Prewriting

Understand the assignment

In your essay, you will describe how to solve a problem.

Brainstorm to find a topic

Start thinking of possible topics by talking with other students about problems that students commonly face, doing a free write, or making an idea map.

Choose a focus

With a specific problem in mind (e.g., heavy traffic), think about solutions for that problem. If you feel there is one solution that is the best, choose a few reasons that illustrate why. If there are many solutions that could work, then choose a few solutions to describe.

Outline

A problem/solution essay follows typical essay organization with an introduction paragraph, body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph.

Introduction

Your introduction should start by briefly describing the problem. You should give the reader any background information they need to be able to understand the problem. Consider where or when the problem occurs, who is affected by the problem, and what can happen if the problem is not solved.

At the end of your introduction paragraph, you should give your thesis. The thesis should respond to the problem by either presenting various solutions that may solve the problem or giving reasons that show why one solution is the best. Consider the examples below.

- Reasons to defend the best solution:
  - *The best way to solve heavy traffic is by using public transportation because it is more efficient, economical, and sustainable.*
- Various solutions:
  - *Knowledge and preparation can help international students participate actively in conversations rather than avoiding them.*

Remember that it is possible to write a thesis that implies the main points rather than listing them.

Here are some phrases that are useful for writing a problem/solution thesis:

- Public transportation and carpooling **can solve** traffic jams.
- Students who have a lot of stress **should**....
- Using public transportation **is the best solution** to solve traffic jams.
- **The most effective way** for students to deal with stress is....

Body

Your body paragraphs should respond to the problem by describing the solution(s). If you chose to write about multiple solutions, describe a different solution in each body paragraph. If you chose one solution, describe different reasons why your solution is good in each body paragraph. Look at the examples below and compare them to the example essays for this chapter.

One Ideal Solution	Various Solutions
TH: The best way to solve heavy traffic is by using public transportation because it is more efficient, economical, and reliable.	TH: Knowledge and preparation can help international students participate actively in conversations rather than avoiding them.
TS: Because public transportation is efficient, it is the best solution for traffic jams.	TS: One solution for students to develop more conversational confidence is to learn about current, relevant news.
TS: Another reason public transportation is the best solution for traffic is because it is economical.	TS: Students can also prepare for common conversational topics if they want to be more active participants in conversations.
TS: The third reason that public transportation is the best solution for traffic jams is because it is reliable.	TS: Another way to feel more confident is by listening to conversations.
	TS: A final way to overcome the habit of avoiding conversations is to refine language skills and prepare questions.

Conclusion

Your conclusion paragraph should start by restating your thesis. Then you should discuss your problem more generally and apply the solutions to the general context you established in your introduction. You can end with a closing statement that is a suggestion, prediction, opinion, or question. You can think of this part of a problem/solution essay as encouraging your reader to go make a change.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Brainstorm (free write)

Write for 10 minutes about problems you or your friends have experienced.

This writing does not need to have a specific structure or shape; your goal is simply to think of as many problems as you can think of.

Exercise 2: Revise thesis statements

Revise the thesis statements to be more effective for a problem/solution essay on a piece of paper.

1. Noisy roommates.
2. Eating healthily in college is difficult.
3. Cell phones should be prohibited in class.
4. Falling asleep while driving is a big cause of car accidents.
5. It causes many people to lose their family because they drive under the influence of alcohol and abuse drugs.

Exercise 3: Evaluate an outline.

Evaluate the outline. Is the thesis effective? Are the topic sentences effective? Be prepared to explain your answer.

- TH: Possible solutions are finding compatibility between roommates before moving in, setting clear rules, and talking.
- TS: First of all, finding compatible roommates.
- TS: Secondly, setting clear rules beforehand can help to have a healthier relationship between roommates.
- TS: Communicating seems logical, but in reality, it can be difficult.
- TH: To conclude, roommates aren't only difficult for international students.

Exercise 4: Make an outline.

On a piece of paper, make a simple outline for one of the problems below. Use the thesis that is given or make one of your own.

Problem	The computer lab closes at 5:00 p.m.
TH	Students who need computers for their homework should go to the BYU library to complete their assignments.
Problem	Students struggle to manage their time.
TH	In order to manage their time properly, students should either buy a paper planner to use, get a scheduling app for their phone, or use a Google calendar.

Exercise 5: Make an outline.

Make an outline for your essay in a word document.

Remember to make your outline as detailed as possible. This will make creating the paragraphs easier for you later.