



## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Teaching Technique 24

# Case Studies

### ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Problem Solving

### TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED


- Low Motivation/Engagement
- Surface Learning

### LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Application: Analysis & Critical Thinking
- Application: Problem Solving
- Integration & Synthesis
- Caring

# Case Studies

In *Case Studies*, student teams review a real-life problem scenario in depth. Team members apply course concepts to identify and evaluate alternative approaches to solving the problem.

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- 1** Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for using *Case Studies*
  - 2** Identify the learning task's underlying problem and craft the prompt
  - 3** Set assignment parameters for the *Case Studies*
  - 4** Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
  - 5** Communicate assignment instructions to students
  - 6** Implement the technique
  - 7** Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

# Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Because *Case Studies* are so versatile, you'll want to carefully consider your reason for using them so that you can best target the case to help students achieve the learning goals. *Case Studies* are most successfully applied when they engage students in real world situations and encourage them to find answers to complex problems. Because the case can be crafted in a way that is suited to a wide range of contexts, this technique is appropriate across disciplines and fields.

The *Case Studies* technique allows students to achieve multiple learning goals. A well-designed case requires analysis, problem solving, decision-making, and justification. Students also often have to integrate and synthesize information in order to solve the problem. Because of its real world context, students are typically invested in the activity, which teaches them to care about the discipline or field. *Case Studies* can also provide opportunities for students to identify personally with decision makers and the problems they confront, which can improve empathy. Finally, *Case Studies* can engage students in critical reflection.

*Case Studies* can provide a learning artifact that allows you to assess student learning. The report, whether oral or written, allows you to see gaps in analysis and reasoning and in the problem-solving process. It provides you with information about complex reasoning skills.

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

Once you have determined your goals for using *Case Studies*, the next step is choosing the topic. You can use research in your field or current events as stimulus ideas. Students are most intrigued by situations that deal with current issues. After that, you'll want to consider the situation and how students will be brought into it. You'll want to ask students to consider the approach they take to solving the problem. And finally, you'll want to specify how students will respond and how they should structure results.

## **STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

The next step is to determine the parameters of the assignment. For example:

- Will students work as individuals, pairs, or in a small group?
- Will the case be a single case, or will you use multiple cases in which students do a cross case comparison?
- Will students submit their responses orally, in writing, or in a multimodal format such as a poster presentation?

# Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



- How long will they have to work?
- Will you give the full case to the class at once or proceed in a “progressive disclosure” of information approach?

## **STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING**

Student responses to the cases can be assessed so that you consider their problem-solving and analytical skills and the thoroughness of the response. Rubrics can be effective, and you can craft them based on your expectations of what they should accomplish, for example:

- Clear explanation of the issues.
- Valid issues.
- Appropriate analysis and synthesis.
- Valid recommendations.

You may or may not choose to grade the *Case Study*, depending on how much time and effort you anticipate students will expend. If it is an in class assignment, you could count it as part of a participation grade. If it is something that students work on over time, you can assign a percentage to the assignment.

## **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

*Case Studies* are typically written and distributed as a handout, often with a series of questions to guide students in their analysis. However, some instructors are creative and present *Case Studies* through YouTube videos, having guest speakers appear in class to set the scene.

## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

To implement the technique, follow or adapt these steps:

- Form groups and distribute the case to each team.
- Allow time for students to ask questions about the process and to clarify the problem presented in the case.
- Ask students to work in groups to study the case and to become familiar with the issues and decision options.
- Ask students to sort out factual data, apply analytic tools, articulate issues, and draw conclusions about the case.

# Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



- Ask students to prepare a statement describing their assessment of the case, the decision options as they see them, and their recommendations.
- Allow time for students to discuss the case and their team deliberations with the full class.

## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

# Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR CASE STUDIES

- Identify a clear learning goal.
- Craft a situation that is as realistic as possible and that is clearly related to the learning goal.
- Portray the characters in an interesting and genuine manner—generally they should have names and personalities.
- Provide the necessary context—for example, you might describe the relationships among people, the nature of the organization, or the social situation.
- Write the case in such a way that it does not suggest one solution; in fact, it should be clear that several alternatives are feasible in the situation.
- Develop a leading question to provide direction; the question may be as simple as asking, “What should Sarah do now?” or it may involve a more complex set of questions that guide a group through the process of understanding the case.
- Provide time for debriefing in which individual or small groups present their perspectives on what could be done in the case situation and describe their reasoning.

## VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

- Partner with community members or professionals in your field to craft real cases and then invite these people to share their decisions and the consequences of their choices after students have analyzed the case.
- After students have studied a case, change one or more variables and ask them to speculate on how this would have affected the outcome.
- Create a simpler mini case that can be presented orally and that teams can analyze and propose solutions for in a short period of time.
- Pair *Case Study* with another Collaborative Learning Technique (CoLT) or a more extensive collaborative experience. For example, use CoLT 28: Collaborative Writing and have students develop a formal paper containing their analysis of the case.

