

Problem Solving Activity: A Question Checklist For Problem Solving

This question checklist is a simple but effective problem solving activity. It's straightforward to use and easy to adapt to any specific circumstance. Using a set of structured questions encourages both broad and deep analysis of your situation or problem. The questions themselves may be simple, but when used as part of the checklist, they become a powerful management tool.



This tool uses a question hierarchy (see our article [Best Management Tool Ever? A Good Question](#) for more advice on how to build and use good management questions). In this hierarchy, "what" broadly states the situation or problem. "Why" is arguably the most powerful question you can ask. It forces you to consider the significance of the problem and thus the

nature of your response. It can be especially valuable when applied as part of the well known problem solving technique, 5 Whys. The repeated asking of "why?" can enable deep analysis of problems, essential for getting to root causes.

Next you should use "how", "where", "who" and "when". These questions are designed to both deepen and broaden analysis. When combined into a question checklist, they become both a tool for analysing and solving problems, and the basis for an action plan.

The table on the next page shows the structure of the question checklist, and includes some examples of more detailed, follow-up questions. It's easy to develop a checklist to suit your own situation but don't just use the question checklist for problem solving. You could also use it for routine situation analysis or to consider how you might deal with opportunities.



Question Checklist

WHAT

- What (exactly) do I want to achieve?
- What are the facts?
- What would happen if no decision was made or solution found?
- What do I need in order to find a solution?

WHY

- Why do I want to achieve a solution?
- Why did the problem or opportunity arise?
- Why do I need to find a solution or way forward at all?
- Ask 5 Whys

HOW

- How will the situation be different?
- How relevant is the information I am gathering?
- How can I find out more?
- How can I involve relevant people?

WHERE

- Where did the issue arise?
- Where does it impact?
- Is the "where" important?
- If so, why?

WHO

- Who am I trying to please?
- Who cares about this situation? Who is affected?
- Who is involved (information, help, action)?
- Who needs to be informed?

WHEN

- When did the issue arise?
- When do we need to act?
- By when must it be resolved?

Problem Solving Activity – Using The Question Checklist Tool

Use the question checklist to build a set of questions for the problem or opportunity you're investigating.

- Spend some time thinking about the checklist yourself, before briefing your team. You may find it useful to read our "T-break" article: [Career Builder: Building Your Own Education](#) for some tips on sharing knowledge in the workplace
- Schedule one or more meetings with your team, to generate ideas about the problem or situation.
- Starting with the “what” questions, discuss all the responses and agree a common understanding of the situation or problem. Flip chart the feedback.
- Spend as much time as you need asking "why".
- Repeat the activity for each of the primary questions. This may be easier in small groups or teams, for more complex situation.
- What next - decide before the team session what you intend to do next, subject to what is discovered in the analysis and feedback. End with actions to be completed, either in summary, or in preparation for any subsequent meeting. Ensure these are SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bounded.

