

13 The Problem Solving Essay

This is a unique, interesting, and difficult essay type.

Many people underestimate the difficulties of problem solving. But think in terms of the real world. If problems were easy to solve, wouldn't most of our problems be solved already?

This is also a complex essay, because problem solving has several different pieces. Note the following:

First, we have a SITUATION.

We don't start with problems, because one person's problem is not a problem for another person. For example, I may think that the spreading of the legalization of marijuana is a problem. But do you? Does everybody around me? NO. So we never assume that what WE think is a problem really IS a problem. So first, we identify a SITUATION.

Convince the reader it's a PROBLEM.

Now I must convince my reader that the situation I have identified (legalization of marijuana) is a problem. I must show the negative effects (refer to our last essay) of this situation in hopes of convincing my reader to believe it's a problem.

Identify the CAUSES.

Again, we're back to the previous essay. In order to solve any problem, I have to show what is causing it. For example, if I say that highway traffic accidents are a problem, you might agree. But what I then say, "So let's lower the speed limit." But what if these accidents are caused by texting and driving, not by speed? If that's the case, lowering the speed limit would do nothing to solve the problem. (If you want ample examples of people trying to solve problems by doing things that do not address the causes, just look at government at any level.) It's difficult to accurately identify causes, but it must be done in this essay.

Propose a SOLUTION.

Here you propose your solution. It will usually include more than one item. Most problems are complex enough to include several solution parts working together. Hint: do not say, "If we all just come together as a society..." We NEVER come together as a society. Propose a workable solution.

Defend SOLUTION.

You must provide evidence (facts, statistics, logic) that will convince the reader that your solution will work. If this has worked elsewhere, that's excellent evidence. If you can show logically why it should work, that helps.

A Basic Problem Solving Assignment

This paper should be at least three pages (750 words) in length. Your job is to identify a problem and propose a workable solution.

1. Select a topic of interest to you. This may be a problem in your own life, a friend's life, or a problem for society (or a segment of society) in general.
2. Clearly detail the problem, why it's a problem, and what causes that problem.
3. Propose and defend a solution to that problem..

Basic Organizational Pattern

1. Introduction: Setting up some context for the issue is a great way to open a position paper. Identify the problem and who it affects. End this introduction paragraph with your **thesis statement**. Your thesis must propose your solution ("X is a problem, but A, B, and C could solve this problem").
2. Body 1: Identify the SITUATION
3. Body 2: Use the negative effects of this situation to convince the reader it is a PROBLEM
4. Body 3: Correctly identify the CAUSES of this problem.
5. Body 4: Propose a SOLUTION.
6. Body 5: Using facts, history, statistics, and logic, defend your SOLUTION as workable and logical.
7. Conclusion: Think about how you can lead the reader back out of the paper.

Revising/Editing: Your final essay should be well polished and easy to read, make a strong argument, and contain no grammar, usage, punctuation, or other mechanical errors.

GUN CONTROL SAMPLE ESSAY

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ENG 101
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The Cause, Not the Tools

The topic of gun control has plagued society for centuries. Gun violence had affected people of every creed, color, and political persuasion. It is nearly impossible to find someone without a story of violence or a stance on the issue. Some argue for full restrictions on gun ownership, while others believe there should in fact be more guns so as to deter criminals; on the very broad spectrum of gun control, a majority of the positions center around these two extremes. However, these positions focus entirely on the weapons themselves. When it comes to stopping gun violence, the solution may in fact have nothing to do with weapons, but rather in dealing with the people who operate them.

The two major viewpoints on how to combat gun violence have a myriad of problems that they bring along with them. Taking away all firearms works very well on paper, but in practice, this only complicates the issue further. The Second Amendment, notwithstanding all the controversy surrounding its meaning in current society, makes it clear that citizens are allowed to own weapons to protect themselves (US Const., amend. II). Therefore, an effort to take away guns would not only be unconstitutional, but it would serve to make every law-abiding gun owner a criminal in the eyes of the government. Further, this action would not deter criminals because those who set out to commit crimes are not concerned with being within the bounds of the law. All this would

do is serve to disarm law-abiding citizens, preventing them from defending themselves or others from armed criminals.

However, the other side of this coin has just as many holes. While there is some evidence behind lower crime rates due to increased gun ownership and concealed carry permits among law-abiding citizens (Riddell), it has not shown to have a significant effect on crime as a whole. Many proponents of this idea argue that armed citizens, particularly teachers in a school setting, could prevent tragedies before they get worse. However, this solution is nigh impossible to pull off without a hitch. To focus on the school setting for a moment, it would require millions, perhaps billions, of taxpayer dollars to arm every teacher in elementary, middle, and high schools and to give them the proper training required to react to hostile encounters. This could then cause further issues; for example, a teacher might not be comfortable handling a gun. Perhaps the worst thing that could result from this is further tragedy. Even police officers, whose job entails training to handle threats, can act rashly in the heat of the moment due to adrenaline; someone with little training could easily act suddenly, killing an innocent civilian in the process.

The question then becomes, if neither of these ideas can fix the problem, then what solution is there? Perhaps the problem is that they both focus on the tools of violence, not those perpetrating it. The solution, then, becomes to deal with the people who commit crime, and to stop them before they do so. Randy Brown, father of Columbine survivor Brooks Brown, gives a simple answer: the Safe to Tell Hotline, instituted in Colorado soon after what he describes as “the dismal failure of Jefferson County to act on information that was given to them two years and one year prior to the Columbine

tragedy” (Brown), simply needs to be expanded and introduced nationwide. Currently, the program “allows students, teachers, parents, and anyone to report a threat that involves a school” (Brown). After Brown’s son and several other students heard the shooters discussing buying gun and their “hit list,” they reported them to the police, but the police never followed up, leading to the Safe to Tell Hotline being established after the incident. Expanding this to other states, as well as moving it out of the school setting and allowing any individual to report others who give off red flags, could prevent tragedies before they begin.

Gabrielle Giffords, a retired member of the House of Representatives and a survivor of gun violence, offered a similar solution, saying, “We need a comprehensive approach: a surge in mental health services, mental health "first aid" programs to identify and intervene in problems before it's too late” (Giffords). This is an equally viable solution; the state of mental health care is dismal. States are losing funding for mental health care, there is little coordination between affected agencies, and well-intentioned parents are being forced to resort to calling the police or relinquishing custody just so that their children can receive help (Szalavitz). This lack of treatment for those suffering from mental illnesses can have larger effects later on. The individuals who perpetrated the Aurora theater shooting and the Sandy Hook shooting both suffered from mental illnesses. Had they been given proper treatment and attention, and had those responsible for their well-being been more proactive in assessing their conditions, then perhaps these events could have been anticipated.

These two theories work best when combined together. Thus, the solution to gun control is not to control guns; rather, it is to allow citizens to report concerning events or

individuals and for a better handling on mental health. These working in tandem will allow for numerous tragedies to be stopped before they start, either by treating or stopping individuals before they get to that point. Taking guns away makes things worse for law-abiding citizens, and adding more guns puts everyone at risk. Only by getting at the root of the problem can things be bettered. The focus needs to be on the people committing these crimes, not just the tools they use.

Works Cited

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