

Problem Solving

This learning tool has the goal of helping users to:

1. Understand the skill
2. Reflect on and identify ways they use the skill
3. Participate in activities to build skills

What is problem solving?

The Office of Skills for Success defines problem solving as:

Your ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions. Problem solving helps you to address issues, monitor success and learn from the experience.



Reflection

There are many tasks that require problem solving.

Check off the problem solving tasks that you can confidently complete.

- ☐ Find accurate information to fix a problem on my own.
For example, labels or text messages with product instructions.
- ☐ Ask for help solving a problem, when needed.
For example, calling an internet provider to help fix a lost connection.
- ☐ Evaluate the different possible actions you could take to solve a problem.
For example, decide the easiest way to locate a phone number which could be by calling a friend, finding a business card or looking online.
- ☐ Think critically about a problem, and break it into parts to determine potential causes and/or solutions.
For example, watching YouTube video's or read the manual to help diagnose the sound your washing machine is making.
- ☐ Consider solutions that have worked before and apply them to a new problem.
For example, Indigenous communities have adapted traditional fishing traps to catch trash and clean up floating garbage while still allowing water and fish to pass through to clean unpolluted waterways.
- ☐ Reflect on how I managed a problem and learn from the experience.
For example, reading and considering information from multiple websites, books, or other pieces of text before making a decision.



Look at the tasks you did not check off. We call these your “skills to build”.

How do you use your problem solving skills at home and/or at work?

Activity One

You work as a Healthcare Aide in an Elders Care Home.

On your daily rounds, one of the Elders who is usually quite healthy tells you that they have a fever. You take their temperature and confirm that it is slightly higher than normal.

The Care Home's policy is to report all new health issues to the shift supervisor, so that they can contact a doctor and/or coordinate treatment as required.



What is the first thing you would do in this situation?

(Select one response)

☐ Give the Elder two Tylenol and tell them to go back to bed.

☐ Wait a couple of hours to see if the fever goes down.

☐ Report the Elder's fever to the shift supervisor.

☐ Call a doctor.

Activity One: Review

Skills Coach Answer:

Report the Elder's fever to the shift supervisor.

The Skills for Success has three levels of complexity, or difficulty, for problem solving tasks: entry, intermediate, and advanced.

This is an entry-level problem-solving task. It requires you to make a single decision, in a familiar environment (your workplace), and there is an existing procedure to follow. Because the fever is only slightly higher than normal temperature, it is safe to assume that this is not an emergency situation which might require deviating from the usual procedure.



Activity Two

You work as a Prep Cook in the kitchen of a busy local restaurant.

The large sink used to wash food items is clogged and can't be used.

There are still fruits and vegetables to be washed and prepared for the lunch rush, which is an hour away.



What could you do to help solve this problem? *(Select all that apply)*

☐ Find containers large enough to wash and rinse the food.

☐ Inform the Kitchen Manager that there is a maintenance issue.

☐ Ask the cook to change the items on the lunch menu to use frozen produce that has already been washed, instead of fresh items.

☐ Use the clogged sink and hope for the best.

Activity Two: Review

Skills Coach Answer:

- Find containers large enough to wash and rinse the food.
- Inform the Kitchen Manager that there is a maintenance issue.
- Ask the cook to change the items on the lunch menu to use frozen produce that has already been washed, instead of fresh items.

This is an intermediate-level problem-solving task. We must consider the problem and identify who is impacted by it in order to come up with a solution.

Additionally, there are both short-term and long-term considerations in this situation. In the short term, we need to make sure lunch can be served. We can do this by either finding a way to wash the produce, or by finding a way to change the menu so that the produce isn't needed. Then we also have to resolve the long-term issue of the clogged sink so that it doesn't impact additional meals.



Activity Three

You are the Environmental Coordinator for your band.

When you arrive at the project site, you do a quick inventory and notice that the pond liners, soil test kits and other important materials for your work are not there. The project is tightly scheduled and you must conduct your assessment before additional work can be completed.



What are one or two things that you could do to solve this problem?



Activity Three: Review

Skills Coach Suggestions:

- **Phone the supply company to see if/when the materials will arrive.**
- **Phone a different supplier, if one is available, and see whether they can provide the missing materials.**
- **Call the Project Manager for the development project to see if they have any flexibility in their work schedules, to give you additional time to resolve the problem.**



If your answer isn't the same as the Skill Coach's suggestions, that doesn't mean it's wrong! Most problems have lots of possible solutions. A strong answer to this question is one that helps you learn more about the problem (for example, finding out why the materials haven't arrived yet) or helps you resolve the problem (for example, identifying an action you could take).

This is an advanced-level problem-solving task because there are several issues to identify and unknown factors to consider. Additionally, there could be multiple significant consequences if the problem is not resolved – such as increased cost or schedule delays.

There will be multiple steps required to solve this issue and you may need to wait for additional information and/or other people before the problem can be fully resolved. This is also an example of a problem that you want to avoid in the future. So, it will be important to understand what happened to cause the problem and then take measures in the future to prevent it from happening again.

Importance of Problem-Solving skills

Your ability to solve problems effectively is important and requires you to interpret and evaluate information, make decisions and prioritize actions. Building problem-solving skills will improve the way you carry out activities and achieve your goals at work or in other life situations. For more information on Problem-Solving skills visit the skill components and proficiency descriptors on the [Skills for Success](#) Website. For more information on the Indigenous Skills for Success Journey Refresh Project please visit the [Douglas College](#) Website.

Continue the Journey

How can you continuously improve your problem solving skills?
