Useful Questions for Scenarios

Here are some questions that are often useful in deciding about the usefulness of a given scenario.

- Can the story be portrayed as a web of decisions leading to certain consequences?
- Can the story be told by, or seen from the viewpoint of, a central player acting under pressure and caught in a situation which requires the exercise of judgement in choosing a course of action?
- Will the central figure be surrounded by other key actors or observers, able to add complementary or different insights into the problem? These people may either be friendly or hostile towards the central character.

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- Does the scenario have one central, broadly applicable theme plus several sub-plots and issues? Whilst the central issue could involve a choice to be made, making that choice could involve several other choices or dilemmas.

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Useful Questions for Scenarios

- Does the scenario have one central, broadly applicable theme plus several sub-plots and issues? Whilst the central issue could involve a choice to be made, making that choice could involve several other choices or dilemmas.
- Is the end a critical decision point: where the central player must decide what to do? Or does the case present the decision made by the key actor and then ask for analysis of that decision?

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Decide on Information Needed

Decide what information should be put into the case. You need to decide what information is needed early enough in the planning process because the availability of information directly influences your choice and quality of content. Moreover, the components of a case also determine what information is needed.

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The materials may come from different sources.

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Look for Materials

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They might come from the reflections on your own personal experience, from stories that you have heard from friends or colleagues, or from articles and publications.

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Look for Materials

Start looking for materials to make the case real and actual. The materials may come from different sources.

They might come from the reflections on your own personal experience, from stories that you have heard from friends or colleagues, or from articles and publications.

The materials also can be obtained from interviews with experts on the subject matter that you are dealing with or with the personnel in a particular organization in which you are interested in and that is related to the case issues.

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Make sure you have correct technical data and accurate factual information. The scenario needs to fit real world situations and parameters.

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Cases are usually presented in a narrative or story format. A narrative is a story of an event. It includes what happened, who was involved, when it happened, why it happened, and how it happened. Good narrative brings the characters and actions to life.

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Narrative Form

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The usual way to organize a narrative is chronologically, in the order in which events occur but you can choose other orders if that is more effective.

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Narrative Form

Cases are usually presented in a narrative or story format. A narrative is a story of an event. It includes what happened, who was involved, when it happened, why it happened, and how it happened. Good narrative brings the characters and actions to life.

The usual way to organize a narrative is chronologically, in the order in which events occur but you can choose other orders if that is more effective.

No matter how you organize the case, the principle is to make the narrative structure clear by transition and focused on the points that you want to make.

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Have a Plot

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The case should show different perspectives. A case writer should reveal the information in a way that the discussion of the case or the suggested solution for the case will draw the analysts into different interpretations, different judgments, different decisions and, consequently, different actions to take.

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Different Perspectives

The case should show different perspectives. A case writer should reveal the information in a way that the discussion of the case or the suggested solution for the case will draw the analysts into different interpretations, different judgments, different decisions and, consequently, different actions to take.

A case involving armed robbery for the thrill of breaking the law does not leave a lot of room for ethical ruminations and judgement.

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There should be sufficient background information to allow participants tackle the issue. Include not only the events that happened, but also how the people involved perceive them.

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Background

There should be sufficient background information to allow participants tackle the issue. Include not only the events that happened, but also how the people involved perceive them.

There should be enough description in the prose of the case itself for participants to be able to situate the case problem, understand the various issues that bear on the problem, and identify themselves with the decision-maker's position.

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1. Introduction

2. Overview/Narrative

The overview/narrative provides a scenario of the situation and offers more detail about the various players in the scenario, including the situation, people involved, and the issues in question.

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1. Introduction

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The overview/narrative provides a scenario of the situation and offers more detail about the various players in the scenario, including the situation, people involved, and the issues in question.

3. Case problems

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1. Provide a series of questions to be answered that will guide the group through the analysis process.
2. Give a specific choice situation and ask the learners what key individuals in the problem should do next.

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1. Provide a series of questions to be answered that will guide the group through the analysis process.
2. Give a specific choice situation and ask the learners what key individuals in the problem should do next.
3. Give the learners a task such as preparing a report recommending an action for review by a key official, or a recommended course of remedial actions for individuals involved.

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4. Ask the learners to prepare a list of key decision points in the problem where those involved may have made different choices leading to different outcomes.
5. Provide two or three alternative outcomes or solutions for the problem and ask learners to identify strengths and weaknesses of each.

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1. The incident has emotional power.

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1. The incident has emotional power.
2. The incident entails difficult choices.

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1. The incident has emotional power.
2. The incident entails difficult choices.
3. Is open-ended, allowing multiple interpretations and solutions.

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1. The incident has emotional power.
2. The incident entails difficult choices.
3. Is open-ended, allowing multiple interpretations and solutions.
4. Entails fundamental/underlying value conflicts.

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6. Gets at issues that require or benefit collegial discussions.
7. Is related to the important curricular and pedagogical aims of the program.

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5. Speaks to important aspects of your goals for your student learning.
6. Gets at issues that require or benefit collegial discussions.
7. Is related to the important curricular and pedagogical aims of the program.
8. The situation has stayed with you and wants to be told.

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