The Case Method: Good Cases, Good Discussions

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Components of Case Method Teaching

- **The case**: A narrative that contains information and invites analysis.

- **The Discussion of the Case**: Participants working together to conduct that analysis.
Characteristics of Good Cases
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- Decision-forcing
- Real
- Analysis-poor
- Information rich
- Narrative with context
- Short
Where to get Good Cases

- **Harvard Business School** -- although they are intended for business students, many of them address economic and political issues as well as issues in organizational behavior and management.

- **Kennedy School of Government** -- a wide range of well-written cases on public affairs, usable in courses in economics, sociology, political science, environmental studies and international affairs.

- **Pew Case Studies in International Affairs** -- longer and very detailed cases good for higher level audiences in international affairs.

- **European Case Clearing House** -- mostly cases in management, but with a strong international focus and policy orientation.

- **The Electronic Hallway** -- cases in public administration, public policy, and related subjects including economic development, education, environment and land use, human services, international affairs, nonprofit, state and local government issues, utility and transit issues, and urban and regional issues.
Producing your own case

- Information not analysis
  - Popular press sources
  - Audio and video

- Multiple short pieces can provide varied perspective

- Preparation questions are key to framing
Examples of “Homemade Cases”

http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/cases/index.html
Components of Good Discussion
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- Students who are prepared to engage with the material and each other
- Faculty who have mastered the case, have a plan for the discussion, and are ready to deal with the unexpected.
Preparing Students Means Getting them ready to:

- Master the material in the case
  - Preparation Questions
  - Guidelines for Case Preparation

- Participate in productive discussion
  - Explain your objectives for the case
  - Model effective listening and questioning
  - Reflect on the process as well as the substance
Preparing yourself means:

- Mastering the material in the case (just like your students)
- Planning your approach
- Facilitating an engaging discussion
- Wrapping up and reviewing
Planning your approach: The Arc of the Case

1. Describe the situation
2. Define possible actions
3. Identify the consequences of each action choice
4. Select the "best" action
5. Summarize and generalize the case
Planning your Approach: Devise questions that will:

- Get information from the case into the discussion
- Draw student attention to important information they have missed
- Induce students to respond to one another
- Foster debate
- Clarify previous questions and student comments
- Push students to support their claims and defend their points of view.
Tips for effective facilitating:

- Ask, listen, follow up
- Rephrase
- Focus on how students know
- Be patient
- Embrace silence
- Get out of the way
- Direct students to each other
More information

- http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/cases/index.html