

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 (CO₂) 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 difficulties have arisen . . .	the best remedy for this may be . . .
the main challenge faced by nurses . . .	two answers have been put forward . . .
one of the concerns during the recession . . .	another suggestion is . . .
the new process created two questions . . .	Matheson's proposal was finally accepted.
the team faced six issues . . .	this was rectified/solved by . . .
our principal worry/dilemma 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: _____

