



WHAT IS IT?

Case-based learning (CBL) is a strategy for engaging students in real life complex scenarios. Case studies, which are central to case-based learning, have long been used in business, law, and the social sciences, but can be used in any discipline. They are useful where an instructor wants students to apply what they have learnt to real-world situations (Boston University, [Centre for Excellence and Innovation in Teaching](#)²).

FEATURES OF A CASE STUDY

According to Davis (1993) an effective case study:

- tells a “real” and engaging story
- raises a thought-provoking issue
- has elements of conflict
- promotes empathy with the central characters
- lacks an obvious or clear-cut right answer
- encourages students to think and take a position
- portrays actors in moments of decision
- provides plenty of data about character, location, context, actions
- is relatively concise.



WHY USE IT?

Using case studies in teaching can provide opportunities for deep learning, as they:

- allow the application of theoretical concepts to bridge the gap between theory and practice
- encourage active learning
- provide opportunities for the development of key skills such as communication, group working, and problem-solving
- increase students' engagement with peers and motivation to learn.

(Davis and Wilcock, 2003)

UQ's Faculty of Medicine has recently focused their early years curriculum around CBL to help develop students clinical reasoning skills:

Early clinical exposure and the utilisation of small group case-based learning creates the optimum learning environment for our future medical professionals to develop the critical analytical and clinical skills necessary to provide excellence in a patient-centred care.

(Medical Education Unit, UQ)



HOW TO DO IT?

1. Write/ source or adapt a narrative based on an authentic situation or case. Students are required to reach a concrete outcome such as a conclusion, recommendation, or prediction based on their findings.
2. Write a series of guiding questions for small group discussion. Pay careful attention to the sequencing of the questions, for example:
 - Early questions ask students to make observations about the facts of the case.
 - Later questions call for comparisons, contrasts, and analyses of competing observations or hypotheses.
 - Final questions ask students to take a position on the matter.

Note: These questions are designed to stimulate, guide, or prod (but not dictate) participants' observations and analyses. The questions should not be answerable with a simple yes or no.

(Adapted from: [Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University](#)²)

IN CLASS

1. Give students ample time to read and think about the case. This can be provided before class.
2. Introduce the case briefly and provide some guidelines for how to approach it.
3. Create groups (ideally 3-6 students) and monitor them to make sure everyone is involved.
4. Have groups present their solutions/reasoning.
5. Ask questions for clarification and to move discussions to another level.
6. Synthesise issues raised. Be sure to bring the various strands of the discussion back together at the end. Ask groups to summarise their findings and compare group responses. Help the whole class interpret and understand the implications of their solutions.

(Adapted from: [Case Studies](#), Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University)

ASSESSING CBL

According to UNSW, case studies will typically assess students' reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. You can also observe or evaluate:

- quality of research
- structural issues in written material
- organisation of arguments
- feasibility of solutions presented
- intra-group dynamics
- evidence of consideration of all case factors
- multiple resolutions of the same scenario issue.

See [Assessing by Case Studies and Scenarios](#), for further examples and tips on assessing case studies.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Case-based learning requires a lot of preparation and planning.
- The lecturer takes on a facilitator's role to guide but not dictate answers.
- The classroom or face-to-face sessions focus on active learning, problem solving, and discussions as groups work together to resolve issues or cases.

RESOURCES

- [The Case Method at Harvard Business School](#) [video 15:22]
- [Teaching With Case Studies](#), Speaking of Teaching, Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching, Stanford University.
- [Case-based Teaching and Problem-based Learning](#), CRLT, University of Michigan

REFERENCES

Davis, B. (1993). Tools for Teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Davis, C. & Wilcock, E. (2003). Teaching Materials Using Case Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.materials.ac.uk/guides/casestudies.asp>

[What is Case-Based Learning?](#) Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University

[Using Case Studies to Teach](#), Centre for Excellence and Innovation in Teaching, Boston University

[Case Studies](#), Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University

For further information see [Case-based learning, UQ Flipped Classroom](#)