

Teaching and learning with cases: a guide for teachers

Version 1.0, august 2020

Introduction

This teacher's guide aims to provide a brief introduction to the case methodology and the various steps in the process, from the formulation and introduction of the assignment, to the students' own work, the case seminar, examination and feedback. For more detailed introductions to case methodology and its various elements, see the resources in the section "Read more".

Case teaching places students in concrete situations that they must solve.¹ This enables learning within a context and takes advantage of a student's previous experiences as well as the course-specific content in a learning process. Learning by starting from real or constructed cases is a well-proven method, especially in law, economics and social sciences. Since sustainability issues tend to be complex and involve many different aspects, perspectives and conflicting values at many different levels, case methodology can be used to better conceptualize the issues being addressed. Cases are by nature open and have several possible interpretations and answers, and can lead to different conclusions depending on which perspectives they are interpreted from. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the case methodology here can help to comprehend theories, illuminate conflicts of interest and make abstract reasoning adapted to reality.

About the sustainability case library: The Sustainability Case Library is a growing collection of cases that can be used and adapted for teaching and learning at different departments, and also includes a teacher's guide that briefly introduces the case methodology. A case is a real or constructed scenario that involves issues and conflicts that need to be resolved, though they usually do not have one clear or obvious solution. They may contain a description of the scenario as well as relevant background information such as graphs, stories or historical documents. Cases explore a problem from the point of view of a specific actor and can be used to bridge theory and practice, develop critical thinking, illuminate conflicts of interest and improve problem solving and communication skills. Cases can be used to shift focus from sustainability problems to solutions and strategies for a sustainable development. There are both Swedish and English language cases available and the aim is that the cases can be used without prior experience in the case methodology or in teaching sustainable development. The Sustainability Case Library is funded by a grant from the Division for Development of Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University and is coordinated by CEMUS/CSD Uppsala. More information and resources can be found at:

www.csduppsala.uu.se/sustainabilitycases

¹ Case methodology in the context of teaching and learning should not be confused with case studies as a research method.

They are also written on the basis of a specific actor's perspective, which opens up to illuminate and understand different points of departure, interests and values within the framework of a course subject. Working on a case-by-case basis is also an opportunity to meet across traditional subject boundaries and an opportunity for students to be activated in their learning.

Areas of use

Case teaching can be used for various purposes, such as bridging theory and practice, practicing critical thinking, reflection and improving communication skills, problem-solving abilities and negotiation techniques. Cases can be used for different purposes and in different forms. The cases in the case library have different lengths and can for example be used as follows:

- a 2–3 hour seminar where students discuss and solve cases in the classroom
- together with one or more lectures to create a learning module on sustainable development
- as a minor or major part of the written and / or oral examination of a course

The process - working with cases

1. The design and introduction of the task

Each case in the case library comes with one or more suggestions for information that can be added to the material. These can be used straight off, or adapted to better suit a given situation and the time frame. When designing and introducing the case assignment, it is important to remember that this is a different type of assignment, which sets different requirements and has different expectations of the student performance, than what a typical assignment might have. There is no "correct" answer in the solution to a case. It is important that the questions are asked openly and leave room for interpretation and unexpected answers. It is often expected that students themselves will interpret the task, and as part of the assignment identify, define and determine what the problem to be solved really is.

The scope of the instructions is also something that may be assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, especially for students who are new to this type of open assignment, it can be helpful to communicate how you want the students to work with the assignment, what the formal requirements are, and how it will be assessed. Since there are many different ways to work with cases, these instructions may look different depending on the purpose of the assignment. Umeå University School of Business, Economics and Law instructs students to follow four phases, which can serve as inspiration for an overall approach to cases:

1. Analyze the situation (map out symptoms, define the problem and formulate criteria for a successful solution)
2. Generate alternative solutions
3. Evaluate alternative solutions
4. Recommend a solution (or more than one)

The solutions can be presented in writing or orally at the case seminar.

2. Student work with the assignment

In this phase, which can last anywhere from an hour to several weeks, the students familiarize themselves with the background material, possibly other support material and may conduct their own research. They also work out and evaluate different possible solutions for the case. This work is planned and led by the students themselves, but the teacher can choose to be available to answer any practical questions that come up in the process.

3. The case seminar

The case, and students' solutions to it, are dealt with through a well-prepared and carefully structured seminar to encourage learning together. The teacher's role in the seminar is as a facilitator of the discussion, rather than as a transmitter of knowledge. Here it is appropriate to remind oneself that a case can have many possible solutions, and that there is no "correct" answer. In line with this, the facilitator / teacher usually leads the discussion by asking mainly open-ended questions that invite different answers. Another important role for the facilitator is to regularly summarize the main features of the discussion and point out different possible interpretations of the case.



One of Uppsala University's case rooms at campus Blåsenhus.

There are many different ways to set up and start a case seminar. It can, for example, be set up as a debate, a critical seminar discussion or a role play. Classic ways to start a case seminar is to start through a so-called "Cold call" or "warm call". In a "cold call", the teacher asks one or more students to start the seminar by developing a question that the

teacher poses, thereafter the seminar is opened for group discussion. During a "warm call", the participants are informed in advance that they will start the seminar.

4. Feedback, assessment and examination

Examination and feedback are important tools for student learning. The case method can be integrated in several ways as part of the examination on a course. In its simplest form, the case seminar itself can be used for examination and during the seminar, students receive feedback on their solutions to the case both from their peers and from the teacher. The students' individual contributions to the seminar can also be assessed and used as a basis for grading. If the assignment contains a written component for submission (individual, in group or a combination of both), this written submission can also serve as a basis for assessment, feedback in grading.

Read more

Brinkfeldt. **Att arbeta med Case** (en guide till studenterna). Handelshögskolan vid Umeå universitet. Tillgänglig på:
http://www.hh.umu.se/kursweb/ht10/2fe135mom2/index.php?download=Casemodell_vt10.pdf

Kjellén, Lundberg & Myrman. **Att undervisa med casemetoden: En handbok om att undervisa och att skriva**. Rådet för högre utbildning. Tillgänglig på:
<http://www.his.se/PageFiles/9010/handbok%20i%20caseundervisning.pdf>

Kjellén, Lundberg & Myrman. **Att skriva case: En handbok om att undervisa och att skriva**. Rådet för högre utbildning. Tillgänglig på:
<http://www.his.se/PageFiles/9010/att%20skriva%20case.pdf>

Nordquist. **Casemetodik**. Medical Case Centre, Karolinska Institutet. Tillgänglig på:
<http://www.his.se/PageFiles/9010/Casepedagogik%20jonas.pdf>

Teaching with Case Studies. Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching. Tillgänglig på: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/cgi-bin/docs/newsletter/case_studies.pdf