

Case Studies: Should I read them or skip them?

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What are case studies?

Case studies are examples. They show you how the topics you are studying apply in the "real world." Some case studies are relatively short - just a paragraph or two. Other, more complicated case studies can be several pages long.

Why are case studies included in textbooks and articles?

Authors use case studies for several reasons:

- To stimulate your interest.
- To help you start thinking about the ideas which will be discussed in a chapter or section or article which will follow.
- To let you see how an abstract or complicated topic plays out in the "real world."
- To illustrate how several important ideas interconnect in an actual situation.
- To help you move beyond simply memorizing what you read or hear. For example, if you can explain a case study or provide your own case study, you understand the material at a deeper level of learning. That's why professors sometimes give case studies as test questions.

Should you take the time to read case studies? *Definitely!*

Why?

- **Case studies help you focus and concentrate when you read.**
Case studies at the beginning of the chapter are especially important because they identify the main points the author wants you to understand in the entire chapter; therefore, they are a great way to figure out
 - before you start to read - what is most important and,
 - after you have read - whether or not you understand those main points.
- **Case studies help you understand.**
It's easier to understand an idea if we can see how that idea "at work."
- **Case studies help you remember.**
Most of us remember examples better and longer than explanations alone. That's why professors use examples in class. [Be sure to include them in your class notes!]
- **Case studies help you on tests and papers.**
Professors expect you to apply what you are learning to the world around you, so you need to understand examples the author provides and then be able to come up with examples of your own.

How can I figure out what I need to learn from a case study? *Look for clues.*

- At the beginning of a chapter: authors often follow the case study with a summary or a list of the major points you need to know.
- In the body of the chapter: case studies are connected with the discussion of a particular topic. Sometimes they follow the section; sometimes they are placed in a box at the top or bottom of a page. In many cases, the author will tell you what you need to focus on.
 - Does the author spell out the key points at the end of the case study - perhaps in a series of questions?
 - Does the author refer to the case study in the discussion of the topic?
- If the author does not indicate the point of the case study, you must figure out the key points based on the case study itself. Look at the major points. What do they illustrate?

For assistance in reading case studies more effectively, just call (215) 951-2730 to set up an appointment with a professional tutor.