



Teaching with Cases

Goals

The effective use of cases requires section leaders to determine the specific goals they hope to accomplish. Cases can be used to help students:

- Apply concepts to complex real world situations.
- Reinforce analytic skills to distinguish between low priority and high priority case components.
- Make connections among different disciplines.
- Develop interpersonal skills and the ability to work in teams.
- Take more responsibility for their own learning.

Learning and Teaching Strategies

- Prepare for the discussion and review the materials before the session. Consider what key learning points you want to convey and what additional questions you may ask, which are not included in the case guide.
- Be cognizant of time. Plan how you will use the session time in advance according to the material that needs to be covered and the learning points you want to convey.
- Encourage students to review the case materials before the session.
- Set some ground rules for participation/discussion, e.g. section leaders can emphasize that the analysis of the case will be a group project, and that no one will be criticized for raising naïve questions or uncertainties. Students must understand that they will work collaboratively toward the goal of analyzing the case and that they are free to experiment with hypotheses.
- Start the discussion with questions that require students to review and organize the case information, i.e. what are the relevant facts and how do they translate into major issues.
- Once the basic information is reviewed, the discussion can move to the case analysis.
- Use open-ended questions to ensure that all the angles of the case are considered (see handout on *Strategies to Promote Effective Small Group Session* for use of questions).
- Probe students for their reasoning behind their arguments/hypotheses/conclusions to prevent them from jumping too quickly into a statement/conclusion without carefully examining the evidence or their assumptions.
- Pose a different hypothetical scenario than the one the case presents to have students explore other alternatives, e.g. ask students “What if this patient were also suffering from...?”
- List identified key problems on the board along with a separate list of possible actions.
- Listen carefully to students’ responses.
- Paraphrase students’ responses to check group understanding whenever necessary.
- Give students sufficient time to reflect on questions/issues that are raised.
- Check with the group about their understanding of the case before moving on to the next.

- Summarize the group discussion to wrap up. You can also ask students to pull together the key points of the discussion.
- Assign research tasks to students to find the answers to questions that demand more information or explore a topic further.
- Gather students' questions throughout the discussion to develop a handout on FAQ for each particular case.
- After the session, reflect on the group interaction and progress, and on students' use of the case to consider whether the case can be developed further or whether more background information can or should be provided.

Challenges of Leading a Case Discussion

- Students who are uncomfortable with ambiguity and/or interested in having the section leader answer all the questions and offer the appropriate facts may be unwilling to participate (Suggested teaching strategy: prepare students for what is expected of them and ensure participation of all students. See handout on *Strategies to Promote Effective Small Group Session* to encourage participation).
- Some students might fear suggesting inadequate solutions (Suggested teaching strategy: prepare students for what is expected of them and communicate/reinforce ground rules mentioned above).
- The discussion can go on tangents that are inappropriate (Suggested teaching strategy: keep the group discussion focused on issues relevant to the case).

References

Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning. Speaking of Teaching. Teaching with Case Studies. *Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching* 5(2): 1-3. Available at: http://ctl.stanford.edu/Newsletter/case_studies.pdf