Writing a Case Study

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What is a Case Study

- A Real Life Challenge/Dilemma
- Details moments of challenge/choice/outcomes
- Shows you a way of thinking/ working on a challenging issue
- It is learning tool

Core Elements of a Case Study

- Challenge
- Opportunity
- Choices
- Outcomes
- Characters
- Data, graphs and other exhibits

Functions of a Case

- Puts the reader in the place of the protagonist
- Helps the reader wrestle with the challenge and choices of the protagonist, often retrospectively
- Provides just the right critical information for the reader

Let's Get Started:

- The Lede: It invites the reader in
- Introduce Protagonist
- Identify other important characters
- Ask if it answers the five Ws: Who? Where? When? What? Why?
- Indicate the dilemma and opportunity
- Make it lively
- Keep it short: 3 to 4 sentences

Next two Paragraphs

- Explain in brief the context, challenge and opportunity
- Give a brief background of the protagonist or the organization (Context)
- Have a linking paragraph to take the reader into the case

Opening Paragraph

- On January 20, 2009, Aadila Sheikh, the Regional Director of the Institute of Educational Development (IED) boarded the train from Noakhali to meet Jamail Hussain, the visionary leader of the Bangladesh Education Board, based in Dhaka. (When, who)

- Hussain wanted to forge a partnership, based on IED's community mobilizing strategy to improve learning outcomes for schools in Majidee town in Noakhali district, which had been amongst the region's worst performing for over a decade. (What, where, why)

- Sheikh was hopeful, but also aware of the challenges ahead. As the train left the station, Sheikh settled with her notes, to formulate her thoughts on what to ask from this partnership and how she could work with the highly fragmented community of Majidee so they could become active participants in their children's education. (Challenge, Hope)

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Context, Protagonist

- Founded in 1990, the Institute of Educational Development is a community-based organization that works with some of the most marginalized groups in Noakhali to improve learning outcomes. Using an innovative approach, whereby it mobilized the community into taking responsibility and finding solutions, the IED, under Sheikh's leadership, had shown measurable improvements in learning outcomes in Noakhali town. Its approach was based on the belief that people should not be turned into passive beneficiaries of aid, but encouraged to find and sustain their own solutions. In 2008, the IED, encouraged by the new approach of the Bangladesh Education Board, submitted a proposal to build a community-based learning model in Maijdee town, a community of 75,000 residents in Noakhali district.

Linking Paragraph leading into the case: Challenge and Hope

- Having grown up in Majidee, Sheikh knew the challenges of working in the community well. It was a diverse community of Muslims, Hindus and Christians. But over the years the community had lost the cohesiveness that Sheikh had known while growing up. The increased pressure on resources had fragmented the community, which had split deeply along religious and ethnic lines. To be able to build a community-based model was a challenge, but Sheikh knew from experience that it was possible to get people mobilized, once they were able to relate to their shared values and interests. A partnership with Hussain was important. He was highly respected amongst the teaching community for his integrity and efforts to improve learning outcomes. He could be a crucial ally in mobilizing teachers' support.

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Structure

- Part I --   Background & Challenges

- Part II -- Process: Strategy, Gains, Setbacks

- Part III – Questions/Challenges that remain

Background & Challenges-Part I

- Give Background:
- The Big Challenge: Split it into its components:
- Organization
- Protagonist
- Other important characters
- Give sub heads as you go. It will make structuring easier

The Process: Part II

- Includes Strategy, Gains, Setback
- The very first steps: How were some barriers overcome
- Choose key decision/change moments
- Few questions to consider:
- Who are the Agents of Change ?
- Who/What are barriers to change ?
- How was resistance overcome ?

Path Forward: Part III

- What Remains- Challenges
- Summing it Up: Perhaps through the Protagonist's words
- Questions that Remain

Research Rules

- It's a real life story, so you do field work to collect information
- Conduct interviews with key characters
- Use a tape recorder during interviews, if possible
- Get detailed data. Ask specific questions that relate to the 5 Ws
- Make a note of all dates
- Take permissions when you quote people
- Look for copyright when using images from the Web
- Use footnotes for all sources
- Data is important: Add data through exhibits at the end and indicate throughout the case wherever it might be most useful for your reader to consult the exhibit.
- Give sources for all your data

Don'ts

- Rules of Plagiarism apply: Make sure you are not copying any sentences directly from your research sources.

- Avoid use of acronyms

- Do not give opinions. Watch against your own biases getting into your writing.

Finally!!!

- Write in Active Voice
- Ask for feedback
- Keep it within 10 to 15 pages
- Don't be afraid to rewrite.
- If often takes multiple drafts before you get the final product