

What is a Good Case and Teaching Note?

It is helpful to have our sights set on what constitutes a “good case” when we embark on the process of case writing. On the other hand, it can be dangerous to be too specific about trying to wrap standards of quality around cases. It can stifle creativity or fail to capture the specific pedagogical objectives of the author. It often bothers me, therefore, when I see very specific criteria offered in the name of quality.

And so I offer my own perspective that perhaps can be applied to a broad range of cases intended for different disciplines or pedagogical objectives.

What’s a Good Case?

A case is the fundamental building block of the experiential learning process that is embodied in the case method. It offers “decision-making calisthenics.” It is a well told story that should capture the richness of a decision-making experience in enough detail to create a proxy for experience for students and to drive challenging individual study and small and full-class discussions. In this way, it becomes a catalyst for developing critical thinking skills.

The quality case should be “sticky.” It should resonate with each student’s own life experience and be relevant to their particular situation. Otherwise, it becomes an irrelevant exercise.

The case should put the reader clearly in the shoes of the decision-maker with enough detail and complexity to rise above the obvious. It should have enough grist to suggest alternative solutions to whatever problem is offered. The best cases are not fictional, therefore, but are based on real situations and field research. Thus enough texture and complexity can be articulated.

A good case should resonate with readers with different perspectives and learning styles. Part of the power of the case method is to allow students to learn from each other, to assimilate different ideas and view-points.

A good case is a great story, impeccably written. It is enjoyable and provocative to read, and offers no stumbling blocks such as misspelling or grammatical errors.

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you, your students, and your peers are the final arbiters of quality.

- You, the author. You must be satisfied that it has satisfied the objectives you had when you set out to write it. Did you learn from the experience? Does it meet your curricular requirements?
- Your students. Do they benefit from the classroom experience? Does it provide enough data to allow students to think “out of the box” and to think critically? Does it exercise decision-making muscles?
- Your peers. Do your colleagues and editors like it? Are other faculty adopting it for use? Have you gotten it published?

What’s a Good Teaching Note?

A great case also includes a good teaching note or instructor’s manual that helps other faculty choose the right case and apply it for optimal use in the classroom. A great case acts as more than a good teaching vehicle. Based on actual research, it extends the boundaries of knowledge. The teaching note captures this knowledge and refers to current literature.

- To help choose the case
 - Learning objectives and uses
 - Summary/abstract
 - Utility for what courses, where
- To help teach the case
 - Assignment questions
 - Analysis and calculations
 - Suggestions for teaching, discussion flow, classroom dynamics, board plan, timing, summary remarks
 - The outstanding student response
 - Sample paper or exam
- Linkages and pedagogy
 - Additional company information, update
 - Research methods used
 - How the case extends the boundaries of knowledge, links to theoretical frameworks
 - Additional reading or references

Outline of a Typical Teaching Note

Synopsis

Case Goals and Objectives

- Appropriate Courses
- Learning objectives and uses
- How the case extends the boundaries of knowledge
- Links to theoretical frameworks

Assignment Questions

Recommended Solutions/Answers

- The outstanding student response
- Sample paper or exam

Teaching Plan

- Suggestions for teaching
- Discussion flow
- Classroom dynamics
- Board plan, timing
- Summary remarks

Related Readings and Reference Material

- Linkages and pedagogy

Teaching Note Exhibits

Epilogue