# Online Adaptation



This section is intended to help you with the process of implementing *Case Studies* in your online class.

## **IMPLEMENT WITH BREAKOUT ROOMS**

If you would prefer to use your videoconference software breakout room function:

- First, craft your case. Present the case and allow time for students to ask questions.
- Announce a timeframe and then assign student groups to breakout rooms.
- Have teams discuss and analyze the case while you move around the rooms to offer comments or answer questions.
- When time is up, bring students back to the main room to report their findings.

## **IMPLEMENT WITH DISCUSSION FORUMS**

If you would prefer to use your Learning Management System's discussion forums:

- First, craft your case. Present the case and allow time for students to ask questions.
- Organize students into teams and create a closed-access forum for each team.
- Have teams discuss and analyze the case and then write up their analysis to post in a whole class forum.
- Once every group has posted their analysis, open up the forum for comments.

# Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Claire Major adapted *Case Studies* in her course, *College and University Teaching*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.



# Technique Template

Sample Case Studies Completed Technique Template:

Content from Claire Major

## *College and University Teaching*

Course Name

### **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

*My course is a graduate level seminar, and it enrolls approximately 25 students per semester. These students are diverse in terms of their preparation for this course, but many of them are working as Teaching Assistants at my university but have had no formal training in education generally or college teaching specifically. The course is blended; we meet onsite once monthly and have weekly online discussions and activities in between session that students complete through a learning management system. They typically read one book focused on college teaching prior to each class session.*

### **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

*My course meets four times during the semester, for eight hours at a time. Because of this, I try to incorporate many different activities in each class session to keep it interesting and lively. I use case studies because they provide a real life scenario in which students can apply some of the concepts we have been learning. I want them to think about good teaching practices, and I have created a case in which the main character does some things well and some things not so well, and students get to think through which is which and why.*

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

*My case is about a professor who has been teaching a long time and who has lost his way a bit as the times have changed. Students read about him and his concerns and from the perspective of instructional coaches, they try to develop a plan for helping him.*

## **STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

*I usually do the case within a single class session, allocating about an hour for it. I put students in groups, give them time to read and discuss, and then I have them report orally what suggestions they would offer the professor.*

## **STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING**

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

*I typically use a rubric to score group responses. This lets me see which aspects of the case they have considered and which they have not. It also provides me structure for thinking about the thoroughness of their responses. I typically consider this assignment in their participation grades (which I refer to as a class engagement grade). If I assigned it out of class and expected a written response, I would assign a more formal grade to it, but so far it has worked well as an in class assignment.*

## **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

*I distribute a handout to the students with a scenario about the fictional faculty member. I outline his issues and describe how he has asked for assistance. I give students roles as instructional designers/coaches and ask them to develop a plan for helping the instructor improve his teaching and his course evaluations.*

## STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

*I follow the steps of this technique almost exactly as we have described them here. I form groups and distribute a case. I allow students to ask questions and give them time to work in their group. I ask them to prepare a statement of what their group will suggest to the faculty member and ask them to report out orally.*

## STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

*Students always enjoy Case Studies. When I look around the room while the activity is in process, students are always invested in the conversation and it is evident that all students are invested in the discussions. I plan to continue to use this technique in future iterations of this course.*

# Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Case Studies** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor’s Guide to assist you in your thinking.

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**Course Name**

## **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?



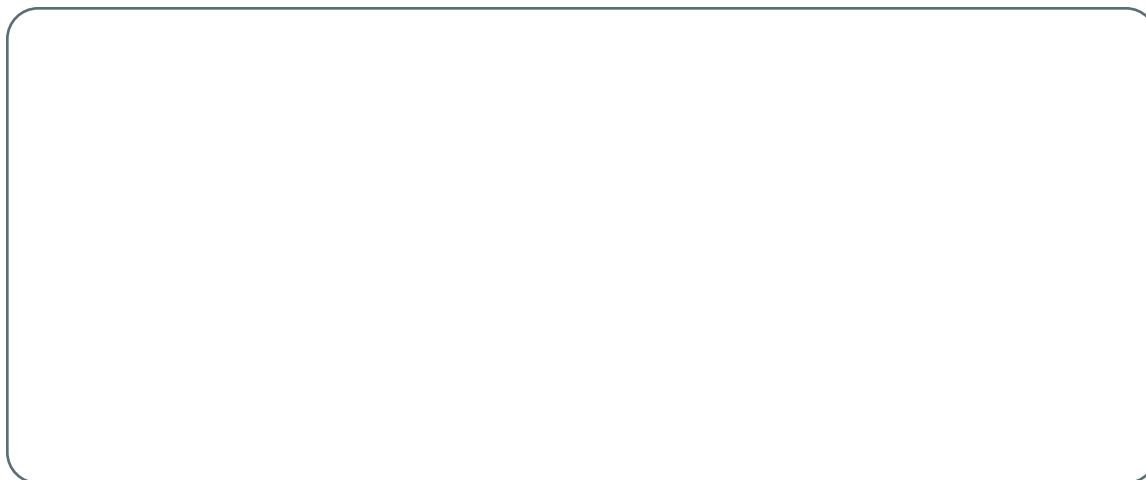
## **STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?



