



Problem Solution Essay


 Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but they should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.


Purpose


 To define a problem and propose a solution to it.

Topic

 A problem and its solution(s). The paper is in two-parts: for the first section, you will focus on the problem; for the other, you will discuss a substantial solution or several possible solutions, choosing the best if professor requests you do so.


 Watch for gigantic problems that do not have manageable solutions; keep in mind the limited space of a composition paper.

 Avoid vague problems and solutions that you will struggle to put into certain and communicable terms.

 Note: Many professors will ask you to discuss multiple solutions and designate one as especially promising. For the “lesser” solutions, condense your discussions to mini versions of the suggestions while elaborating on your favored solution completely.


Example: Ned recognizes that many of his friends have a “bad relationship” with writing academic papers. He thinks one way to remedy this situation is to increase campus awareness of the Writing Center.

Thesis


 The thesis statement should identify a specific problem and a specific solution.

Example: Students have prevalingly negative feelings toward writing papers; many reasons for this situation could be mitigated by the Writing Center.

Audience

 Your audience should care about the problem enough to care about the solutions. As with an Informative Essay (and all essays, really), you must decide what your readers already know about the topic. You should also consider how your reader can participate in the solution (like with a Persuasive Essay).



Structure

 This essay is in two parts: Problem, then Solution. On the following page are suggestions for what you should attempt to cover in each part; this is not necessarily the order in which you should broach each sub-topic.

The Problem Section

- 1) What is the problem being addressed (explain, describe, and “prove” that it exists)?
- 2) Whom does this problem affect?
- 3) Why does this problem exist (identify the root causes)?
- 4) Why does the problem persist (identify the major factors that contribute to the problem’s ongoing presence)?
- 5) What’s at stake if the problem is not solved, and why is it worthy of a solution (be reasonable about the current and potential hazards if the problem presents)?

The Solution Section

- 1) Who can take action?
 - 2) What should they do, exactly?
 - 3) Why would this help?
-  Associate your solution with *Problem* numbers 3 & 4 above: How would your solution directly eliminate (or at least diminish) the impact of the problem’s causes?
-  If you can, use research to show how the solution affects the problem and its causes.

Example Breakdown

Problem

- 1) What: students hate writing papers
- 2) Whom: students
- 3) Why: (a) students feel like they do not understand assignments; (b) students feel like they do not know what instructors look for in their writing; (c) students do not think they can write about topics that interest them; (d) students do not know where to start; (e) students are unsure how to revise papers to meet academic standards
- 4) Persistence: Ned could claim that high school initiates a problematic relationship with writing assignments, or that American culture devalues writing. Ned will look at only at those factors that he can specifically identify and feasibly “solve”
- 5) What is at stake: entire collegiate careers spent lamenting all writing assignments

Solution

- 1) Who: students
- 2) What: Go to the Writing Center.
- 3) Why it would help: Because very often Writing Center tutors can (a) help students understand assignments, (b) explain how to write in particular disciplines and for academia generally, (c) talk with students to help them think of interesting topics; (d) brainstorm ideas with students to help them generate ideas and get started, (e) guide students through revision strategies to help them achieve scholarly goals.

For more information on this topic see
Chapter 11 in The Longwood Guide