

Developing negotiation case studies

[Business](#), [Management](#)



While a great deal of excellent advice exists for producing case studies on managerially relevant topics in general, negotiation cases have distinctive aspects that merit explicit treatment.

This article offers three types of tailored advice for producing cases on negotiation and related topics (such as mediation and diplomacy) that are primarily intended for classroom discussion: 1) how to decide whether a negotiation-related case lead is worth developing; 2) how to choose the perspective and case type most suited to one's objectives; and 3) in by far the longest part of the discussion, ten nuts and bolts suggestions for structuring and producing an excellent negotiation case study.

Suppose you read about, participate in, or otherwise become aware of a negotiation that intrigues you as a possible candidate for a case study. Perhaps a student, colleague, participant in an executive program, or private client suggests such an episode. You may consider researching and writing up the case yourself or you might supervise someone else for this purpose. Should you proceed with an investment of your scarce time and resources? If so, how?

What's the best casewriting advice you can give to a research assistant, a student (team) grappling with a course assignment to produce a case study, or someone else who is simply interested in writing up a negotiation for discussion purposes? ii Generations of experienced, even legendary, casewriters have codified guidelines for producing excellent case studies on virtually any subject. iii Yet negotiation cases often have distinctive aspects that merit explicit treatment.

Over the years, I've found myself in many conversations trying to crystallize and convey the elements that seem to contribute to crafting superior negotiation cases. I hope that pulling these insights together and developing them a bit more systematically will be useful for others undertaking casewriting projects. A quick caveat: though casewriting is often properly part of a larger research program, and synergistic with other methodologies, I focus here on case studies that are mainly intended as vehicles for classroom discussion and analysis.

As such, I sidestep important issues associated with systematically selecting and developing cases for well-defined research projects. For example, in the field of international relations, which thrives on case studies, the “method of structured, focused comparisons” is a research staple. iv More generally, exacting criteria exist for identifying, developing, comparing, and Draft: Developing Negotiation Case Studies. Copyright ©2010 by James K. Sebenius. 1 contrasting case studies in order to extract valid inductive social scientific knowledge. However, I leave that set of considerations for specialists with casewriting as a component of well-defined research agendas. vi The following sections offer three types of advice for producing cases that are primarily intended for classroom discussion: 1) how to decide whether a case lead is worth developing; 2) how to choose the perspective and case type most suited to your objectives; and, 3) in the by far the longest part of the discussion, ten nuts and bolts suggestions for structuring and producing an excellent case study.

One of the best ways to learn the casewriter's craft is to study a number of truly excellent case studies, or better, to discuss such cases in a forum led by an experienced case method instructor. As such, in each of the three advice sections that follow, I'm tempted to list a number of my favorite negotiation cases as models.

Since, however, these choices may be unfamiliar to many readers, and may be set in times, places, or contexts of little interest to others, I will instead offer a set of model cases, plus commentary, in an online forum in the hope that others will consult, comment, and contribute. (See online url to be provided later.). I. Advice on developing a prospective case: a case for what? A case of what? Start by seeking clarity on your overall purpose: " a case for what? "