

## “a case of”

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Constituents after “it’s (is, was, will be, etc.) a case of” are usually accompanied by NP, ~ing, NP ~ing.

### (1) NP

It was a case of consensus not confrontation (bbc 791)/ It’s a case of high-tech kidnapping (today 290992)/ It was a case of fresh outlook, unencumbered by past practice (ambooks 409)/ It’s a case of mistaken identity (npr 80692)/ It was a case of friendship at first sight (mags 952)/ it was a case of three men against the one (britbooks 22)/ This is a case of town versus country, pure and simple (today 120592)/ it is a case of trial and error (britbooks 672, mags 544, mags 882)/ It was a case of rural David vs urban Goliath (guard 9071)/ For them it’s a case of your life in their hands (mags 160)/ It’s a case of different strokes for different folks (mags 367)

### (2) ~ing

It’s a case of casting your bread upon the waters. Who knows how the flavour will be repayed (mags 634)/ I have no desire at all to go back into that sort of politics. It is a case of going forward. Times change (guard 9072)/ It is a case of having to dance to a tune other than the one you are accustomed to (mags 631)/ Adik and I sat down by the sea and stayed waiting for a hotel room to be vacated; when Pasternak, who had had his swim, learned that there was still no room available, he said: “It’s a case of waiting for the tide to turn,” adding after a moment’s thought: That’s how old sayings become metaphors. We had a meal together in the so-called kursaal. (britbooks 335)

### (3) NP ~ing

Putting measures into effect at once, without endless preliminary parliamentary struggle, will contribute materially to restoring our democracy to health. It was a case of dictatorship being more ‘democratic’ than parliamentarism (britbooks 837)/ It’s a case of still waters running deep (today 111192)/ This is a case of discretion being the worse part of valour (mags 734)/ It could be a case of familiarity breeding contempt (today 211192)/ It really was a case of, you know, reality and fiction kind of blending together (npr 261091)/ but it was a

case of fortune favouring the brave rather than the beleaguered (times 280992)

(4) pronominal object ~ing

It was a case of him spending time home, not being at work (guard 9073)/ a case of them humorizing me (npr 2000391)/ It was a case of him sticking his neck out and I was also sticking my own neck out (mag 794)/ It's a case of us getting used to a different philosophy (indy 21090 )/ It's a case of us expressing our own deep-felt needs and beliefs (npr 150293)/ The last two years have been a real bonus for me after I was given a free transfer by Coventry City.' he says. I like to think that I could still do it in the Premier League but it's not a case of me deciding here I want to go, it's a question of who wants to come in for me. I'm just going to have to wait and see what comes along in the summer. (mags 499)

Incidentally, neither NP's ~ing nor Possessive pronoun ~ing is used after "a case of".

(5) Np~en

It's a case of another one born every minute (mags 621)/ It was a case of 'the interior conquered by the periphery' (britbooks 560)/ It's a case of the biter bit (indy 111090)/ a case of vertigo recollected in tranquillity (guard 9073)/ It's a case of a moderately clever idea stretched beyond its limits. (today 131291)

The phrase "a case of" is a preface, and is used for comparing the situation which has been established in the discourse with another that is familiar to the reader, often a proverb, aphorism, or other fixed expression. In other words, it is a way of packaging the immediate situation by summarizing it with reference to something established as a typical or recognizable aspect of collective human experience. The point of reference is often so familiar that the speaker or writer does not consider it necessary to provide the whole story: "a case of sour grapes" (times 70892), for example, is a reference to the well-known fable, and the reader is expected to understand the relevance of the comparison.

(6) a proverb, aphorism, or other fixed expression

Some owners like to fit protective boots on their horse whenever they ride, even though the horse may not actually brush. It is a case of 'a stitch in time' (britbooks 865)/ I think it is a case of sour grapes to complain. (times 70892)/ It was a case of out of sight, out of mind (britbooks 340)/ It's a case of first come, first served (today 230992)/ The decision no longer to supply plastic wallets with full driving licenses might be a case of penny wise, pound foolish (times 190892)/ It was a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained (mags 527)/ That replacement was a case of more haste, less speed (guard 9073)/ It's a case of the buck stops here (times 30992)/ It's a case of ignorance is bliss (spoken 108)/ It is just a case of time will heal (today 131192)/ It would have been a case of all's well that ends well (mags 675)/ It may have been a case of cart before the horse. (britbook 684)

All the examples mentioned in (3) are a proverb, or a fixed saying when the tense is

changed into the timeless present instead of ~ing. In some examples in (6) a full sentence occurs after the preposition 'of'.

It's a case of ignorance is bliss.

It's a case of time will heal.

It would have been a case of all's well that ends well.

Sometimes the preface is used to alter the text of the proverb or fixed expression, thereby tailoring it to fit a new situation; examples of this are:

This is not a case of when in France, do as the French do (guard 9072)

This is a case of discretion being the worse part of valour (mags 734)

These are presumably variants of the following:

When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Discretion is the better part of valour.

(7) bare infinitive

It's a case of adapt or die (guard 9075)/ I think this is a case of cure or kill (guard 9073)/ It's a case of get in before I drive off (spoken 878)/ It was a case of never mind the quality, look at the quantity (indy 31190)/ It's a case of reform or die (bbc 490)/ It was a case of swing and pray (today 120992)/ It has to be a case of wait and see. (today 90192)/ It's a case of unite and fight the real enemy, or divide and fight each other (mags 360)/ It's a case of "carry on regardless. We won't change" (today 24092)

Only the last example is put in quotation marks.

