

Assignment Design Guide

Instructional Strategies for Case Studies

A practical guide for faculty on designing and facilitating case-based learning experiences grounded in active learning, critical thinking, and student-centered instruction.

WHY USE CASE STUDIES?



ACTIVE LEARNING

Students learn by actively analyzing cases, discussing ideas, and engaging with complex problems rather than passively receiving information.



CRITICAL THINKING & DECISION-MAKING

Case studies ask students to evaluate evidence, navigate ambiguity, and make informed decisions using disciplinary knowledge.



REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

Case studies simulate authentic professional and civic situations, helping students bridge theory to practice.

Designing Case Study Learning Experiences

Purpose:

Effective case study teaching begins with intentional design. Cases should align with course learning objectives and provide opportunities for analysis, discussion, and application.

Align Case Studies With Learning Objectives:

- What students should know or be able to do
- Which disciplinary skills students should practice
- How the case study advances course outcomes differently than lecture-based instruction

Select the Appropriate Case Study Type:

Well-designed case studies encourage students to apply concepts in realistic and complex contexts. Different case study structures support different learning goals.

Examples include:

- Directed case studies → understanding concepts and principles
- Interrupted case studies → problem-solving through staged information
- Decision or dilemma case studies → decision-making and judgment

Facilitating Case Studies

Purpose:

When using case studies as an instructional tool, the instructor shifts from lecturer to facilitator. The goal is to create conditions where students lead analysis, discussion, and inquiry.

Encourage Student-Led Discussion:

Students should do the intellectual work of:

- Asking questions
- Interpreting evidence
- Challenging assumptions
- Proposing solutions

Assign Meaningful Roles:

Possible student roles include:

- Discussion starters → initiate conversation with guiding questions
- Facilitators → encourage participation and ask follow-up questions
- Recorders → take notes of the main points of the discussion

Using Different Methods:

- Debate or Trial: Students work in teams to prepare and defend competing perspectives, strengthening critical thinking and challenging assumptions.
- Role Play or Public Hearing: Students assume stakeholder roles and respond from multiple perspectives to build empathy and explore complex viewpoints.
- Clicker or Polling Cases: Students respond to staged questions and discuss their reasoning with peers to increase participation and formative learning.