

Case Method for Active Learning

Purpose: The case study method invites students to analyze real-world or hypothetical scenarios that may involve a challenge, decision point, or complex situation. At Harvard DCE, this method promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and the practical application of course material. Case studies provide opportunities to connect academic content to real-life contexts, making learning relevant and transferable across disciplines.

When Do I Use Case Studies?

1. **Setting:** In class, online, or as out-of-class assignments
2. **Class Size:** Small, medium, or large
3. **Time Required:** 30 minutes or more
4. **Activities Involved:** Reading, writing, discussion, presenting

Steps for Implementation

1. **Select or Design a Case**

Choose a real or realistic scenario that presents a conflict or challenge relevant to your course content. Ensure the case has multiple potential solutions.

2. **Distribute the Case to Students**

Give students enough time to read and reflect on the scenario before group work.

3. **Form Small Groups**

Create groups of 3–6 students to encourage participation and collaboration.

4. **Guide the Discussion**

Prepare 2–4 open-ended guiding questions to help students analyze the case and apply course concepts.

5. **Facilitate Group Work**

Monitor groups to ensure that all students are engaged and contributing.

6. Student Presentations

Ask each group to present their ideas to the classroom, which they can share via collaborative tools (e.g., Zoom Whiteboard, Google Docs/Slides, Padlet)

7. Debrief and Reflect

Lead a class discussion to synthesize findings and highlight key takeaways.

Reinforce connections to course content.

Sample Case Study and Breakout Room Activity

Harvard Ice Cream Flavor

On a Google slide deck, present a case study along with questions that the class can answer for the whole class discussion and then provide students with a link to a Google Slide deck in the Zoom chat for their small group work.

1. Sample Case Study

The CEO of the Boston Creamery has an open call to propose a Harvard ice cream flavor. This will be Harvard's signature ice cream flavor, which needs to embrace the qualities and values of the University. The CEO will be selecting the winning flavor based on how it best represents Harvard's collective identity.

2. Essential Question: What is the name of the ice cream flavor? Why?

3. Market Research: How will you gain an understanding of your brand, customers, and marketing?

4. Create a Vision for Your Product

What is your brand?

5. Define the Target Audience

Who are your customers?

6. Develop a Marketing Strategy

How will you sell it?

7. Create an Advertisement

(e.g., Visual for social media, audio recording for radio, or video clip)

8. Breakout Room Activity Google Slides (each group has a numbered slide)

In groups, create a digital vision board for your ice cream flavor on your group's assigned Google slide following the marketing research process. Add visuals e.g., images you have or find on the internet and using drawing tools and text).

Optional Enhancement Activity

Encourage students to design their own case studies based on real-world challenges related to the course and present them to the class.

Instructor Planning Guide

1. Have you provided students with enough time to read and reflect on the case?
2. Have you created groups of 3–6 students and will you check-in during breakouts?
3. Have you written a series of guiding questions to support small group discussion?
4. Are you encouraging students to reflect on what they learned from the case?

Instructor Checklist

- ☐ I selected a compelling and relevant case.
- ☐ Students received the case with sufficient time to prepare.
- ☐ Groups were formed with 3–6 students.
- ☐ I provided 2–4 guiding discussion questions.
- ☐ I monitored group discussions to ensure engagement.
- ☐ I facilitated student presentations and led a debrief to connect their findings to course concepts.

Resource: [Teaching with Cases](#) (Harvard Kennedy School PDF's and videos)