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A Problem-Solution Essay

First of all, what is a "Problem-Solution" essay? Basically, it is any essay that starts by identifying a problem (or problems) and then proposes one or more solutions. It is quite common to be asked to write a "Problem-Solution" essay in school: the example below is based on a task in Grade 6 Humanities at UWCSEA.

Read the text and do the following tasks:

1. Mark the section of the text that outlines the problems. (How many are there?)
2. Mark the section that proposes solutions. (How do you know where this section begins?)
3. Mark the section that justifies the solutions and calls for action.
4. Underline all the linking words/phrases in the text. (*Firstly, For example, etc.*)
5. Underline (with a wavy line) all the phrases that tell us something about results.

There are numerous health problems in shanty towns. Firstly, because the sites are illegal the government does not provide piped water. As a result, drinking and bathing water are usually dirty and this causes diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and hepatitis, as well as skin and eye diseases. Secondly, houses are often overcrowded and have poor air circulation. This makes it easier to catch diseases like flu, TB and diphtheria where infection enters through the throat. Thirdly, there are no drains, sewers or rubbish collection services. The resulting pools of stagnant water and heaps of household waste attract rats and insects, which can pass on diseases.

The government could do a lot to solve these problems. For example, they could supply clean, piped water to individual houses or, at least, to neighbourhoods. This would make drinking water safe and reduce infections. In addition, the authorities could provide householders with building materials to improve their conditions and educate them about the importance of ventilation. Lastly, the city council could construct drains and provide a rubbish collection service to reduce the risk of infections spread by rats and insects.

If the government took these steps, the result would be a safer, healthier environment. Furthermore, the improvements would also

lead to increased employment opportunities in areas such as construction, plumbing and rubbish disposal. It is time for politicians to come to the aid of the people who elected them!

Planning Your Own "Problem-Solution" Essay

1. Choose a problem (or set of problems) for your own essay. The following are a few examples of the sort of problems you might consider. Feel free to think of your own, but please discuss it with me first.

- global pollution
- the lack of lunchtime activities at UWCSEA
- problems with the canteen
- problems with bags and lockers
- endangered species
- the destruction of rainforests

2. Make notes to identify the problem/s. For example, notes for the "Shanty Town" essay would start like this:

PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no piped water (drinking + bathing water are dirty à diseases) • overcrowded houses, poor ventilation 	

3. Make a list of the solutions:

PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no piped water (drinking + bathing water are dirty à diseases) • overcrowded houses, poor ventilation 	<p>govt. provide piped water</p> <p>govt. help householders to build better houses)</p>

(Of course, these notes are fairly brief. Your actual essay will expand the points by adding far more details/examples.)

4. Write a first draft of your essay. Aim for clear, simple sentences. Use linking words/phrases if appropriate. Remember to use separate paragraphs for problems and solutions, as well as a final paragraph for your justification and call for action.
5. Share your essay with someone. Review it. Rewrite it. Edit it.

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