

# How to Write a Teaching Case

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# Introduction

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## What's a Case?

A case is a situation that requires investigation and analysis to be followed by a recommended course of action ... <SMJ>

## What's a Teaching Case?

A Teaching Case presents a Decision Dilemma (DD), with a central Decision Question (DQ), focusing on which a story is knitted by best articulating the (360 degree) Decision Context (DC) ... <SMJ>

## Key Components of a Teaching Case: **SMJ Perspective**

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### **Development Perspective (write-up)**

1. The 'case lead': Key decision dilemma and the central decision question
2. The protagonist: Key decision maker
3. The decision context
4. Interesting and challenging (thought provoking) elements
5. Trade-offs: Significant
6. Learning/experiencing opportunities
7. A well-knitted story

### **Audience Perspective**

1. Course/Subject/topic
2. Undergraduate/ graduate/ executive

### **Analytical Perspective**

1. Theories & Concepts
2. Tools & Techniques
3. Approaches & Frameworks

### **Learning Perspective**

1. Analytical skills
2. Decision making skills
3. Articulation mastery

# Make a Thoughtful Start

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Before starting to write a case, first think of several important “**design**” questions:

1. What is the key decision dilemma: the ‘case lead’? Who is the protagonist? Is s/he ready to grant a written permission to make the case public (with original names or disguised names)?
2. In your understanding, what theories, concepts, tools, techniques, frameworks, and/or approach(es) may be deployed to address the decision dilemma? Examples: Design thinking, BMC, blue ocean innovation, startup funding/financials, etc.
3. What are the interesting hook(s) that can bind the story together?
4. Is the case ‘lead’ sufficiently rich in terms of contextual nuances (the setting, personalities, cultures, urgency of issues)?
5. How would students react to the case? Is it sufficiently challenging? Interesting?
6. Is there enough dynamic tension in the case to produce contentious and competing views?
7. Would the case lend itself to an interesting and useful teaching and learning approach (e.g. role playing, simulation) and experience?

# HOW TO WRITE A CASE – Components

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A case typically consists of three main parts.

## **Part 1. The Opening Paragraph**

In the opening paragraph, invariably the most important part of a case, you set the general scene and tone. It is not a summary, and is different from the abstract of a research article. Use the opening paragraph to paint a concise and interesting picture of the main issue(s) in the case; describe the context within which the case occurs; introduce the principal protagonist(s); set the timeline. It is customary to finish the opening paragraph with one or two overriding questions facing the characters in the case. The opening paragraph should provide a summary of the five questions posed by journalists:

- what • who • why • where • when

# HOW TO WRITE A CASE –

## Components

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### **Part 2: Body of the Case**

The second part, the body of the case, is used to tell the whole story -- usually in a chronological order. It typically contains general background on business environment, company background, and the details of the specific issue(s) faced by the company.

Paying attention to contextual shades is particularly important at this stage. How you tell the story is often more important than the story itself. A good case should exude dynamic tension.

Tell more than one side to the story so that students can think of competing alternatives. A good case usually revolves around at least one major issue that is usually simple to identify but not necessarily easy to resolve. Engage the reader by using quotations from interviewees or stakeholders of the case

### **Part 3. Concluding Paragraph**

In the last part, the concluding paragraph, provide a short synthesis of the case to reiterate the main issues, or even to raise new questions.

# HOW TO WRITE A CASE – Principles

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Use simple and clear English to avoid clutter

Write neutrally. As a case writer, you should play the role of an honest investigative journalist without “taking sides”

Don’t provide any analysis, or “lessons learned” in the case; leave that in the teaching note. Let students decide about the merits of any particular argument based on their understanding of the facts provided in the case.

Decorate to highlight or downplay certain points, but stay true to the facts.

Purely descriptive cases provide a snapshot of an interesting issue, but they usually are of limited academic value. Description (what) is only the first stage in the learning process. A bona fide teaching case should be, at a minimum, decisional and analytical. It should challenge students to move to higher orders of learning by prompting them to ask “how” the issues are related to one another and “why” things happen the way they do. By learning how to identify business patterns, students can improve their analytic skills.

