Activity Type

Writing Exercises: gap-fill, categorising, identifying, brainstorming, listing, creating an essay outline, writing an essay

Focus

Problem solution essay block structure

Aim

To be introduced to problem solution essay block structure and attempt a problem solution essay writing practice.

Preparation

Make one copy of the four-page worksheet for each student.

Level

Upper-intermediate (B2)

Time

90 minutes

Introduction

In this problem solution essays worksheet, students are introduced to problem solution essay structure and attempt a problem solution essay writing practice.

Procedure

Give each student a copy of the four-page worksheet.

First, students read a description of problem solution essays and compare two structures for organising a problem solution essay - block structure and chain structure.

Students then complete sentences with phrases used for problem solution essays.

Exercise A - Answer key

1. f   2. b   3. d   4. a   5. g   6. h   7. c   8. e

Next, students arrange the phrases into a table according to their function and add any additional phrases they may know to the table.

Exercise B - Answer key

Indicate a problem - a growing need, a growing problem, in danger

Indicate a solution - response to, tackled by, to deal with, viable solution, these measures

After that, students read an example problem solution essay and underline language that indicates a problem or a solution.

Exercise C - Answer key

Problem - very challenging, poorly written, share many ... shortcomings, crucial errors, not addressing, a failure to, significant issue, a final problem

Solution - to help, may be useful to, effectively address, effective solutions, employ, make sure, need to, should only, to ensure, should create, making sure, to improve, making use of, to deal with, can obtain, identify

Next, with a partner, students discuss three problems and think of some solutions. Encourage students to take notes listing each problem, sub-problems and solutions.

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Procedure continued

Students then choose one problem and create a block structure essay outline on the topic.

Following that, students use the outline to write their own problem solution essay.

Before the students start writing, elicit some important requirements for the essay and write them on the board.

1. Use block structure rather than chain structure.
2. Discuss problems first and solutions second.
3. Make use of language that clearly indicates problems and solutions.
4. Make use of transition signals to make clear links between key points.

Finally, students swap their essay with another student and do a peer review focusing on such things as essay structure, vocabulary and grammar usage, sentence structure, etc.

The purpose of a problem solution essay is to identify and explain a problem to show its importance and then to offer some valid solutions to fix it. The structure of a problem solution essay is similar to that used in a cause and effect essay. You can use a block structure or a chain structure as in the table below. This worksheet focuses only on block structure.

Block structure	Chain structure
Introduction Problem 1 Problem 2 Solution 1 Solution 2 Conclusion	Introduction Problem 1 Solution 1 Problem 2 Solution 2 Conclusion

A. Complete the sentences with the phrases below.

a. to deal with

b. a growing need

c. response to

d. tackled by

e. viable solution

f. a growing problem

g. these measures

h. in danger

1. Inflation is .... facing many economies today.

2. In today's classroom, there is .... for ways to effectively engage students.

3. Such problems can be .... employing innovative solutions.

4. Governments now have .... the issue effectively.

5. .... have shown to be effective in the past.

6. Without a comprehensive plan, this project is .... of failing.

7. A potential .... the issue is to increase teacher salaries.

8. A final .... would be to partner with another company in the sector.

B. Place the phrases from Exercise B into the table below according to their function. Add any other phrases you know for each function.

To indicate a problem	To indicate a solution

C. Read the problem solution essay and <u>underline</u> the words and phrase that indicate either a problem or a solution. Use the the examples below as a guide.

Going abroad to obtain an English language degree is an increasingly popular option for many students around the world whose first language is not English. In order to successfully complete their qualifications, most courses require students to produce well-written academic essays. This can be <u>very challenging</u> not only for second language learners but also for native English speakers. Therefore, it is not uncommon for many first-year students to produce poorly written academic essays. <u>To help</u> students write better essays, it may be useful to examine the problem in more detail and suggest some effective solutions.

Essays written by first-year university students share many common shortcomings. One of the most crucial errors students make when writing an essay is not addressing the question directly. This mostly stems from a failure to fully comprehend the requirements of the task. This can result in an essay that includes many irrelevant points. Thus, although the essay might be well written, it receives a low grade. Another significant issue that many student essays have is incoherent writing. In other words, ideas are not logically structured and therefore not easy to follow. Ideas may also not be fully developed or explained. An effective essay should be easy to read, and the main points should be made clear. A final problem many students have with their essays is poor vocabulary usage. This might include the overuse of certain words, which makes the text sound repetitive, and using informal language that goes against academic style rules. Constant repetition of certain words can make an essay difficult to read and all universities require essays that a written in a formal and objective tone.

To effectively address these problems, there are a number of relevant and effective solutions students can employ. Firstly, to make sure that the question is being directly addressed, students need to identify the key task words in the question. Task words direct students and tell them how to go about answering a question. For example, if the question asks the student to 'discuss', then they need to examine an issue from both sides. However, if the question uses the word 'argue' or 'persuade', then the students should only examine the issue from one side. Secondly, to ensure that an essay is well structured and coherent, students should create an outline of the key ideas they want to discuss. They should begin by making a simple thesis statement and then listing main points and supporting ideas in note form, making sure that they all directly link to the thesis statement and follow some logical order. Finally, to improve their use of vocabulary, students should start by making use of a thesaurus and replacing overly repeated words with appropriate synonyms. To deal with the use of informal language, students can obtain an academic style guide and familiarize themselves with the most common rules.

To sum up, although students may find it challenging to write effective essays, it is often simple enough to identify the main issues and then find convenient solutions to deal with them. Students may often not fulfill the requirements of the writing task, may produce poorly organized essays, and use vocabulary ineffectively. However, if students take the time to analyze the question, use an outline to plan, and make use of a thesaurus and a style guide, they can quickly improve their writing.

D. In pairs, discuss the problems below and think of some possible solutions. Each solution should relate directly to a specific sub-problem.

1. Rising income inequality
2. Homeless dogs and cats
3. Plagiarism and collusion in universities

E. Choose a problem from Exercise D and create a block structure essay outline that breaks the problem down into sub-problems and gives some possible solutions.

Thesis Statement: ....

     Problem

Sub-problem 1: ....

Details: ....

Sub-problem 2: ....

Details: ....

     Solutions

Solution 1: ....

Details: ....

Solution 2: ....

Details: ....

F. Now, use your outline to write an essay that discusses your chosen problem and offers some solutions. Remember to match a solution to a specific sub-problem and use language that indicates a problem or a solution.

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