

Tips To Assist Writing a Problem Statement

1. A problem occurs when there is a gap between what is happening and what should be happening.
2. Problem statements determine the direction needed next. If the problem statement is wrong, **every step that follows will be wrong**.
3. A problem statement should describe in one or two sentences what the difficulty is or what needs to be solved.
4. In writing problem statements, avoid 1) describing the solution, 2) guessing the expected cause, 3) being vague or ambiguous, or 4) combining multiple problems into one.
5. The problem as first stated is rarely the true problem. Always restate the problem as many ways as you can; change the wording, take different viewpoints, and try it in graphical form.
6. Ask who, what, when, where, how.
7. If you cannot understand the problem, try explaining it to others and listening to yourself.
8. Remain willing to revise the problem statement as you uncover new information.

Problem Statement Exercise

As you tour the facility, ask yourself and others the following questions:

1. What can you *see* that causes you to think there's a problem? Try to view the facility through the eyes of someone unaffiliated with the company.
2. Where is it happening?
3. How is it happening?
4. When is it happening?
5. With whom is it happening? (HINT: Don't jump to "Who is causing the problem?" When we're stressed, blaming is often one of our first reactions. To be effective, you need to address issues more than people.)
6. Why is it happening?

Problem Statement Examples

1. I'm looking for my lunch. <GAP> I'm eating my lunch.

Problem Statement: I cannot find my lunch.

2. No parts are being assembled. <GAP> I'm assembling.

Problem Statement: I can't find the parts I need.

3. This saw is mangling the wood. <GAP> I've finished the sawing job.

Problem Statement: The tools are not working properly.

4. There's no room for these new orders. <GAP> New orders are placed for shipment.

Problem Statement: It is really cluttered by the loading dock.

5. Production is down. <GAP> Production is at required levels.

Problem Statement: Workers are not familiar with the process.