

## Writing Teaching Notes for Business Cases<sup>1</sup>

A good teaching note gives a road map for class discussion and serves as the starting point for instructors who would like to adapt the material to their classroom needs. In this document we explain when a teaching note should be written and who it is targeted towards. We also describe the structure of a teaching note and touch upon the fact that a teaching note is a 'living document'.

### 1. When to write the teaching note<sup>i</sup>?

The teaching note comes before the case<sup>2</sup>. Before writing the case, you must have a clear idea of the purpose the case serves in a course and how it will be used. Start with a list of teaching objectives you want to achieve with the case. Next, compile key discussion questions and analytical tools that will help in answering those questions. Finally, make a list of relevant readings and theories you want to link to the case. This will help you shape a preliminary teaching note. While writing the case you may want to refer to this document to decide what must be covered in the case to connect with the questions and theories which you will include in the final teaching note. Therefore, it is best that a teaching note be written in parallel with the case, not as an afterthought.

### 2. Who is the teaching note for<sup>ii</sup>?

A teaching note is directed towards instructors or faculty members who may be interested in using your case in their course. The teaching note will help them understand the case better and optimize its use as an educational tool. The teaching note should explain, analyze and synthesize the information presented in the case in a manner that no further research is required from the instructor.

### 3. Structure of a Teaching Note<sup>iii</sup>

Unlike cases, teaching notes are written in the *present tense* because they describe a teaching process that is current and ongoing. While there is no fixed structure for a teaching note, a good teaching note is structured as follows:

#### *Case Overview*

- This is a one or two paragraph summary of the case. It should capture the essence and the primary decision of the case. Faculty often determine whether to use the case in their course based on the case overview.

#### *Learning Objectives*

- A good case is written with concrete learning objectives in mind. A case follows learning objectives, not the other way around. Learning objectives provide an overview of how the case fits within a course or a discipline. Learning objectives may be knowledge based (analytical tools, framework, or theories of the field), skill based (related to application of knowledge) or attitudinal (students develop an attitude about their managerial or social responsibility after analysing the case). Generally, two to five learning objectives with measurable learning outcomes suffice.

#### *Pedagogy or Target audience*

- This section discusses the audience of the case; whether the case is targeted towards undergraduate or graduate students and disciplines to which the case is best suited. It explains the pre-requisites or business concepts which the students should understand before working on the case. It also lists the supplementary material which can be used to expand understanding of the case. It is also helpful to recommend an appropriate teaching approach (class discussion, role play or video aids, etc.) for the case.

#### *Assignment Questions*

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<sup>1</sup> CTL, IIM Bangalore supports only Harvard Business Publishing - Education (HBPE) cases. As a rule, HBPE cases are accompanied by teaching notes.

<sup>2</sup> To be edited

- Questions help in analysing specific challenges facing the case protagonist before class discussion. Questions flow from learning objectives. A marketing case on positioning may have a question like this: ‘Was the protagonist able to create the desired perception of her product in the minds of the target customers?’ Thinking about answers to individual questions beforehand, enriches class discussion and helps students defend their solutions in class. Use a combination of open-ended (to stimulate discussion) and closed questions (to test whether students got the facts right). Include controversial questions to increase the level of the discussion.

#### *Case Analysis*

- This section offers thorough answers to assignment questions. It also suggests techniques to analyse quantitative data. You can suggest application of relevant theories, models and other analytical tools. Refer to the case to ensure that case analysis matches case content. If a question can be answered via more than one approach, show the alternatives and list their pros and cons.

#### *Teaching Plan*

- The teaching plan suggests how to allocate time to various components of teaching the case within the class. A set time may be devoted to case introduction, questions, conclusion, analysis and epilogue to ensure that everything is covered in the limited time available for case discussion. Some teaching notes also contain information about the ‘Board Plan’; how points may be arranged on the whiteboard while introducing or analysing the case.

#### *Epilogue*

- The case only contains information up to a certain point; the date of setting of the case. Relevant events that happen after this date are included in the epilogue. It is of interest to the students as they find out which of the several possible scenarios really played out.

#### *Conclusion*

- The conclusion restates the most important teaching objectives and takeaways of the case.

#### **4. A living document<sup>iv</sup>**

To perfect a teaching note, you need to teach the case a few times, observe class dynamics, gather student feedback and revise the teaching note accordingly. They must be expanded and edited to reflect evolving events and expanding subject knowledge. Thus, teaching notes are living documents.

#### **Additional Readings:**

1. On Writing Teaching Notes Well, Darden Business Publishing, University of Virginia, available at: <http://dardenbusinesspublishing.com/Syllabus%20Copy/on-writing-teaching-notes-well-2.pdf>

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<sup>i</sup> How to Write a Good Teaching Case, RSM Case Development Centre, Erasmus University, Rotterdam School of Management, available at: [https://www.rsm.nl/fileadmin/Images\\_NEW/CDC/CDC\\_How\\_to\\_Write\\_a\\_Good\\_Teaching\\_Case\\_.pdf](https://www.rsm.nl/fileadmin/Images_NEW/CDC/CDC_How_to_Write_a_Good_Teaching_Case_.pdf), last accessed on December 11, 2020

<sup>ii</sup> How to Write a Good teaching Note, RSM Case Development Centre, Erasmus University, Rotterdam School of Management, available at: [https://www.rsm.nl/fileadmin/Images\\_NEW/CDC/CDC\\_How\\_to\\_Write\\_a\\_Good\\_Teaching\\_Note.pdf](https://www.rsm.nl/fileadmin/Images_NEW/CDC/CDC_How_to_Write_a_Good_Teaching_Note.pdf), last accessed on December 11, 2020

<sup>iii</sup> How to write a Teaching Note, WDI Publishing, University of Michigan, available at: [https://wdi-publishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/HowToWriteaTeachingNote\\_8-11-2017.pdf](https://wdi-publishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/HowToWriteaTeachingNote_8-11-2017.pdf), last accessed on December 11, 2020

<sup>iv</sup> Writing Cases and Teaching Notes, Harvard Business School, available at: <https://store.hbr.org/product/writing-cases-and-teaching-notes/399077>, last accessed on November 9, 2020