

## Develop and Deliver a Case Study

### Course Planning Tips

If you have determined that a case study is the best method to teach or reinforce a concept or information, be sure to take the time to plan it carefully, using the tips below and perhaps a previous case study as a model.

- Start with a simple case first. Multiple cases can be used throughout a course so that students become more comfortable with open-ended, problem-solving exercises over time.
- Discuss the purpose and suggested methods for doing a case assignment with your students. Students may want examples of possible solutions, if multiple solutions are possible. Some models may be taken from similar case assignments.
- Take sufficient time to introduce the narrative and establish the case facts.
- If doing a case assignment for the first time or piloting a new case, give students an opportunity to provide their reactions and feedback. Student feedback is often invaluable for diagnosing where an assignment may go wrong.
- If the case assignment is too complex, the material may frustrate students and shut down the very critical thinking skills the assignment may be trying to foster.
- A very controversial case could lead to extreme emotional reactions and extended discussion. A firm statement of the facts and rules of etiquette can help reduce tensions.

### Discussion Tips

If you are conducting a case study in which a class discussion or debate is important, then these discussion tips can be beneficial.

- Make sure the first question is simple, but open-ended. This helps set the expectation of open-ended answers. However, some more direct questions later on may be used to help students clarify details.
- Limit yourself to a few well-chosen questions so that students have time to explore each question.
- Use some questions to have students explore or challenge their underlying assumptions about how they view case issues.
- Make sure all students participate by directing questions to quiet students in a class, requiring students to contribute to an online discussion, or some other technique.
- The discussion format should be flexible enough to allow some latitude. However, redirect students that wander off-track.

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- If possible, change seating arrangements so that students can form a discussion circle or be grouped with their teams. If seating is fixed, students can still move to be together, and some may be able to meet in the hall.

## Encourage Problem Solving

The primary aim of case studies is to provide real-life, relevant examples of sample problems and situations to encourage the students to think through causes, contributing factors, and possible solutions.

- Instead of answering questions directly, ask questions of your students so they enter into a dialogue about the problem.
- Encourage students to clearly define the problem first. Listing all the facts (or “knowns” and “unknowns”) helps students define the exact nature of the problem.
- Ask students what a viable solution would “look like.” This may help them brainstorm ideas.
- Encourage students to take a quick break if they are really stuck. Walking or doing something else may “loosen” their thinking and prevent coming to a solution too early or employing “group think.”
- Remind students to develop an action plan once a “solution” is found. There may be other roadblocks ahead for the plan.

## References and Links

The references and links listed below provide additional information on developing or delivering case studies:

- Herreid, C. F. (1999). What not to do when teaching cases. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, Vol. 5, pp. 292-294.
- Nickols, F. (2004, July). *Solution engineering: Ten tips for beefing up your problem solving toolbox*. Retrieved from [Solution Engineering ten tips.pdf](#)