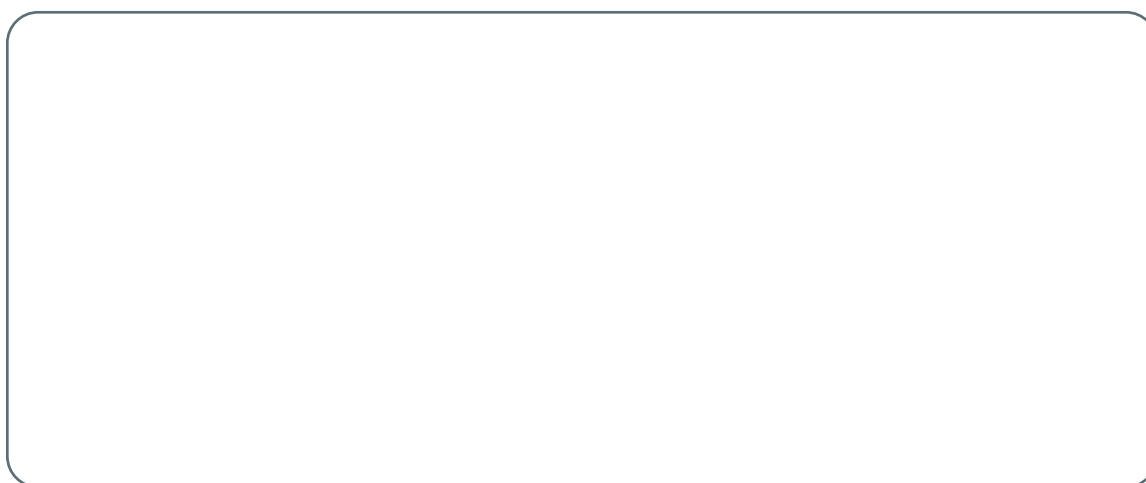
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#### **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

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## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

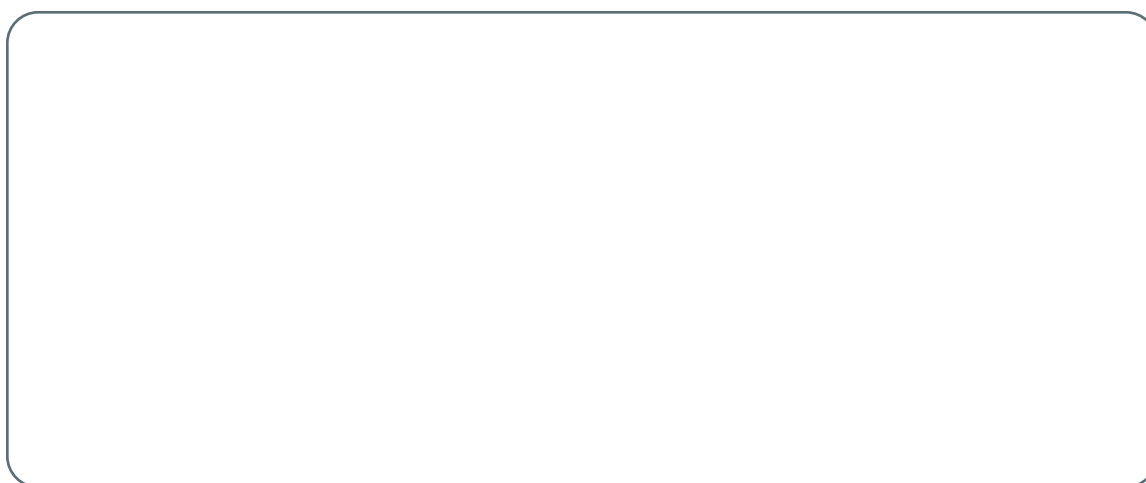
How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?



## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

*Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.*

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?





# References and Resources

## PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Student Engagement Technique 28: Case Study” in *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, 2010), pp. 272–274 and “Collaborative Learning Technique 15: Case Study” in *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014), pp. 238–243. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F. (2010). *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., & Cross, K. P. (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Barnes, L., Christensen, C. R., & Hansen, A. (1994). *Teaching and the case method: text, cases, and readings*. Boston: Harvard Business School.
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- Herreid, C. F. (1994). Case studies in science: a novel method of science education. *Journal of College Science teaching*, 23(4), 221–229.

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