

CHAPTER 5

Case Writing Process: The First Draft

Learning Objectives

After completion of this unit, the students will be aware of the following topics:

- ☐ Organise your Material
- ☐ Material to Include
- ☐ Presenting your Material
- ☐ Focus of Objectivity

The quality of a case is ultimately measured by its usefulness as a teaching material. Experience has indicated, however, that certain literary standards are necessary and certain accepted forms of presentation go a long way towards assuring acceptable cases. Case writing is fundamentally no different from other writings. The fact that it is primarily reportorial suggests various techniques and dictates at times the proper order of presentation. One essential requirement is that the case must be in thoroughly good language and free from defects in organisation and errors in grammar, punctuation or the use of words.

Your case presents a problem to the participant, with the intention that the participant solves that problem. There may be one 'right' answer, or there may be 'better' answers among a variety of possible solutions. Therefore, as with any other type of problem you present, you must ensure that there is sufficient information in your case for the participant to decide what is the (main) problem that needs solving and what information the participant needs in order to analyse the situation and reach a decision.

This chapter is devoted to certain techniques, which have proved helpful in writing useful cases. Since the techniques of case writing vary somewhat from case to case, from course to course and from time to time, the following are for the most part only suggestions. They are, however, suggestions based upon past successful (and unsuccessful) experience and should be disregarded only with sufficient reason.

ORGANISE YOUR MATERIAL

- If you have not already done it in the field, write everything down.
- Prepare an outline of the case and use it in writing.

You should yourself be very clear as to what the fundamental issue is and whether there are any secondary issues that have a bearing on the main problem. Unless you are clear yourself what the main and sub-problems are, so that you are able to ensure that they are all included clearly, useful analysis and effective solutions are less likely.

The main problem and any sub-problems can then act as foci status for the various items of information needed. The problem may or may not be presented quite so plainly at the start.

Further aspects are introduced gradually, increasing the complexity of the case and providing possibilities for alternative proposals that need to be compared and evaluated.

MATERIAL TO INCLUDE

Probably your most difficult decision when writing your case is how much information to include and the way in which it is to be presented. Having perhaps taken a great deal of time and trouble to gather your information, you are understandably reluctant to discard any of it, but it is vital that you are selective with your provision.

It is very unusual in any real-life situation to have available only the facts which are necessary to solve a particular problem. There are generally far too many facts available, not all of which are relevant: or a decision may have to be taken when there is really insufficient relevant information either available or possible to get and an intuitive leap may need to be made. Avoid the latter with your first case - too much information, though time wasting if carried to excess, is preferable to too little. You can progress to types that need intuitive leaps perhaps once you - and more particularly the participants - become more accustomed to the method. Part of their task when reading your case will be to decide which facts are relevant and needed for a good decision and which are not.

Again, how this is provided is for you to decide, but too much infilling can have an off-putting effect on the reader - you need to keep a reasonable balance between informing and overloading. Rather than providing written information, you may be able, instead to give some references that will allow the background to be researched by the reader.

PRESENTING YOUR MATERIAL

The facts can be presented in a variety of ways - verbally, numerically, statistically, visually, orally, using the range of print and non-print media available to you. However, not only must the facts directly related to the problem be included: you will generally also have to provide participants with the background information that they need to be able to set the problem into its context.

Presentation of your data will be eased, both for you and for your reader, if you group your information into a logical order. There can be no comprehensive guide to this, because the grouping will be very much dependent on the type of problem, on your preferred way of writing and on the type of sequencing you use. Because writing is such an individual skill, it is very difficult to suggest firm rules about the ordering and presentation of a case.

Your case is probably best written in several separate sections, each dealing with a particular aspect, which are then welded together to form the complete case. A structural unity should be aimed for and in putting your materials into order, the following types of sequencing have been suggested:

- Historical, or time sequencing;

- Event sequencing;
- Logical argument sequencing.

Within any of these sequences, authors have proposed a variety of sub-structures. For example:

- *Time structure:* Because a case or decision takes place in time, there must be a fairly clear perception on the part of the student of what the time sequence was of the events taking place in the case.
- *Narrative structure:* The things that happened and the circumstances of their happening must be narrated in some kind of understandable pattern.
- *Expository structure:* The events and issues contained in a case must be explained so that the learners will have a comprehensive understanding of the situation and the meaning of the various concepts to assist them in their analysis.
- *Plot structure:* The case writer must be able to capture the imagination of the audience without damaging the believability of the case.
- *The issue or issues:* There must be a question of what somebody should do, what somebody should have done, who is to blame for the situation, what is the best decision to be made under the circumstances, etc.

The more these can be interrelated, the more they will contribute to the interest and effectiveness of your case.

FOCUS ON OBJECTIVITY

During all this, remember to keep your writing objective. One purpose of the case is to allow the participants to make the judgements, not for you to give yours. Your job is to present that case, not to interpret it or present your own opinions about it. Use adjectives sparingly, if at all, because they can introduce aspects of value judgements by you.

This does not necessarily mean that you should avoid having people represented in your case. On the contrary, it is often easier and makes for a livelier case, if you can include some convincing characters that may well be required to give opinionated information in the case - but these should be opinions based on your research, quoting what you have gathered from interviews, etc. They are not included to be mouthpieces for your opinions.

No matter what outline is adopted, it is well to remember that most cases, to be useful in teaching, should deal with an administrative situation and should not just be a memoranda relating interesting facts.