

Case Writing

Part 4

Case Objectives and Prospecting

Part 5

Developing and Implementing the Case Plan

Now that you have a basic understanding about the case method and its uses, we will examine the case writing process. The following slides (#10 - #20) outline a simple process for identifying case leads, working with firms to secure the data necessary to develop a case, and securing the firm's permission to use case materials for instructional purposes.

Case writing is divided into two parts.

In *Part 4*, the reasons why the case is being developed must be specified up front. Once the objectives are set, the writer must begin to search for a firm that has faced the particular business problem that will be featured in the case.

In *Part 5*, it is noted that the case plan guides the writer in developing and finalizing case materials. This plan identifies specific steps in the case writing process as well as dates targeted for completion. The case plan helps the case writer organize the work as well as facilitate communications with the firm that has agreed to sponsor the case project.

Additional Notes:

Case Writing

Part 4

Case Objective and Prospecting

Additional Notes:

Case Objectives and Prospecting

Case Objectives

- Course Instruction
- Curriculum Integration
- Program Delivery

Prospecting

- Personal Contacts
- College/University Contacts
- Business Support Organizations
- Trade Associations

Cases can be developed to meet a number of objectives. At one level, the professor can develop a case to use in class to help illustrate a business concept or give students an opportunity to make and implement a decision about the topic at hand. Cases can also be used to help pull together business topics that have been presented throughout an undergraduate or graduate degree program. As such, they help to integrate the curriculum and get students to resolve managerial problems by considering a number of competing interests and perspectives from the various business disciplines. At this level, the planning and development of case materials must be coordinated by a college-wide curriculum committee that represents the interests of all the business disciplines. Finally, cases can be written to help position a college or university within the local or regional economic community. That is, if the college or university's mission is to support economic development, cases can be written which help the local business community to grow and compete. For example, cases could be written to help students and managers understand how to contain costs as well as how to plan and deliver added value for commodity industries located in the area. Alternatively, the college or university could develop a set of case materials to generally improve managerial decision making in order to help local businesses to prosper. At this level, case development and planning need to be coordinated with those setting the strategic direction for the college or university.

Once the objective(s) are set for case development purposes, the case writer needs to identify firms that have faced and perhaps resolved business problems of interest here. The firms have to be willing to share information and be identified in the case itself. A number of options are identified above that may serve as prospecting sources. As the case writer becomes established and known within the business community, he or she can ask firms that they have worked with successfully in the past for referrals. In time, the experienced case writer develops an effective network of contacts and consequently access to firms that have faced a wide range of business problems and challenges of interest.

Case Writing

Part 5

Developing and Implementing the Case Plan

Additional Notes:

The Case Plan

Step 1

Company Contact and Data Collection

Step 2

Case Writing and Editing

Step 3

Final Release

Step 4

Training Note and Case Use

The case plan outlines a sequential process that the writer should follow in order to efficiently produce a business case.

Step 1 identifies how to approach and recruit a firm to participate in the case writing process. During this initial meeting, the firm and writer outline the rights and responsibilities of each party during the case development process as well as a timetable to keep the project on target. Assuming that the relationship develops as planned, the firm agrees verbally to later sign a written release authorizing the case to be used for instructional purposes. Following this meeting, the writer begins to collect the necessary data for the case.

Step 2 involves drafting and revising the case as needed to produce a near finished product.

Step 3 includes a review of the case with the firm and revisions as needed to correct any facts that are misreported in the text. These revisions may or may not include changes to protect the firm's identify and/or interests.

Step 4 focuses on developing a training note for the released case in order to guide trainers and professors in its use. Additionally, following the first few case presentations, changes to the training note and/or minor clerical revisions to the case might be made in order to improve the case's instructional value.

