



Case studies

This activity will help you to...

- Understand what is involved in compiling a case study
- Consider how information might be selected for inclusion

Many sources of information

A case study is an in-depth investigation, often of a single individual. Case studies are most often used by professional psychologists who aim to intervene in some way to change an individual or their circumstances. When compiling a case study a psychologist can draw on a huge range of possible sources of information. These might include:

Interviews with the subject	Results of experimental tasks carried out by the subject	School records and reports
Medical records	Physiological measures e.g. MRI scans, EEG traces	Tests of personality
Interviews with teachers/managers	Observations of the subject	Diaries, letters or other biographical information
Attitude tests	Tests of clinical symptoms (e.g. depression)	Interviews with colleagues/co-workers
Tests of intelligence	Interviews with parents/family members	Employment records

Which of these sources of information might be useful to a psychologist investigating the following situations? Why do you think they might be useful?

- **Jamie** is seven years old. When he first started school he seemed to enjoy it very much. Unfortunately he has recently become very quiet and withdrawn in class and has stopped making progress in his learning. His teachers have engaged an educational psychologist from the local education authority to find out what the problem is and how they can help.
- **Eva** is a promising athlete and a potential Olympian. She has been a champion at school and county level and is now starting to compete seriously at a national level. Her coach has engaged a sports psychologist to try and give her 'the edge' over her competitors.
- **Reena** is recovering from a car accident in which she sustained head injuries. Surgeons had to operate on her brain and she spent several weeks in a coma. She has now regained consciousness but it appears that her injuries have affected her psychological functioning.
- **Jeff** ended up being compulsorily detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act after being arrested trying to break into a local zoo. The police became concerned by the bizarre way he was talking and called for an examination by a doctor. The doctor recommended that he be referred to a consultant psychiatrist.

In each of these cases, the psychologist's primary aim would be to help the person in question overcome their particular problems or difficulty. But how might their investigations contribute to more general psychological knowledge?