

Writing Cases

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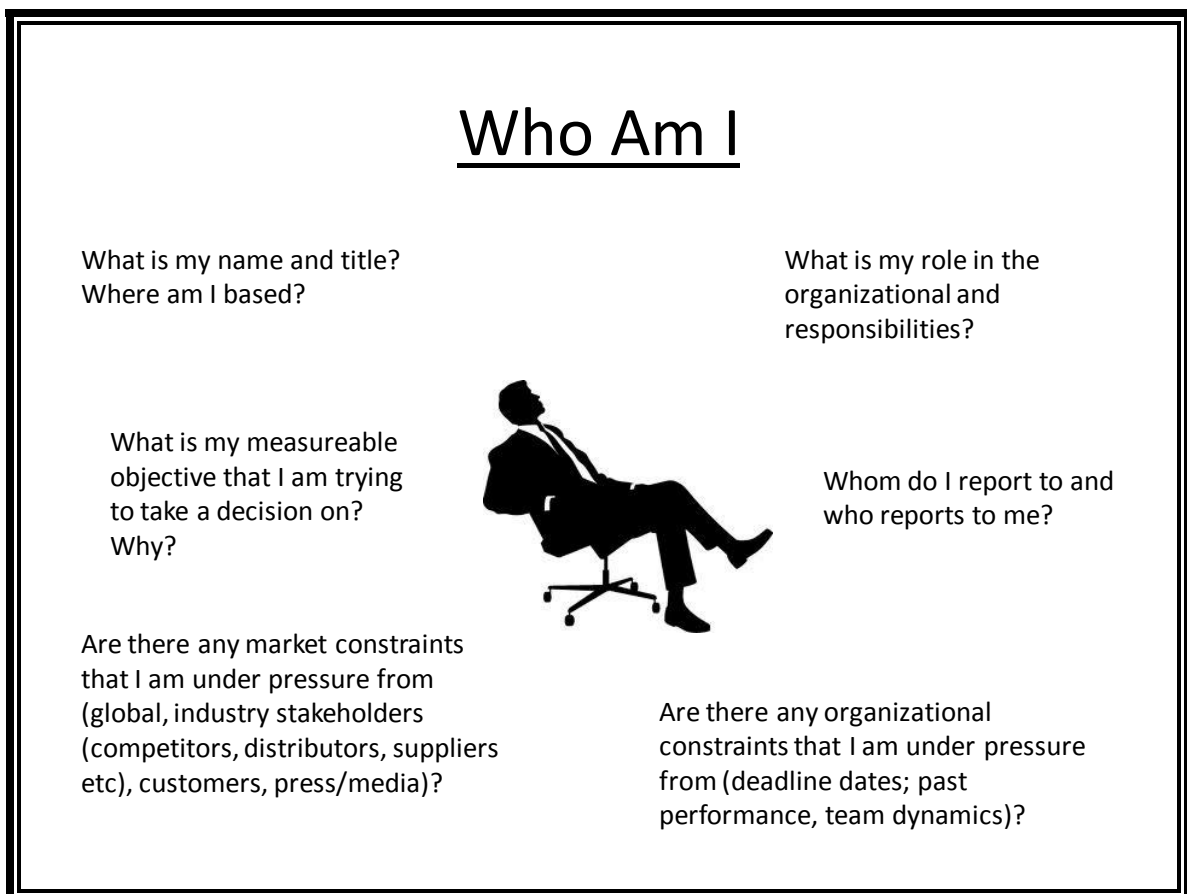
The difference from a case study research methodology and a teaching case study

Teaching cases differ from research cases primarily in terms of application. While one is used as an instrument to facilitate teaching and add to practical knowledge the other is a methodology used to support research findings, and add to the body of theoretical knowledge. The style of writing differs. Teaching cases should be interesting and have a story line that students can get immersed in and relate too while Research cases are more evidence based and must relate to academic peers (two different audiences). The other key difference is that teaching cases highlight practical applications of theory and concept to real world situations, they are a documentation of the same (they reflect the ambiguity of the situation) and need not have a single outcome as the intent is to create a dialogue with students, encourage critical thinking and research and evaluate recommendations. On the other hand research cases are more academic and are focussed on a research outcome.

Like research cases, you should have a case study protocol (a list of questions) and collect relevant information from your case organization or case lead. You should ensure you not only have correct documentation, you must try to get permission letters.

Is it important to mention the person and the decision role?

Yes it is important to mention the person and the decision role. This is because this information gives the student an idea of the role they must take. Decision problems escalate with levels, responsibilities increase and so does the strategic time frame. To make the right decision, a student must not only know the role they must play, but the decision outcome expected, the resources available (money, manpower etc) and the context. You can disguise the company and the role title but there must be enough similarity with the situation so that the case can help the student understand the complexities of each choice and the outcomes; both in achieving the stated objectives and any other sub-objectives that may exist in the system.



What will make your case unique?

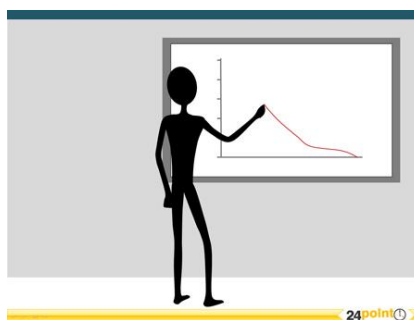
A unique case study chooses an industry, decision problem area, or a market where little data exists and conventional theoretical norms do not always apply. The context of a case is very important to the case as decisions are influenced by the pressures of the variables at that time. By documenting the context, and relating it to the teaching objective, the case allows the students to get a simulated feel of what was going on, the constraints the decision maker was facing and the dynamics of the pressures of the job. As a writer you may not be able to capture all these points but you should be able to give a feel of what was going on. The important thing is don't drown your reader in facts especially if it takes away from the story. If needed put the additional data in teaching resources so your very finicky reader (which student loves to read long cases?) still has access to more data but can quickly get the gist of the case.

