

Introduction to Case Studies

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Key concepts, purposes, and practical steps for creating and using case studies.

1. What Is a Case Study?

Aspect	Description
Definition	An in-depth examination of a single subject (person, group, organization, event, or phenomenon) in its real-world context.
Scope	Can be exploratory , descriptive , or explanatory ; may focus on a single case or a small number of comparative cases.
Typical Formats	Narrative report, journal article, teaching module, business white paper, or multimedia presentation.

2. Why Use Case Studies?

Purpose	Example Applications
Illustrate Theory	Show how a marketing model works in a real company.
Generate Insight	Explore why a public-health intervention succeeded in one community but not another.
Develop Skills	Teach students diagnostic reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making.
Inform Practice	Provide practitioners with concrete examples of best practices.
Support Policy	Supply evidence for policymakers about program outcomes.

3. Core Elements of a Good Case Study

1. **Clear Research Question(s)** – What you aim to discover or explain.
2. **Contextual Background** – Setting, history, and relevant environment.
3. **Data Sources** – Interviews, documents, observations, statistics, multimedia, etc.
4. **Evidence Presentation** – Organized facts, quotes, timelines, and visual aids.
5. **Analysis & Interpretation** – Linking evidence to theory or research questions.

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6. **Conclusions & Implications** – Lessons learned, recommendations, and broader relevance.
 7. **Limitations** – Scope, bias, and generalizability constraints.
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4. Designing a Case Study

4.1 Choose the Case(s)

Criterion	Guiding Question
Relevance	Does the case address the research problem?
Representativeness	Is it typical, atypical, or critical for theory?
Access	Can you obtain the necessary data?
Ethical Feasibility	Are participants' rights protected?

4.2 Define the Research Design

Design Type	When to Use	Key Features
Exploratory	Little prior knowledge	Open-ended questions, flexible data collection.
Descriptive	Need a detailed portrait	Systematic documentation of facts and processes.
Explanatory	Test causal mechanisms	Link variables, compare multiple cases if needed.
Intrinsic	Interest lies in the case itself	Focus on uniqueness, often for teaching.
Instrumental	Case illustrates a broader issue	Generalizable insights, theory building.
Collective (Multiple)	Compare patterns across cases	Cross-case synthesis, pattern matching.

4.3 Data Collection Strategies

Method	Strengths	Typical Use
Interviews (semi-structured)	Rich, personal perspectives	Understanding motivations, experiences.

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Method	Strengths	Typical Use
Observations (participant/non? participant)	Direct behavior evidence	Process analysis, cultural context.
Document Review (reports, archives)	Verifiable, historical data	Timeline construction, triangulation.
Surveys/Questionnaires	Quantitative supplement	Measuring attitudes, outcomes.
Multimedia (photos, video)	Visual context	