

Problem Solving

8 steps to problem solving

Step 1. Define the problem. What exactly is going on? Sometimes a problem just seems too big to tackle. However, if you make a list and break it down into smaller parts that you can make a start on solving, it'll feel more manageable.

Step 2. Set some goals. Focus on the steps you can take to resolve things, rather than just thinking about what you'd like to happen. Maybe you wish you had more money. Make a list of all the ways you can save or earn more. It could mean walking to school rather than taking the bus, or applying for a part-time job.

Step 3. Brainstorm possible solutions. Be creative and come up with as many solutions as you can think of. Some ideas may be way out there, but don't worry about evaluating them yet. If you want to solve a conflict you're having with your parents by escaping on a rainbow unicorn, write it down! Keep an open mind and list anything that comes to mind, plausible or not.

Step 4. Rule out any obvious poor options. Okay, reality check. Evaluate your list of ideas and rule out the ones that are unrealistic or unhelpful. Bye-bye, rainbow unicorn. But how about trying to see things from your parents' point of view? That option should probably stay on your list.

Step 5. Examine the consequences. Go through the options you've got left and for each one write a list of their pros and cons.

Step 6. Identify the best solutions. Now it's time to make a decision. Look at your list of options, and pick out the ones that are most practical and helpful. There may be one obvious solution, or some might work in combination.

Step 7. Put your solutions into practice. Have faith in yourself and make the commitment to try out one of your solutions.

Step 8. How did it go? So, you tried it out. What happened? If you had more than one solution and the first didn't work, move on to another one.

What to do when you can't fix the issue

Despite your best efforts, you may still not be able to fix something. If you've tried a few strategies but haven't had any success, you might try to focus on your coping skills instead, to help you deal with things as they are.

If you're experiencing a lot of negative feelings because of your issue, it's important to look after yourself. Take time out to do something you enjoy. You might also find it

helpful to talk to someone you trust who can give you moral support. If your situation is interfering with your day-to-day life, it's a good idea to get some professional help.

What can I do now?

- Grab a notebook and start brainstorming ideas for solving the problem.
- If a solution is proving to be elusive, focus on your coping skills.
- Talk to someone you trust about your problem and see if they have any insights to offer.

What are problem-solving skills?

Problem-solving skills help you determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution. Although problem-solving is often identified as its own separate skill, there are other related skills that contribute to this ability.

Some key problem-solving skills include:

- **Active listening**
- **Analysis**
- **Research**
- **Creativity**
- **Communication**
- **Dependability**
- **Decision making**
- **Team-building**

Problem-solving skills are important in every career at every level. As a result, effective problem solving may also require industry or job-specific technical skills. For example, a registered nurse will need active listening and communication skills when interacting with patients but will also need effective technical knowledge related to diseases and medications. In many cases, a nurse will need to know when to consult a doctor regarding a patient's medical needs as part of the solution.

Problem-solving skills examples

To solve a problem effectively, you will likely use a few different skills. Here are a few examples of skills you may use when solving a problem:

Research

Researching is an essential skill related to problem solving. As a problem solver, you need to be able to identify the cause of the issue and understand it fully. You can begin to gather more information about a problem by brainstorming with other team members, consulting more experienced colleagues or acquiring knowledge through online research or courses.

Analysis

The first step to solving any problem to analyze the situation. Your analytical skills will help you understand problems and effectively develop solutions. You will also need analytical skills during research to help distinguish between effective and ineffective solutions.

Decision-making

Ultimately, you will need to make a decision about how to solve problems that arise. At times (and with industry experience), you may be able to make a decision quickly. Solid research and analytical skills can help those who have less experience in their field. There may also be times when it is appropriate to take some time to craft a solution or escalate the issue to someone more capable of solving it.

Communication

When identifying possible solutions, you will need to know how to communicate the problem to others. You will also need to know what communication channels are the most appropriate when seeking assistance. Once you find a solution, communicating it clearly will help reduce any confusion and make implementing a solution easier.

Dependability

Dependability is one of the most important skills for problem-solvers. Solving problems in a timely manner is essential. Employers highly value individuals they can trust to both identify and then implement solutions as fast and effectively as possible.

How to improve your problem-solving skills

There are several methods you can use to improve your problem-solving skills. Whether you are searching for a job or currently working, improving your problem-solving skills and associated abilities will help make you a strong candidate and employee.

- Acquire more technical knowledge in your field. Depending on your industry, it may be easier to solve problems if you have a strong working technical knowledge. You can more technical knowledge through additional coursework, training or practice.
- Seek out opportunities to problem solve. By putting yourself into new situations, you are more likely to be exposed to opportunities to problem solve. You may find there are opportunities to volunteer for new projects in your current role, on another team or outside the workplace for another organization.

- Do practice problems. Practice and role-play can be useful tools when learning to develop your problem-solving skills. You can find professional practice books for your industry and problem-solving scenarios online. Practice how you might solve those problems and determine if your potential solutions are viable.

For example, in customer service you might find a scenario like, “How would you handle an angry customer?” or “How do you respond when a customer asks for a refund?” Practicing how you might handle these or other scenarios common in your industry can help you call upon solutions quickly when they arise on the job.

- Observe how others problem solve. You may have colleagues who are skilled problem solvers. Observing how those colleagues solve problems can help you improve your own skills. If possible, ask one of your more experienced colleagues if you can observe their techniques. Asking relevant questions can be helpful in applying them in your own career.

How to highlight problem-solving skills

Showcasing your problem-solving skills on your resume and cover letter can help employers quickly understand how you might be of value to their team. You might consider only showcasing problem-solving skills on your resume if it is particularly relevant in the position you’re applying for. Customer service, engineering and management positions, for example, would be good candidates for including problem-solving abilities.

Problem-solving skills for resume

On your resume, you can highlight your problem-solving skills in several locations: The “skills” section, the “achievements” section, and by giving specific examples of problem-solving in your “experience” section.

In the [skills section](#), you may want to list key problem-solving skills that you possess, instead of simply writing down the more generic term “problem-solving.” For example, you could list specific technical skills you possess that would help you solve problems or soft skills associated with problem-solving, such as your research abilities or decision-making talents.

Remember, stories are powerful. Keep specific examples in mind of times you solved a problem. This is useful on your resume but will also help you answer [interview questions](#) like, “Tell me about a time you overcame _____ an _____ obstacle.”

Problem-solving skills for cover letter

Your cover letter is also an excellent opportunity to elaborate on your problem-solving skills. Here, you can give a brief example of a time you solved a problem successfully. Alternatively, you might identify a challenge that this potential employer is seeking to solve and explain how you would address it.

Related: [7 Powerful Ways to Start a Cover Letter](#)

For example, if a job posting mentions that the company is looking for someone to help improve their social media presence, you can identify key ways you might aid in increasing awareness of the brand through various social media platforms.

Your problem-solving skills will be a benefit to you in every step of your career. From resume to application, interview to job duties, the ability to solve problems effectively as they arise will make you a valuable asset on the job and a highly sought after candidate.