Writing a “Teaching” Case Study

Harvard Chan School of Public Health
December 17, 2015
Types of cases

- Retrospective (research)
- Secondary sources
- Point-of-view
- *Decision-forcing*
  - A case describes a situation, it does not prescribe a solution
  - A case tells a story, it does not explain a theory
Choosing a case topic

- “Fishing in the pond”
- Protagonist (individual, organization) faces dilemma; reasonable people can differ on solution
- Access
Case topic vs incident

- Topic: public policy on elderly, ill prisoners
  - Case: A CA prison tests limits of “medical parole”

- Topic: environmental illness in the developing world
  - Doctors running a clinical arsenicosis trial in Bangladesh face local press attacks

- Topic: managing information in a global health crisis
  - Case: WHO-Beijing director balances internal vs external information needs in midst of SARS outbreak
Choose your focus

- For whom is this case intended?
  - purpose, audience

- What might be the dramatic juncture?
  - decision point
  - plausible tension/conflict
  - chicken/egg problem
Frame your case

- Who is the protagonist?
  - other key actors?
- What is the journey?
  - chronology
- What are the roadblocks?
  - Constraints/context: political, economic, personal
Case Structure

- Introduction
- Background
- Development
- Action

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- Wrap-up (e.g. epilogue)
Stay inside the case

- Write as if it were happening now
- Include background information only if available to protagonist
- Accelerate/decelerate
- Details: in shoes of protagonist

A CASE IS A STORY, NOT AN ESSAY!
Case “voice”

- Non-judgmental
- Objective; no analysis
- Factual
  - detail oriented
  - informational
- Engaging
  - clear, lively language

AVOID JARGON!
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