

THINKING YOUR WAY THRU IT

A Strategy for Problem-solving

This simple strategy works best when you take each problem step-by-step. Some steps are easy, some are hard. But once you use this method a few times, you will begin to internalize it, and your problem-solving skills will be good enough to tackle just about any problem that might arise.

- 1) **Define** the problem—*stating the issue clearly*, in your own words, is the beginning of any useful life skill. What, exactly, is the nature of the problem?

Example: Let's say you're required to buy a book for a class you're enrolled in. Put it simply: "I need a book for my English class."

- 2) **Brainstorm** your options—before rushing to a possible solution (or panicking because you don't have one) take a moment to *imagine* as many possible approaches to the problem as you can.

Example: Have you ever obtained a book before? If so, how? Brainstorm all the places people find books. For instance, maybe you once checked a book out of a school library, so a school or public library may be an option. You are also aware that books are for sale on-line, from Amazon.com and other internet sources.

- 3) **Research**—this may include a Google search, a trip to your local public library, or a brief discussion with an expert—someone you think might be familiar with your particular problem.

Example: Since you don't normally buy books, you ask an acquaintance who you know is an avid reader. This

acquaintance tells you where his favorite bookstore is located. Your friend also reminds you that books for college courses are usually for sale in the college bookstore.

- 4) **Decide** how you will solve the problem—brainstorming and/or researching should result in you deciding *which* of your possible *options is best*. In other words, which solution will solve your problem satisfactorily?

Example: you shop for the book on-line and compare the price of the book at Amazon.com with the price at the college bookstore. You notice that the bookstore charges a few dollars more, but decide it's worth it to get the book immediately, without the added shipping cost.

- 5) **Act** upon your decision—once you've made your decision, act upon it.

Example: you purchase a copy of the book at the college bookstore. Problem solved! You can now study the book as you choose.

- 6) **Reflect** upon the process—don't skip this final step; it is the key to learning this important skill. What can you learn from the way you tackled this particular problem that might help you when the next problem arises?

Helpful Tip: Solve *one problem at a time*. Occasionally, when working your way thru this process, you get distracted by other related problems. For example, maybe you've decided how you will acquire your book, but you don't know how you will pay for it. First, solve the problem of where to find it, then repeat the process to solve the new problem of how to fund it, using the same process. With practice, the strategy becomes more automatic, and faster—like any new skill.