# Problem-Solution pattern

The Problem-Solution pattern is one of the most important organizational structures in *scientific* and *engineering* texts, but is also found in *newspaper* and *magazine articles*. The problem-solution pattern reflects a form of critical thinking that tends to be more argumentative and evaluative. You may find this pattern useful in writing *introductions*, research reports, proposals, and essay answers to examination questions. In its simplest form, the Problem-Solution pattern consists of two parts: a ***problem*** and a ***solution***. However, most problem-solution texts involve four steps.

## SITUATION

The first sentence in a paragraph, often referred to as the ***Situation***, provides *background information* and the *setting* for the problem. In this step, the writer attempts to orient the writer by showing the ***importance*** or ***relevance*** of the current situation to the reader's world. The words below are frequently used to emphasize the relevance of the topic:

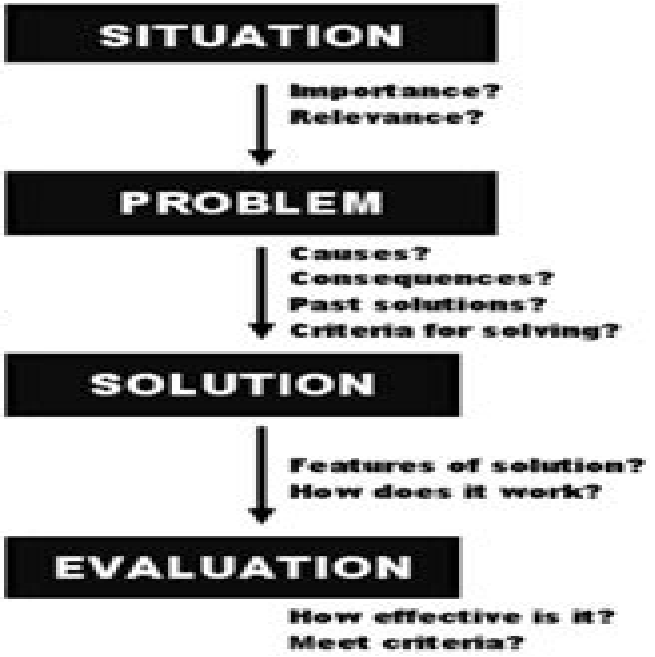
> *major, important, popular, common, and many*

## PROBLEM

The second or topic sentence states the ***problem***. In science texts, the problem is commonly signaled using the following types of words:

> ***contrast*** (*However, despite, unfortunately, although, but*),
> ***negative connotation*** (*limited, few, little, no, not, none*),
> ***synonyms for "problem"*** (*danger, drawback, disadvantage, weakness, need, shortcoming, obstacle*).

Sometimes, the present situation may be presented as the problem, or these first two steps can even be presented in reverse order. Describing a problem also entails commenting on the ***history***, possible ***causes and effects*** of the problem, the limitations of any ***current/previous solutions***, as well as the ***criteria*** for a good solution.




## SOLUTION

Once the reader understands the *importance/relevance* of this topic and the *problems* arising from it, the next step introduces a ***solution*** to the problem. This step is often signaled using the words below:

> ***Nouns*** (*solution, answer, approach, strategy, improvement*)
> ***verbs*** (*solve, address a problem, work out* and *develop*)
> ***causative connectors*** (*therefore, as a result, thus*).

## EVALUATION

When presented with a possible solution, readers naturally wonder whether this solution is effective in light of the criteria described in the problem step. Therefore, the final step should *evaluate* the solution. If the evaluation is ***negative*** (i.e., the solution is ineffective), then your reader will expect an *explanation* as to why it will not work. Alternatively, a ***positive*** evaluation supports a successful solution, and the positive features of the solution would be signaled by **positive language**:

> ***Nouns*** (*benefit* or *advantage*)
> ***verbs*** (*provide, offer, enable, allow*)
> ***Adjectives*** (*effective, efficient, reliable, safe, useful*)

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