

## Week 8: The Problem Solving Essay

Problem solving is something you do EVERY DAY. Consider the following examples:

1. You wake up late and might not make it to work on time.
2. Your new puppy refuses to be house trained.
3. Your week seems to always last longer than your paycheck.
4. What started as a promising relationship suddenly seems to be taking a negative turn.
5. You are receiving lower grades in your classes than you want.
6. There is nothing good in the fridge to eat.

And these are just a tiny sampling of personal problems. Consider societal problems as well.

Note this sample, taken from a 2014 Houston Chronicle article

(<http://www.chron.com/news/nation-world/nation/article/Americans-rank-the-nation-s-12-biggest-problems-5318832.php#photo-6021684>):

- Unemployment
- Dissatisfaction with the government
- The economy
- Health care
- Government debt
- Education
- Ethics/morality
- Foreign aid
- Poverty
- Immigration
- Individual lack of resources
- Income gap between rich and poor

You could make a case that much of what we do on a given day is related to problem solving.

However, as you may have seen in your own life or the lives of others you know, we are often pretty awful at problem solving. There are many reasons for that. In order to understand these reasons, let's look at the steps of the problem solving process (note that these are also discussed in our reading this week; this is just an overview):

1. Pick a "situation"
2. Determine it's a problem
3. Identify causes
4. Propose solutions
5. Defend solutions

This process can break down anywhere along this line. For example, I might think something is a problem when it really isn't. I might misread the causes of the problem (the most common breakdown in this process), or I might propose solutions that don't fit the causes.

There is an example of this analysis in your reading this week.

The point is, being a good problem solver is important, but many people are not because they don't follow the steps in the process, or they allow the process to fall apart because they don't use logic during that process.

Our goal as academics is to approach this process logically. We must never assume that something is a problem without evidence of a net negative outcome of that process. We never assume causes (remember the post hoc fallacy?), and we only propose solutions that will logically address those causes.

Chapter 13, your reading this week, will discuss this essay in more detail, along with providing several other important tools:

1. The basic organizational pattern (pg. 94)
2. **THE ASSIGNMENT ITSELF** (pg. 94)
3. A sample essay for your review (pgs. 95-99)

We will write this essay over the span of three weeks. This week your job is to preview the chapter, get a better idea of how a problem solving essay works, and then read the article in the website I have listed below regarding the problem with technical education. We will base our discussion this week on that article. You should also choose a topic for your own problem solving essay, and get started working on that essay.

Next week we will have additional reading, another discussion forum, and you will submit a rough draft for peer review.

In week 3 of the unit, we will have a final discussion forum and you will submit your final drafts.

## READING

Chapter 13 in *The Super Compact Guide*

[http://www.citea.org/uploads/3/2/7/3/3273106/career\\_technical\\_education\\_-\\_problems\\_and\\_solutions\\_022807.pdf](http://www.citea.org/uploads/3/2/7/3/3273106/career_technical_education_-_problems_and_solutions_022807.pdf)

## THE CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROBLEM SOLVING DISCUSSION FORUM

Once you've completed the reading, go to the Career Technical Education Problem Solving Discussion Forum link. Review my opening question and respond, and then respond to at least TWO of your classmates throughout the week.

## THE PROBLEM SOLVING ESSAY

As you begin planning this essay, note that I want to see an essay related to your work or study in your technical field. If you work in the field, select a problem at your workplace for this essay. If you are not employed in the field, select a problem that you have studied in your coursework to this point.