Step 1
Company Contact and Data
Collection

Case Writing Event	Date
First Meeting to Explain Case Writing Objectives/Process and Secure Verbal Release Agreement	
Initial Data Collection	
Outline Case by Subtitles/Assess Data Needs	
Second Data Collection (if needed)	

At this point, the professor would have successfully identified a firm that is willing to consider participating in the case writing project. During the first meeting with the firm, the professor outlines the objectives of writing the case as well as the type of information they will need and when they will be back to interview managers about key events. Assuming that these steps are carried out successfully, the professor should ask the firm if they would be willing later to sign a release form that permits the distribution and use of the case for instructional purposes. If the firm is unwilling to do so, it is best to thank the firm for their time and begin prospecting again. If the case is not release, it can not be used. Note that during the initial interview with the firm's management team, a contact person should be identified. In this way, the professor knows who to contact if any problems arise.

Following the initial data collection, the professor should prepare an outline of the case in order to assess if they have enough information at this time. Its best to outline the case by subtitles (e.g., Company Background, Marketing Performance, Introduction of New Product and Consumer Response, and Production Problems and Managerial Concerns). Under each subtitle, list the information collected during interviews with managers and/or review of reports provided by the firm. This way, the writer can see what additional information is needed to complete the case. A second visit to the firm to collect this information may be necessary.

Step 2 Case Writing and Editing

Case Writing Event	Date
Draft Case	
Review and Revise Case	

During this phase of the development process, the professor is drafting the case and making revisions in order to ensure that the case reads well. Additionally, since the case is being written for instructional purposes, the case must require the student to perform some analysis and arrive at some managerial decision.

The case should have a short, yet descriptive title. It should also contain a short introductory paragraph (about 60 - 100 words) that provides an overview of the case. This overview should identify the company, its location, the name of the decision maker, when and what kind of problem was encountered or the type of decision that had to be made.

Following the introductory paragraph, the case should provide a general overview of the company and the industry it competes in. Subtitles used to organize the case, should address general topics and then focus more and more specific issues or problems that the case writer wants to feature. Throughout the text its best to write in the past tense since the events being described have already occurred. The case should end with some question or dilemma for the student to consider.

It is suggested that the novice case writer try to produce relatively short cases (2 to 3 pages in length). Only after the writer has worked successfully with several firms and tested the cases to make sure they worked well in the classroom, should longer more complex cases be attempted.

The case writer should show his or her early drafts to colleagues for feedback about clarity, completeness and whether or not the case really addresses the business issue of interest here.

See the appendix at the end of this manual for an example of a case and training note.

Step 3

Final Release

Case Writing Event	Date
Present Case to Company for Review and Secure Release Agreement	
Revise Case and Disguise Case if Requested	
Present Edited/Disguised Case to Secure Release Agreement	

At this time, the professor should send the case to the contact person for review and follow up with an appointment to discuss the final release. The contact person may or may not be the manager who has the final authority to release the case. During the initial interview with the company, the case writer should determine who will sign off on the case and attempt to keep them apprised of the case progress if so desired.

During the meeting with the company, sometimes minor mistakes are found (e.g., misspelling of the manager's name, some events are slightly out of order, etc.). Often the firm will sign a release and simply request that these changes be made. For this reason, it's a good idea to send two copies of the case to the firm for review. The requested changes can be made directly on one copy. The other copy can be saved for the company's files. A sample release letter and form can be found on the next two pages.

Sometimes cases address issues that the firm may be sensitive about (e.g, faulty product introduction, inventory mismanagement, etc.). The firm might request that some aspect of the case be changed to disguise and protect the firm. While disguising the case in some way increases the chance of securing the release, it may decrease the realism and instructional value of the case itself. Cases that fail to mention the industry or provide no financial data, for example, may not depict a business situation that students can identify with. Generally, the writer can change dates, managers' names, and the company name (in that order) and still retain a case that has sufficient instructional value. Changing financial data and the industry, for example, pose tougher problems in terms of protecting the usefulness of the case itself. For numerical data (e.g., profits, sales, inventory turnover, carrying costs, etc.), consider strategies that change the actual numbers (e.g., sales data is multiplied by .75) but preserve the integrity of the information (e.g., sales increase each year and at a rate greater than a major competitor referenced in the case). To anticipate problems about confidentiality, the writer should consult with the contact person as necessary throughout the case development process to ensure that the interests of both parties (writer and firm) are properly considered.

