

Problem Solving Messages (PS)

You may send a "problem solving" (PS) message to the instructor, to communicate about any problem that arises during the course. Personal problem solving provides us with a mechanism for flexibility and a "safety-net" in case unforeseen events unfold. You can earn points for resolving problems directly related to upgrades of course materials and procedures (see details below).

How do you send and receive credit for problem solving message? (PS)

I. Framing your Problem

First, think about and answer the following 4 questions .

1. What is your perception of how to define the problem?
2. What good aspects of the situation are not problems?
3. What options might be considered to address the problem?
4. Which option do you favor, and why?

Second, communicate with the person who shares the problem .

1. Ask the other person if s/he perceives the problem differently.
2. Ask the other person if other options should be considered.
3. Ask the other person which alternative is favored and why.
4. Together, decide on the best option for both.

Source: Weeks, D. 1992. The eight essential steps to conflict resolution. J.P. Tarcher, Inc: Los Angeles.

Example: Personal PS (no points)

1. **PROBLEM:** My horses opened the gate and are out on the highway so I may not be able to complete the quiz in time.
2. **GOOD ASPECTS:** We can drop 2 of the 12 quiz grades, providing flexibility for emergencies like this.
3. **OPTIONS:** #A ignore the situation and complete the quiz, #B not take the quiz and count this as a "grace day", #C rush to get the horses back and take the quiz
4. **PREFERRED OPTION:** #B; the disadvantage of #A is that I may lose the horses and face a lawyer if they cause a car crash; disadvantage of #C is that I probably won't do well on the quiz or on handling my horses

Example: Shared PS (earn up to 4 points)

1. **PROBLEM:** A link to the syllabus is not provided on the Home page:
2. **GOOD ASPECTS:** In looking for the syllabus, I went to the Course Description page and found it there, plus I learned more about the course on that page.
3. **OPTIONS:**
 - #A: add a link to the Syllabus pdf on the left menu bar
 - #B: change the link "Course Description" to "Syllabus" on the top menu bar
 - #C no change, and communicate with each student about this by email or chat, answering PS messages that result from confusion

4. PREFERRED OPTION:#A: the disadvantage of #B is that students may not realize that the syllabus is a description of the course; the disadvantage of #C is that it starts off with confusion and its better to "put the best foot forward"

II. Sending Problem Solving Message

1. Depending on your access to a computer, there are several options to send a PS message:
 - OPTION 1: using the format of the examples illustrated above, send the message by WebCT email or other email: (j-packard@tamu.edu)
 - OPTION 2: write the message and FAX it to 800-662-1751
 - OPTION 3: leave voice mail at 979-220-4115
2. There are several ways to continue dialogue about your PS message:
 - OPTION 1: communicate by email if it is not a sensitive matter (j-packard@tamu.edu)
 - OPTION 2: communicate by phone if you need to discuss options and want a rapid answer

III. Earn Points

For participation points, you may earn up to 4 points per complete "shared PS message" (see examples above). Partial points may be earned by messages that just identify the problem (1 pt), identify the problem and only one solution (2 pts), or identify the problem, what is working, and only one solution (3 pts).

Personal PS messages (see example above) will not be rewarded with points; however, they will be taken into consideration in assigning the final grade. For example, if the total score is on the borderline between an "A" and a "B", the PS messages will be reviewed. If there is evidence that unforeseen circumstances during the course may have affected cumulative grade point such that it does not accurately reflect your overall performance, such documentation will be considered in assigning final grades. The reason for this procedure is to reinforce transferable problem solving skills, which are a positive asset in any workplace.

IV. When?

You may send a PS message at any time before, during, or after the course is scheduled. On the **first course meeting**, we will focus on procedures for positive problem-solving. Bring your questions to chat for answers and clarifications about how to use the PS procedures.

Before sending a PS message, please check the main threaded discussion on WebCT , and web site links, including the FAQ lists. Hopefully you will find an answer to your questions. However, if the answer is hard to find for you, then chances are that it is also hard for others. Your input can help us upgrade these course materials so they are as effective and efficient as possible. We will need to know exactly which page is causing a problem, so please include the specific URL.