



Fourth, case studies must be decision-focused. They should present a dilemma, a situation that needs to be addressed and requires a certain action. As I see it, 'descriptive cases' may be excellent research tools but they are useless for developing analytical and decision-making skills. After reading a case, there is nothing more discouraging for a student than to have that "So what?" feeling. Therefore cases have to be open, which is linked to the next point.

Fifth, a case should not have a clear, obvious answer. Who is interested in a thriller where you know who the murderer is after the first few pages? A good case has to surprise the learner, spark conflict and controversy in the classroom and make people defend their positions and try to convince others that they are right. After all, this is what happens in real life. Different people may have different views on the decision to be made. Good cases do not provide answers but rather help learners ask the right questions. This is a skill of inestimable value, as those who have read James Thurber's fable, '[The Scotty Who Knew Too Much](#)' will know.

If these five points are observed, one has the foundations on which to build an excellent case study. However, it is one thing to have solid foundations and it is quite another to raise a building. Any case-writer should keep in mind that a case study is a tool for experiential learning, which is often more powerful when students are involved and actively contribute to the case discussion. It is learning by doing and having to face real business situations. While the case instructor plays a role in this process, a well-written case is a must.

To finish, let me add that a good case must be accompanied by sound teaching notes or an instructor's manual. As a case instructor, I never use a case study unless it comes with a teaching note. The teaching note is what really provides the added value from an academic viewpoint, by giving recommendations to case instructors on the learning objectives, the target audience(s), the teaching approach, the questioning route, the expected answers and the links to other theories, models or frameworks. What works best for me is to develop the teaching note in parallel with the case study and then polishing it after using the case in class a few times. What are the keys to an excellent teaching note? That is the subject for another article.

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