

The Goldilocks Problem

In this classic fairy tale a little girl named Goldilocks, goes for a walk in the forest and comes upon a house. No one is home so she goes through their food and property until she solves her comfort and hunger problem by finding the things that are just right for her.

Clearly identifying and communicating the problem lays a strong foundation for a company, a project, an organization. If you can't explain the problem to your team, customers, and stakeholders, how do they know what you are doing? A problem statement that is too narrow won't offer enough room to explore creative solutions. And a broadly scoped statement won't provide an idea where to start. It must be just right.

1. Start by taking a first stab at writing your design challenge in one short statement.

Use a marker (preferably a Sharpie™) and write a short and easy to remember statement that conveys the problem you are solving. Use scrap paper if you need more space but don't spend too much time on this. There are more steps for refining the statement!



Problem Statement:

2. Now, take a stab at framing it as a design question.

Begin your question with “How Might We”

How might we

3. Explain the “top of the mountain” for this company or project.

Think of the ultimate impact you’re trying to have. How will you know you have achieved everything you can imagine and then “it’s all down hill from here”?

4. Write down five possible solutions in 10 minutes (or less).

You’re likely on the right track if you can come up with five solutions. If not, try “If you can’t draw it, it can’t be done,” or work on personas to get some clarity and come back and restart this exercise.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

5. List the context you’re working in and the primary constraints that you’re facing.

Try not to think about money or time too much. Consider technology, resources, laws, market understanding, education, culture, etc.

6. Now rewrite your problem statement with all this in mind.
Make it short and sweet AND clearly communicate the problem.

7. Assess your problem statement against these 3 criteria:

1. Ultimate impact:

2. Allow for a variety of solutions:

3. Take into account constraints and context:

8. Do you need to rewrite that statement again or you are good to move on?

Next Step

Who has this problem? How do they deal with it now?