(8) auxiliary verb

It is a case of needs must. (guard 9073)

(9) inversion

Palmer makes himself available before the weekend, I can't see Taylor picking him. Yet England have to stick with the sweeper. Even more so now, and maybe it's a case of cometh the hour, cometh the answer. Palmer is a tremendous athlete, very confident as a person, bright and communicative and handy in the air. (today 110692)/ The referee, David Matthews, judged that Bristol, in retreat, had deliberately collapsed a five-metre scrum. With the game grinding along in low gear it was a case of cometh the hour ... a turgid one at that, cometh the man. (indy 81090)

(10) subordinate clause alone

It was a case of whether Gooch and Gower could win the game for England (times 00280792)/ It's a case of er, er, when that happens and not if it happens and er, when it happens there is a danger that they will go from export restrictions to import restrictions (spoken 497)/ The leak caused deep embarrassment for the Government and sparked off fresh



calls for Chancellor Norman Lamont's resignation. Some senior Tories feel it is not a case of if he goes, but when. And Labour last night renewed its call for Prime Minister John Major to sack Mr Lamont. (today 21092) / But we gave them a lesson. We had all the chances and we played all the football as well. No arguments about that! It used to be a case of whether United would win the title again before Doomsday. Right now a goal would do. (today 21192) / Mr Gorbachov was beginning to shift his ground, so that he could take Mr. Yeltsin's ideas on board and move things forward more quickly. I think that's right. And I think it's not only a case of whether Mr Gorbachov is willing to take Yeltsin on board; but we may have a situation, in the not too distant future, when the question will be posed rather differently. (bbc 590) / It's just a case of if they can help you (spoken 1165)

In Standard English on account of is usually followed by NP, or VPing, but in informal English it is sometimes followed by a sentence.

1) On account of it was Sunday, there were only about three shows showing. (Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*)

2) The Missis and me, we didn't sleep two hours last night, was up and down the whole time, on account of we got a sick baby. (Capote, *In Cold Blood*)

3) on accounta dogs just naturally hate that Keg. (Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*)

4) All sorts of cars are packed there overnight on account of there's hardly anywhere to park in the village. (COBUILD on CD-ROM)

This linguistic phenomenon is explained by the amalgamation of the standard use of because of NP and because S, and the similar use of like as both preposition and conjunction.

1) John behaves like a lawyer.

2) John behaves like a lawyer does.

3) Aunt Bidde acts like (= as if) she is no kin at all (Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*)

In the following section (11), a full sentence is followed after "a case of".

(11) full sentence

For the British, it was a case of what might have been. (mags 801) / But now it's a case of you see how far the money goes. (spoken 878) / It is a case of 'Don't believe what they say, watch what they do. All we have seen over the past couple of weeks is contradiction after contradiction. (guard 9073) / One of the four fashion capitals has had to change with it. Grudge is too strong a word to tack on to what was shown in Milan this week, but it is definitely what's been worrying them. It looks like a case of if you can't beat, incorporate it, even if all some could stomach was a Guns 'N Roses soundtrack and the odd bobble hat. (guard 9072) / It was a case of when you think about it you've got to book it straight away. (spoken 878)

The following is placed in quotation marks after "a case of".

What I do remember is that everybody was very friendly. There was no nationality distinction. It was a case of "if you can fly, OK, let's go." (bbc 990) / She always felt that he

thought her a nuisance, and he never had time to discuss methods. It was just a case of "Well, try this and come back if it doesn't work". After three children, one miscarriage, and one abortion, it seemed. (britbook 818)

(12) topicalization after "a case of"

and really if you weren't doing that they wouldn't be throwing all their money at television at football sorry so it really is a case of what the public want the public get. (spoken 00000074)/ Another policeman's wife who lives nearby said everyone had rallied round. The whole street has been in to help. It's a case of whatever they need they will get. Peter Gilchrist, 30, was due to appear in court today charged with attempting to murder Mr Window. (today 00281092)

(13) occurrence of wh- movement

It was a case of why send a woman to do a man's job? (mags 779)/ You know it's a case of Well how long have they been putting this additional part on this cooker (spoken 355)/ It's a case of which is the best? (spoken 113)/ It was a case of which one of us would go with him and we would have stayed away (mags 585)/ It's not just a case of who will be my other driver (today 140792)/ It's just a case of what sells (time 290882)

(14) relative pronoun

It's not credibility, it's a case of what we can extract from most people, the money to play the game with. (mags 353)

Constituents used in (1) to (14) after "a case of" are diverse in S-structure, but when we consider the following PS structure, I think that all the examples are equally explained.

1. PP → P - NP
2. NP → N - CP
3. CP → comp - IP
4. IP → NP - I -VP

For example, the topicalization transformation is 'Left-adjoin an NP to an S', so it co-occurs with comp (= complementizer), and wh-movement is substitution into comp.

(1) I think that Lucy, John loves.

(2) I wonder who John loves.

It is, therefore, plausible to say that the structure after 'a case of' is thought to be CP.

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*Note* : This is one of the pieces of research I carried out at the Centre for Advanced Research in English, the University of Birmingham in 1994. I must thank John Sinclair, Susan Hunston and Jim Ronald for various comments and suggestions. As for computational support I owe thanks to Jeremy Clear, Zoe James and Christine Dickinson.

**Abbreviations after quotations** : ambooks (American Books 10 m.), bbc (BBC World Service 18m.), britbooks (British books 23m.), ephem (Ephemera 1.5m.), indy (*Independennt* newspaper 5m.), mags (Magazines 28m.) npr (American Radio, National Public Radio 21m.), spoken (Spoken 8.5 m.). times (*Times* Newspaper 10m.), today (*Today* Newspaper 10 m.) wsj (*Wall Street Journal* 6 m.), guard (*Guardian* 12 m.), newsci(*New Scientist* 3 m.) scbooks (more British scanned books 4 m.), econ (*Economist* 7 m.) Total: 167 m. (m = million).