

Writing a Case

A. Developing Case Drafts- a procedure.

1. To begin, the authors are asked to write down a topic they would like to teach, and one big “take home” message on this topic.
2. Next, individuals are asked to think of two or three realistic settings or scenarios useful for leading students to explore that topic. Avoid sci-fi scenarios, or having animals or plants talking. It's very confusing and not usually appreciated by learners.
3. Working in pairs, each member explains their topic and possible scenarios, with the intent of convincing the partner of the utility of at least one of the scenarios.
4. Next, each individual drafts a brief paragraph or two describing the scenario/situation as though writing to a nonscientist friend.
5. In the last step, case review, new partnerships form, or small groups, and each author reads his or her case aloud with the partner responding by telling what he or she thinks the case is about.

B. Initial Case Review

1. Without preamble or explanation of any kind, the case author reads the case out loud to a small group of willing listeners whose job is to tell the author what the case is about.
2. The other members of the group offer suggestions (preferably in the form of questions that the case stimulates for them) as to what the case is about. The author writes these down. The author does not respond to the feedback from the listeners.
 3. After all the listeners have had their say, then the author shares what he or she intended the case to be about. Sometimes there is great congruence between what the listeners think and what the author intended, often there is some incongruity.
3. When there is much incongruity, it's time to think about recasting the case, perhaps in a new scenario.

Note: It's best to delay the discussions of teaching strategies, assessment strategies, and the like, until steps 1-3 are complete

C. Structuring the Case for Learning

Once the story clearly leads to the intended objectives, it is time to start structuring the case for teaching.

1. Go through the case and decide which terms or phrases are the "hooks" -- those that stimulate questions, learning, etc. Write down for each part of the case the issues that are stimulated by that part of the case. This step allows the author to decide if any paragraph has too much or too little content.
2. Decide where the story should be split up into parts for the students to work on a bit at a time. **Keep the parts short. They will contain much more learning material than you anticipate.** This is called "splitting up the case" for teaching/learning. Of course, if you choose to have a case with only one part this step will be unnecessary.
- 3.
4. In addition to the story (the narrative) the case module might include:
 - How you want students to analyze the case
 - Learning objectives
 - Investigations and other activities
 - Resources
 - Data tables, graphs, images that you supply
 - Statement about student products –
 - An assessment plan (what you will evaluate and how)
 - An implementation plan (how many days, when, etc.)

See the case modules produced by [workshop participants](#) in the LifeLines OnLine, BioQUEST and HHMI workshops for samples of the ways cases are linked to activities and assessed. <http://bioquest.org/lifelines>

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Note: These suggestions are drawn from work done by the case development group at the 1996 BioQUEST summer workshop,* following a framework commonly used in English writing classes and for developing cases at Harvard Medical School.

*Members of the 1996 BioQUEST case development group included: Melissa Howse, Kay Grimnes, Karen Klyczek, Judith Fischer, Margaret Waterman, Linda Weinland, and Peter Woodruff

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