



## ACADEMIC SUPPORT

**Cuesta  
Home**

**Academic Support  
Center**

**Academic  
Support**

**Disabled Student Programs &  
Services**

**Tutorial  
Services**

**Enhanced  
TOC >>**

**Uses of  
Critical  
Thinking >>**

**Evaluating  
Information  
>>**

**Recognizing  
Propaganda  
>>**

**Analyzing  
Information  
>>**

**Recognizing  
Viewpoints >>**

**Problem  
Solving >>**

**Responsible  
Thinker >>**

## Appreciate the Complexities Involved in Decision-Making & Problem Solving

- Develop evidence to support views
- Analyze situations carefully
- Discuss subjects in an organized way
- Predict the consequences of actions
- Weigh alternatives
- Generate and organize ideas
- Form and apply concepts
- Design systematic plans of action

### A 5 Step Problem Solving Strategy

1. Specify the problem - a first step to solving a problem is to identify it as specifically as possible. It involves evaluating the present state and determining how it differs from the goal state.
2. Analyze the problem - analyzing the problem involves learning as much as you can about it. It may be necessary to look beyond the obvious, surface situation, to stretch your imagination and reach for more creative options.
  - seek other perspectives
  - be flexible in your analysis
  - consider various strands of impact
  - brainstorm about all possibilities and implications
  - research problems for which you lack complete information. Get help.
3. Formulate possible solutions - identify a wide range of possible solutions.
  - try to think of all possible solutions
  - be creative
  - consider similar problems and how you have solved them
4. Evaluate possible solutions - weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each solution. Think through each solution and consider how, when, and where you could accomplish each. Consider both immediate and long-

term results. Mapping your solutions can be helpful at this stage.

5. Choose a solution - consider 3 factors:
  - compatibility with your priorities • amount of risk
  - practicality

## Keys to Problem Solving

- Think aloud - problem solving is a cognitive, mental process. Thinking aloud or talking yourself through the steps of problem solving is useful. Hearing yourself think can facilitate the process.
- Allow time for ideas to "gel" or consolidate. If time permits, give yourself time for solutions to develop. Distance from a problem can allow you to clear your mind and get a new perspective.
- Talk about the problem - describing the problem to someone else and talking about it can often make a problem become more clear and defined so that a new solution will surface.

## Decision Making Strategies

Decision making is a process of identifying and evaluating choices. We make numerous decisions every day and our decisions may range from routine, every-day types of decisions to those decisions which will have far reaching impacts. The types of decisions we make are routine, impulsive, and reasoned. Deciding what to eat for breakfast is a routine decision; deciding to do or buy something at the last minute is considered an impulsive decision; and choosing your college major is, hopefully, a reasoned decision. College coursework often requires you to make the latter, or reasoned decisions.

Decision making has much in common with problem solving. In problem solving you identify and evaluate solution paths; in decision making you make a similar discovery and evaluation of alternatives. The crux of decision making, then, is the careful identification and evaluation of alternatives. As you weigh alternatives, use the following suggestions:

- Consider the outcome each is likely to produce, in both the short term and the long term.
- Compare alternatives based on how easily you can accomplish each.
- Evaluate possible negative side effects each may produce.
- Consider the risk involved in each.

- Be creative, original; don't eliminate alternatives because you have not heard or used them before.

An important part of decision making is to predict both short-term and long-term outcomes for each alternative. You may find that while an alternative seems most desirable at the present, it may pose problems or complications over a longer time period.



[Previous Page](#)   [Back to Table of Contents](#)   [Next Page](#)

[Return to Top](#)

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