

UNIT  
2.10

# Problems and Solutions

Writing tasks frequently ask students to examine a problem and evaluate a range of solutions. This unit explains ways in which this kind of text can be organised. Note that some of the language is similar to that practised in Unit 2.1 Argument and Discussion.

## 1 Paragraph structure

- Study the organisation of the following paragraph.

### How Can Road Congestion be Reduced?

Currently, roads are often congested, which is expensive in terms of delays to the movement of people and freight. It is commonly suggested that building more roads, or widening existing ones, would ease the traffic jams. But not only is the cost of such work high, but the construction process adds to the congestion, while the resulting extra road space may encourage extra traffic. Therefore, constructing more roads is unlikely to solve the problem, and other remedies, such as road pricing or greater use of public transport, should be examined.

**Problem:** Currently, roads are often congested, which is expensive in terms of delays to the movement of people and freight.

**Solution A:** It is commonly suggested that building more roads, or widening existing ones, would ease the traffic jams.

**Arguments against Solution A:** But not only is the cost of such work high, but the construction process adds to the congestion, while the resulting extra road space may encourage extra traffic.

**Conclusions in favour of Solutions B and C:** . . . other remedies, such as road pricing or greater use of public transport, should be examined.

## 2 Alternative structure

The same ideas could be reordered to arrive at a different conclusion:

### **How Can Road Congestion be Reduced?**

Currently, roads are often congested, which is expensive in terms of delays to the movement of people and freight. It is commonly suggested that building more roads, or widening existing ones, would ease the traffic jams. This remedy is criticised for being expensive and liable to lead to more road use, which may be partly true, yet the alternatives are equally problematic. Road pricing has many practical difficulties, while people are reluctant to use public transport. There is little alternative to a road building programme except increasing road chaos.

**Problem:** Currently, roads are often congested, which is expensive in terms of delays to the movement of people and freight.

**Solution A:** It is commonly suggested that building more roads, or widening existing ones, would ease the traffic jams.

**Arguments against Solution A:** This remedy is criticised for being expensive and liable to lead to more road use, which may be partly true . . .

**Solutions B and C, and arguments against:** . . . yet the alternatives are equally problematic. Road pricing has many practical difficulties, while people are reluctant to use public transport.

**Conclusion in favour of Solution A:** There is little alternative to a road building programme except increasing road chaos.

## 3 Practice A

- Analyse the following paragraph in a similar way.

### **Controlling Carbon Emissions**

There is general agreement that rising levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the earth's atmosphere, caused by burning fossil fuels, are contributing to global warming. It is argued that this trend can be reversed by generating energy from renewable sources, such as wind-power or solar. However, these sources tend to be unreliable and are often more expensive than using oil or coal. An alternative approach is to increase energy efficiency, for example by insulating homes better, so that demand for energy is reduced. Since this method is often quite cost-efficient it may prove to be more effective.

**Problem:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Solution A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Argument against Solution A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Solution B:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion in favour of Solution B:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Rewrite the paragraph using your own ideas to reach your own conclusion.

## 4 Vocabulary

The following words can be used as synonyms for *problem* and *solution*.

three main <b>difficulties</b> have arisen . . .	the best <b>remedy</b> for this may be . . .
the main <b>challenge</b> faced by nurses . . .	two <b>answers</b> have been put forward . . .
one of the <b>concerns</b> during the recession . . .	another <b>suggestion</b> is . . .
the new process created two <b>questions</b> . . .	Matheson's <b>proposal</b> was finally accepted.
the team faced six <b>issues</b> . . .	this was <b>rectified/solved</b> by . . .
our principal <b>worry/dilemma</b> was . . .	

## 5 Practice B

- Use the following points to build an argument in one paragraph.

**Topic:** University expansion

**Problem:** Demand for university places is growing, leading to overcrowding in lectures and seminars

**Solution A:** Increase fees to reduce demand

**Argument against A:** Unfair to poorer students

**Solution B:** Government pays to expand universities

**Argument against B:** Unfair to average taxpayer who would be subsidising the education of a minority who will earn high salaries

**Conclusion:** Government should subsidise poorer students

## 6 Practice C

- Think of a similar problem in your subject area. Complete the table and write a paragraph that leads to a conclusion.

**Topic:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Problem:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Solution A:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Argument against A:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Solution B:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Argument for/against B:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**(Solution C):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

