



Writing Cases for Public Health Education

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Discussion Case

...can be generalized with respect to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned

...describes a specific **situation** in sufficient depth to enable students to apply public health knowledge, and to develop competencies involving skills and attitudes

...should present an **issue** that can be defined better through discussion and multiple perspectives

...should be relevant and important to your audience

Key Design Questions for Discussion Cases

What issues will the case focus upon?

What analysis is required to address those issues?

What data is required to perform that analysis?

Where will you get that data?

**In order to ask the right
questions, you need to have a
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

What Frameworks ?

Risk management

Stakeholder analysis

Disease surveillance

Root cause analysis

Communication theory

Models of behavioral change

Environmental exposure assessment

Organizational change theory

Sources of Discussion Cases

Think about purpose - knowledge transfer, skill building, attitude

Field Case

interviews, data,
research from a
selected site

Armchair Case

professional
experience of writer

Library Case

published
information

Writing a “Field” Case



Before the First Visit...

Determine institutional relationships

Contact the organization

Schedule and sequence interviews

Negotiate terms and conditions

In the Field

- 1. Explain the Case Method**
- 2. Interview**
 - Tape
 - Note taking
- 3. Gather relevant data and documents**
- 4. Confidentiality**
- 5. Define case issue**

**Think about how you
will WRITE the case**

Defining the Case Issue is *your first priority*

What does the course need?

What frameworks are relevant
for the course?

What kinds of decisions and conflicts
do the frameworks suggest?

What do the protagonists say about
“what’s been tough”?

Writing the Case

1. Determine the focus ASAP

2. 1st Paragraph Introduction...

- Protagonist
- Decision/Case “Issue”
- Setting/Timing
- Context
- Why it is important

3. Maintain authority of the case writer’s voice...

- Describe case in neutral voice
- Avoid judgments

4. Use quotes from interviews when judgment or opinion is expressed

Sample First Paragraph (or two)

Timing

Protagonist

In January 2003, Dr. David Acheson, the new Chief Medical Officer of Health of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reflected on his meeting with his boss, Joe Levitt. Earlier that morning, Levitt had called him into his office and handed him his first major assignment. Working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Acheson was to lead the **development of new federal guidelines for fish consumption** for all Americans.

Issue

As Acheson gathered the papers on his desk, he tried to sort through the task ahead. **How could the content of the advisory be science-based, simple and protective of public health?** Collaborating on a joint advisory by **two federal agencies (the FDA and EPA) that had not always seen eye-to-eye was going to be new terrain.** How might Acheson approach collaboration with the EPA and multiple other stakeholders to arrive at a single joint fish advisory? How best could the FDA **communicate the advisory to the public?**

Context

Importance

Sample “Judgmental” Quote from Fish Case

Unfortunately for pregnant women and their children, the seafood sold in supermarkets and restaurants is regulated under FDA's **weaker** standard. Moreover, the FDA's action level is only an informal enforcement policy, and it is not legally binding either on the Agency or on the seafood companies. More importantly, **it does absolutely nothing to prevent heavily contaminated fish from being sold to consumers. FDA's action level on methylmercury is truly a toothless tiger.**

*Caroline Smith DeWaal
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