Release Letter

(Letterhead)

Today's Date

Firms' Name and Address

Dear (manager with release authority),

Enclosed are two copies of the case titled, _____. I want to thank you for your support in the development of these materials. At your earliest convenience, please review the case and make any corrections that you would like me to make directly on one of the enclosed copies. The second copy is for your files. I will be contacting you shortly to discuss any concerns that you may have.

If you feel the case is acceptable as is or with minor corrections, please indicate so on the enclosed release form and return it in the self-addressed envelope provided.

Thank you,

(Your name and title)

Enclosure

Above is a cover letter that should be included with the release form. You should modify as needed to reflect your circumstances and preferences.

Release Form

(letterhead)

From: (your name, title and address)

To: ((manager's name, title and address) authorized to sign release)

Re: Case Release

I have reviewed the case, _____, and released it for instructional purposes:

_____ "As is" (no corrections requested).

_____ "pending changes requested on the enclosed copy of the case".

Sincerely,

(type release person name and title here) (date)

Above is a sample of a release form. You should revise it as necessary to reflect your personal preferences and circumstances.

Step 4

Training Note and Case Use

Case Writing Event	Date
Draft Training Note	
Test Case	
Revise Case and Training Note as Needed	

Only after the case has been released should the case writer develop the training note. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, if the case is not released for some reason, the writer would have wasted their time by developing the training note beforehand. Second, the training note does not have to be reviewed and approved by the firm. The training note is your property and is not shared with students or the general public.

Note that once the case and training note are done you might have to make revisions to one or both following its use in the classroom. If minor changes are made to the case (e.g., changing sentence structure to improve readability or reordering paragraphs for clarity) the firm does not have to review and release the case again. If changes to the case are substantial (e.g., a new purpose or business issue is targeted) then the revised case probably needs to be presented again to the firm for review and release. Ideally, you would have had the time and resources (e.g., other case writers who are willing to edit your work) to test the case thoroughly during the “case writing and development” stage to anticipate any major revisions to the text.

The rationale for and an outline of a training note are provided on the next page.

The Case Training Note

1. Immediate Issue(s)
2. Basic Issue(s)
3. Suggested Student Assignment
4. Discussion Questions
5. Analysis
6. Suggested Session Approach and Plan

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To help the professor deliver a good case session, the case writer will often include a training note that contains an overview and analysis of the case. Only professors, not students are provided access to the training note. An outline of a training note is provided above.

Immediate/Basic Issues: The immediate issue is the business situation or decision that the manager is presently facing (e.g., for the “Training Proposal”, whether or not Lyfann should partner with a key account). The basic issue represents a more fundamental concern that has broader implications that the firm must consider (e.g., how firms should plan for and manage growth) in the long-term. Students can apply the lesson from the basic issue to their own situations or ones they’ll encounter in the future. Often resolving a more basic concern leads to some position statement or policy that management can use to guide the business in the future. Many students as well as professors often have a difficult time identifying and responding to the basic case issues. Often, the immediate issues take center stage in case discussions.

Suggested Student Assignment: The case writer may also provide an assignment for students to work on prior to the large group discussion. In “The Partnering Proposal” a few questions are posed at the end of the case itself. These questions guide individual preparation and small group discussions. Often the student assignment addresses the immediate issues found in the case.

Discussion Questions: Case writers also provide a set of discussion questions that can be used to begin the case session. Ideally, the questions review then build upon the student assignment. Questions that start somewhere else and fail to build upon individual/small group preparation, make the case session seem disorganized. In subsequent case discussions, students might do little preparatory work figuring out that it will be of little value in upcoming case discussions. Thus, students may come to case sessions less prepared which will have a negative impact on learning.

Analysis: The training note should have an analysis section where the case writer shares insights and answers to the student assignments and discussion questions. Ideally, the analysis also includes a discussion of how previous case sessions have worked out. In the analysis section, the professor should be apprised of what issues are difficult for students to grasp or bring out in discussion sessions.

Suggested Session Approach and Plan: Sometimes the case writer will outline how to organize and carry out the case session. This section might include some ideas on how to lay out the structured case discussion and how much time to devote to each question. Alternatively, this section might identify a number of other case instruction methods (e.g., role-plays).

See the appendix at the end of this manual for an example of a case and training note.