## HOW TO WRITE A CASE – Characteristics of a Good Case

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- A good case should give enough information so that students can break down the relevant facts. But it mustn't provide any diagnosis or prognosis.
- A good case should challenge students to make a "business case" for a particular decision by articulating how and why they came up to their decision.
- A good case should provoke students to think laterally.
- A good case should ideally promote both analysis and synthesis skills. Students usually learn quickly how to break down a case into clusters of related issues; they are mostly good at analysis. They have more difficulty, however, with synthesis -- how to put related facts into a coherent, articulated plan of action.
- A good case often involves implementation issues. Take advantage of these issues to increase dynamism by highlighting the human and socio-political factors in implementation.



# HOW TO WRITE A CASE – Writing Nitty-Gritty

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Teaching cases tell a story about what happened. They should therefore be written in the past tense.

Identify and establish an issue/problem which can be used to teach a concept or theory.

The opening paragraph of the case should typically contain the following information:

- WHOSE role is the student to assume?
- WHO is the key decision maker?
- WHAT is the nature of the issue/problem?
- WHEN did the case take place? Specify the date line in this paragraph.
- WHERE did the case take place; what organization?
- WHY did the issue/problem arise?

Establish teaching objective(s) and revise the opening paragraph as necessary:

# HOW TO WRITE A CASE – Writing Nitty-Gritty

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Establish teaching objective(s) and revise the opening paragraph as necessary:

Specify the purpose of writing the case.

- Check if the opening paragraph matches the purpose.
- Check if the case is appropriate for the course for which it is intended.
- Check if the case is appropriate for teaching the relevant concepts/theories.

Structure the case and decide on subheadings

## CONCLUSION

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- A good teaching case encourages lateral thinking by unraveling the dynamic interplay between the inductive and deductive methods of discovery.
- As business issues increasingly become more complex and interdependent, it is important for business students to learn how to
  - differentiate between major and minor issues,
  - discover business patterns,
  - distinguish problems from symptoms, and
  - synthesize their thoughts into coherent, articulated and actionable decisions.
- It is important to write teaching cases in such way that students learn that there is no “one solution” to business problems and that tradeoffs are possible among competing alternatives.

# TEACHING NOTE

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For the teachers, write a detailed long note addressing the following:

- **Synopsis\***
- Key decision dilemma/Basic issue(s)\*
- Potential uses of the case\*
- Potential audience of the case\*
- Teaching objectives\*
- Immediate use(s) of the Case\*
- Suggested teaching approach/plan\*
- Possible discussion questions\*
- Suggested student assignments\*
- Suggested additional/supplementary readings or references (optional)
- Suggested Computer and multi-media support, if any (optional)
- Teaching themes and lessons from the case (optional)

Provide **your own analysis\*** ...

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you'd always need an  
**official release order/ written permission/NOC**  
from the protagonist/organization you are  
writing the case on.

Reference

*Ali Farhoomand, The University of Hong Kong*

<https://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/cbmp/product/1584-PBK-ENG>

# Entrepreneur's Dilemma

## Real-life decision cases (I&E)

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**Entrepreneur's Dilemma** is a case writing exercise involving a real entrepreneur (the protagonist) and a real decision dilemma (the lead or the central decision question), as latest as possible.

**Each student** is required to **write one case** on a specific entrepreneurial decision dilemma where the entrepreneur himself/herself is the protagonist (the key decision maker). The student is also required to **solve the case** using proper analytical tools, frameworks, and approaches as part of the teaching note.

Each student is required to obtain a written Clearance (No Objection Certificate) from the protagonist.

For details on how to write a decision/teaching case and how to develop the teaching note, please refer to SMJ's Case Writing Guideline [attached separately].

The expected length of each case is 3,000 (+/- 1,000) words, excluding Annex and the teaching note.

Well-written cases may be considered for further development and potential publication.

Submission deadline: 11:59 pm | 10 January 2026.

**Sample cases:** Intelligent Machine, Bondstein, Kaajkori (not the brief version though)

**Note:** This exercise is part of the your **final exam**. Both carry a combined weightage of 35% of the total marks.

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Thank you  
Enjoy exploring!

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