

# Problem-Solution Essay

## INTRODUCTION

Question creates interest

Statement of problem

Thesis statement

## BODY

Expanded description of problem, with evidence

### Our Children Can't Read

Is Bowen County's population less intelligent than it used to be? When I first saw headlines such as "Reading Scores Rise in State, Not in Bowen County" or "State Reading Scores Rise Three Points in Five Years, Bowen County Scores Stagnate," I was tempted to answer, "Yes." These reading scores, so widely reported in the newspaper and on television, are based on reading tests given to third- and fifth-grade students. The scores in Bowen County are, in fact, slowly improving, but they are still lagging behind scores in the rest of the state. Our children are not less intelligent than children in other counties; however, they might need help in increasing their motivation. Fortunately, simple solutions such as "book buddy," adult/child literacy, library outreach, and high school volunteer-tutor programs can help put our children on the road to reading recovery.

What has caused this stagnation in reading abilities? Some educators cite statistics on the lengthening workweek and suggest that parents just don't have as much time to read to their children as they used to. Still other educators point to an increase in the number of Bowen County students who were not held out of the reading tests. This year, more students with exceptional education needs were tested than in previous years.

Whatever the reason, it seems that children who don't see others read and who don't read themselves aren't very likely to realize the

## Problem-Solution Essay *continued*

First solution

Outcome

Second solution

value of reading. This does appear to be the case in Bowen County. Interviews with twenty local elementary-school teachers indicate that many of Bowen County's young children today are not very interested in learning to read. If a lack of role models and experience is partially responsible for our students' declining reading abilities, then what solutions are possible within our existing institutions and their overburdened budgets? Fortunately, there seem to be several relatively inexpensive remedies that might help solve the problem.

To provide more models of readers for young children, all the Bowen County schools could adopt the "book buddy" program. The program works like this: each kindergarten and first-grade class is paired with a fifth- or sixth-grade class. Then, each younger child is paired with an older one. Once a week for thirty minutes the two classes meet, and the "book buddies" spend time reading and talking about books of their own choice. This program gives the younger children additional reading role models, and it gives the older children an important sense of self-esteem as well.

Marginally literate and illiterate parents might also become reading role models for their children. Our library, which already sponsors a literacy program, could expand its services to include an adult/child literacy program like one already operating in Indiana, Pennsylvania. According to a recent School Library Journal article, volunteer tutors in this program are trained to help parents learn to read with their children. Once a

## Problem-Solution Essay *continued*

Most basic solution

week parents meet one-on-one with a tutor at the library and learn to read one easy-reading book. Then, during the last fifteen minutes of class, each parent reads this book to his or her child or children.

More solutions

Many literate parents are too busy to read regularly for pleasure and don't serve as reading role models for their children. Ms. Atkins, the reading specialist at Culvert Elementary, urges them to find other ways to be role models for reading. For example, she suggests that parents read recipes or directions aloud to children while fixing meals. Or, parents might read washing instruction tags aloud while sorting laundry.

More solutions

Children with more reading role models will also gain more reading experience. To create additional reading opportunities, the library could modify and extend its services. For example, it could begin an outreach program for day-care facilities and providers. Rather than hold story hours only in the library, librarians could regularly visit day-care sites for story hours. In addition, the library could begin a special program for home day-care providers, creating specially prepared boxes of age-appropriate books for them to check out. Furthermore, if the library does begin a parent/child literacy program, the children of parents in the program could attend a story hour during the time their parents are being tutored.

Experts say that children who lack role models in reading and experience with reading also need extra instruction in reading skills. Using high school volunteers as tutors would help solve this problem.

## Problem-Solution Essay *continued*

CONCLUSION

Problem restatement

Summary of solutions

Outlook

High school students who have at least a C average could volunteer for thirty minutes each week, during their study hall or lunch period. A survey of two hundred high school students indicates that eighty percent of them would volunteer. And most of the elementary school teachers in the county are enthusiastic about the prospect of more volunteers.

There is a growing gap between Bowen County's reading scores and those of the other counties, but we can begin to close that gap by motivating our children to read. The solutions aren't drastic. Adopt a "book buddy" program. Set up an adult/child literacy program. Create a library outreach program. Create a high school volunteer-tutor program. These programs cost almost nothing and ask of us only our time. The children of this county are its most precious resource. Programs such as these might help us preserve that resource.

# Problem-Solution Essay

## Definition

A **problem-solution** essay explains a problem and presents ways in which the problem might be solved. A good problem-solution essay makes a complex problem simple to understand, and explores all of the possible solutions to the problem.

Many problem-solution essays use the structure illustrated in the framework below. Print this framework and use it as a guide when you write your own problem-solution essay.

## Framework

## Directions and Explanations

**Introduction**

- Create interest.
- Establish the problem.
- Include a clear thesis statement.

**Get readers involved** Make your readers curious about your topic. Use a question, vivid description, anecdote, or quotation to draw them in.

**Use a complete thesis** Include a thesis statement that not only summarizes the problem, but that also mentions the solutions your essay will discuss.



**Body**

- Present an expanded description of the problem.
- Discuss solutions in detail.

**Describe the problem** Describe all of the causes or parts of the problem. Be sure to use evidence to support your explanations, including expert opinions and statistics. If you use sources, be sure to cite them.

**Present the solutions** Describe each potential solution. You can present solutions in order from most important to least important, or vice versa. If you have several solutions of equal importance, you might organize them chronologically or by type.



**Conclusion**

- Restate the problem.
- Summarize the solutions.
- Provide an outlook for the future.

**Finish up** Wrap up your essay by restating your thesis statement, recapping each solution in a brief summary, and leaving your readers with something to think about.