Building up the Context

Describe the industry of operation and especially highlight the unique quirks or issues that make the market challenging

Describe your focus product and help the student understand its potential and its realistic performance in the market place vis a vis competitors. How is this product objective fit within the organization objective

Describe the country of origin and focal market of operation

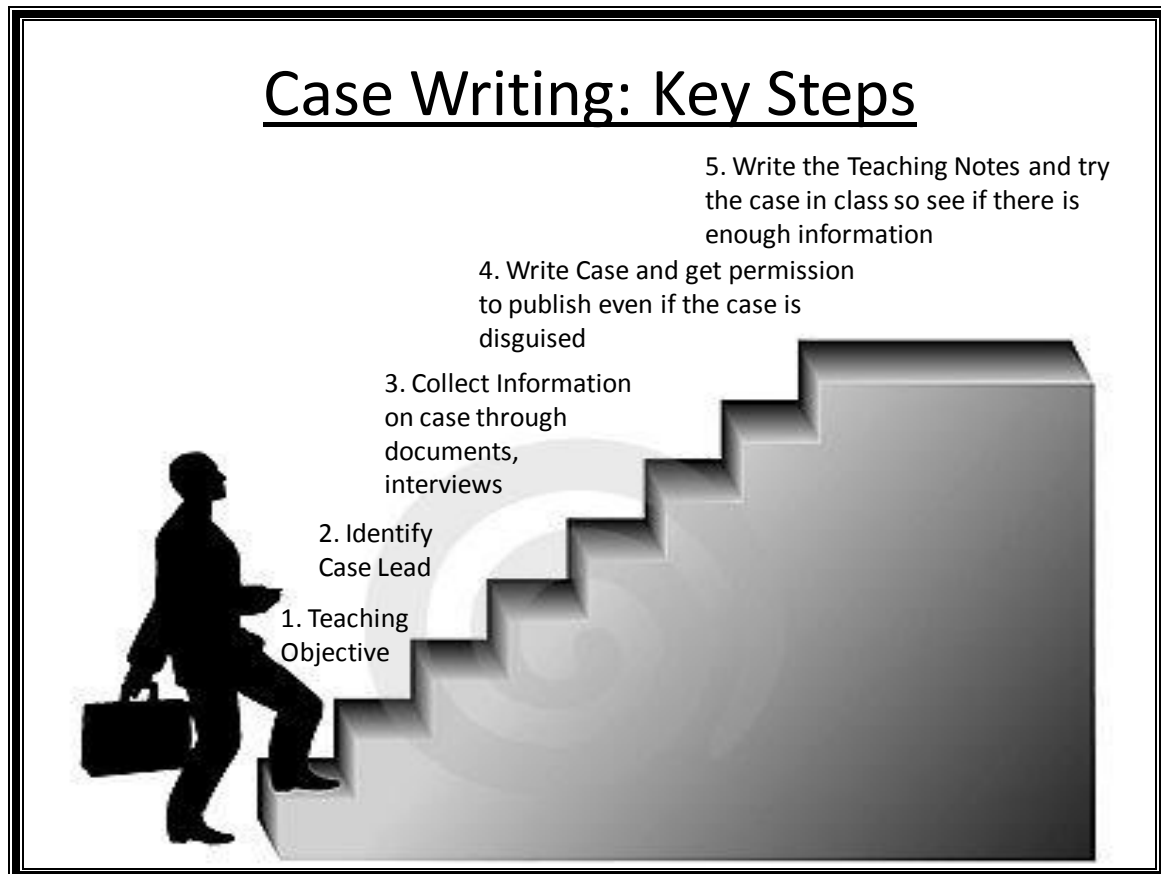


Describe the organization, its history, its vision, its structure (large, small, diversified, SME, adaptable?) and its culture.

What is the time-line for the objective? Why the urgency? What could be the possible consequences for not achieving your objective?

What is the starting point of a good case study?

Though intuitively I would say the teaching objective, realistically it is with a good access to a story. When you find one interesting case, it is important to “bag” it by getting permission. Since these cases need approval they sometimes start out one way and end another. There is nothing wrong in that. The most important point is collecting as accurate a picture of the setting of the story which is always the backbone of the decision problem. Another important aspect to explore is whether the teaching objectives may spillover to multiple disciplines. Do look at all angles as this makes your cases more interesting and widens the reach.



Teaching Notes

This is the most important part of a successful case. It will ensure that your case is used the right way in class and that all supporting resources are easily available for the students/teachers. This section is easily 2-6 pages long. It can have competitive information, reading recommendations (theories, journal articles, web articles, news paper articles) and organizational material.

The rough format is as follows:

Who is the teaching case for: Students of which classes, disciplines and what is the level of expertise with this area? Is there any prior preparation students must do before they come to class?

What are the teaching objectives? Which theories and concepts can be reinforced, what skills can be learnt?

What are possible issues the teacher or students can bring out in the discussion and how can these be handled?

Are the resources documented easily accessible?

Is there a teaching plan – how will you begin the discussion, how do you lead the students and what is the outcome. In some cases a Board Plan (to jot down key points is also recommended). What is the time needed to facilitate this discussion?

A few discussion questions maybe given and these can also help in class discussions. Do you recommend group study or individual study? Should it be a discussion, debate, role play, etc? Why?

Last but not least how do you think students can be evaluated?