

Twelve General Questions to Ask about a Problem

1. Am I sure it really IS a problem? Is it real or imaginary?
2. How big a problem is it? What level?
3. Can I solve this problem alone or do I need help?
4. What would happen if I just left it alone and didn't worry about it right now? In other words, how urgent is the problem?
5. Is there a time limit for solving the problem? Can I solve it quickly or will it take a long time, maybe several days or weeks?
6. Why is it a problem? Do I know?
7. What caused this problem? Was it something I did or didn't do, or was it outside my control?
8. Is this problem mine alone or do I share it with someone else?
9. Can I fix this problem completely? If I solve it, will it stay solved or will it recur?
10. Does this problem affect other people besides me? If so, who?
11. Do I have enough information to solve the problem?
12. What would my perfect solution be?

Possible Problem-Definition “Starts”

Some students struggle to get started writing. Others may find it hard to get down to defining a problem. When it comes to problems, here are some “starts” that you may find helpful.

- In what ways might I ... (better than “How can I ...”)
- What might I change to ...
- How might I create ...
- In what ways might I combine ...
- In what ways might I fix ...
- What options might I have to ...
- In what ways might I adapt or change what I already know to ...
- What might I take away or remove so that ...
- In what ways might I proceed ...
- In what ways can I overcome ...
- In what ways can I say ...
- In what ways can I make a difference to ...
- In what ways can I collect (provide, share, give ...)
- What might I do to make (myself, my dad ...) feel (stronger, better, healthier, happier ...)
- _____
- _____
- _____

Seeing Problems Positively

- Problems can be the beginning of something new and exciting.
Example: The problem of global warming has led to the designing of more efficient vehicles.
- Problems can help us to grow and develop our thinking skills.
Example: The problem of coming up with a topic for a science report led to increased information about fragile ecosystems and how the student could help.
- Problems can be motivational.
Example: The problem of wanting to be less timid around others prompted a student to ask to orally present the class's weekly news report.
- Problems can help us to meet new people.
Example: The problem of moving and leaving friends led to meeting new friends.
- Problems can be opportunities for personal growth.
Example: The problem of whether or not to attend church with parents led to an interest in learning about other religions.
- Problems can serve as beneficial learning experiences.
Example: The problem of spilling blueberry juice on the dining-room carpet led to an Internet search for a stain removal.
- Problems can promote the creation of new ideas.
Example: The problem of trying to make a baby brother stop crying led to the idea that maybe babies would enjoy being sung to in gibberish.
- Problems can make us stop, think, and take notice of our surroundings.
Example: The problem of getting lost on the bike trail through the woods led to finding a new trail home.