



# Case-Based Learning (CBL)

## How to Teach

**What is CBL?** A 'case' is a brief narrative about a challenge encountered by an individual or organisation, presenting only the information available at that time. During class discussions, instructors encourage students to contribute, challenge and build on each other's ideas by asking questions. The case method simplifies complex concepts and fosters an engaging learning environment.

**Case variety.** Lecturers can use a variety of case studies to help students develop their skills. These can include 'paper cases', 'live' cases featuring guest lecturers such as entrepreneurs or corporate leaders, on-site visits or multimedia cases which immerse students in real situations.

### PACADI: A Six-Step Decision-Making Approach

In order to encourage students to consider decisions from the protagonists' perspective, it is recommended that a more structured approach to case analysis be taken, using the PACADI framework.

1

**Problem definition:** What is the biggest challenge, problem or opportunity, and what is the most important decision that needs to be made?

2

**Alternatives:** Describe the strategic alternatives for solving the problem in detail (3-5 options). They should be exclusive, realistic, creative and feasible, bearing in mind the given constraints.

3

**Criteria:** What are the key decision criteria that will inform the decision? Students should explain their reasons for choosing the decision criteria and the importance of each factor.

4

**Analysis:** Conduct a thorough analysis of each alternative, using the criteria. This enables students to evaluate the pros and cons of the different options, as well as their short- and long-term effects.

5

**Decision:** Students propose solutions to the problem. This decision is justified based on an in-depth analysis. They also explain why the recommended solution is the best fit for the criteria.

6

**Implementation plan:** To succeed, students must outline key implementation steps, timeline, costs, expected outcomes, key performance indicators and risks.

## Students' activities:

- Think about what they do not understand yet: What questions do I need to answer?
- Think about possible sources of information, depending on the available resources.
- Organize themselves in groups.
- Organize the materials they produced or found during the information research process.
- Discuss about different decision possibilities.
- Make decisions.
- Present the decision and defend it with arguments.



## Lecturers' activities:

- Select or create a relevant case study.
- Present the case study.
- Prepare and decide on relevant resources.
  - Moderate and structure the process.
- Ask questions, challenge the student's assumptions.
  - Support only if help is needed.
  - Give feedback.
- Facilitate reflection.

## Types of case studies

Although the focus is on decision-making (Case-method), case studies also teach students how to identify problems and gather information. There are four main types of case study:

- **Case-study-method:** students have to identify hidden problems and find solutions for them
- **Case-problem-method:** students have to find decisions for explicitly named problems
- **Case-incident-method:** students have to gather information from the case narrative and/or other sources in order to find a solution
- **Stated-problem-method:** students have to analyse a given solution with respect to given problems and information

## Notes

- The case study should act as an example for basic principles, thus being representative and generalizable.
- The case study should be relevant and manageable for the target audience.
- The case study should describe a situation as clearly, extensively, and vividly as possible. Photographs, movies, or short clips such as news, diagrams and relevant literature might help.
- The case study should stimulate and incentivize students to act and make a decision.

## Sources

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Weinstein, A., Brotspies, H.V. & Girona, J.T. (2020). *Do Your Students Know How to Analyze a Case Really? A Framework for Using Cases to Help Students Become Better Decision Makers*. <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/a-framework-for-using-cases-to-help-students-become-better-decision-makers>



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## How to Construct

**How are cases developed?** The case method engages students in real-life decision-making by focusing on questions rather than ready-made solutions. A good case study requires a compelling introduction – an urgent managerial issue – which is tied to a concept or theory and presented in such a way that students must discover it for themselves.



### Key design questions:

- Which concepts/theories will the case teach?
- What hook binds the story?
- Is the context rich and nuanced?
- Will it challenge and engage students?
- Does it create dynamic tension and multiple perspectives?
- Can it support interactive methods, such as role play or simulation?

### A case typically consists of three main parts:

- 1 Part 1: Opening paragraph**  
The opening sets the scene and tone of the case. It should introduce the main issue, context, key protagonist(s), and timeline, and end with one or two central questions. In short: answer the five W's — what, who, why, where, when.
- 2 Part 2: Body of the case**  
The body of the case tells the full story (often chronologically), with background on the company, environment, and key issues. It should provide context, present different perspectives, and create dynamic tension around a central theme. Quotes can captivate readers and encourage them to suggest alternative solutions.
- 3 Part 3: Concluding paragraph**  
The most important points are summarised, and new questions are raised. The writing style is clear and neutral, without analysis, as students must draw their own conclusions. The language should be factual yet engaging. An effective teaching case goes beyond mere description, encouraging students to consider how and why they can develop their analytical skills.

### How to write a case



1. In past tense – teaching cases tell a story.
2. Define a problem/issue linked to a concept or theory.
3. Opening paragraph: clarify who, what, when, where, why and the student's role.
4. Align with teaching objectives: purpose, course fit, and relevant theories.
5. Structure the case with clear subheadings.

### How to write teaching notes



Teaching notes outline what students should achieve and guide instructors in using the case. They explain objectives, key issues, teaching approaches, and may add data or exhibits for complexity. Notes are written in present tense (analysis), ideally alongside the case. They may include:

- Case use & audience
- Objectives & teaching plan
- Synopsis & key issues
- Discussion questions & assignments
- Readings, analysis, and teaching themes

### Why is it important to define a good case?

A strong teaching case fosters lateral thinking (taking a fresh, unfamiliar approach to problems) and shows that problems rarely have a single solution. Students learn to:

- differentiate major from minor issues
- discover business patterns
- distinguish problems from symptoms
- synthesize insights into actionable decisions

Emphasizing trade-offs sharpens strategic thinking and decision-making skills.

### DEI-lens (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion)



Do not teach and write cases in isolation – identities and contexts always play a role. Adopting a DEI perspective broadens horizons, fosters realism and promotes inclusive leadership.

### Sources

Farooqui, S. (2021). *A Short Guide to Writing and Teaching Inclusive Cases*. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.  
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