GET THAT JOB
Evidencing problem-solving skills

Problem-solving skills are attractive to potential employers. This guide highlights the need to be able to provide evidence of how you undertake a new challenge and bring it round to a successful conclusion.

The professionals and graduates interviewed in the Standing Out videos said that they valued employees who could solve problems. Much of problem-solving is to do with attitude and having a positive attitude to work-place dilemmas is a much-cited quality.

Problem-solving involves being able to get to the bottom of something, rising to a challenge, being analytical and tenacious. Employees are sought who can think on their feet and tackle problems in a systematic and measured manner.

How to demonstrate and evidence problem-solving skills

It is your ability to show an understanding of the process of solving a problem as well as being able to describe concrete examples that will be required in order to answer interview questions fully. As part of your degree programme you will have undoubtedly undertaken problem-solving. It is important that you reflect on your course and seek some authentic, concrete examples that you would be able to draw from to answer questions in depth.

You may have used a technique on your course known as Problem-Based Learning, (PBL). It is a technique that would have trained you to activate prior knowledge whilst developing analytical skills.

IDEAL model of problem-solving

Bransford and Stein (1984) identified the IDEAL model of problem-solving which can be used within a range of contexts.

1. Identify the problem. What are the essential elements of the problem? Is it a problem that is similar to others that you may have solved?
2. Define the problem through thinking about it and sorting relevant information.
3. Explore solutions. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each solution?
4. Act on strategies
5. Look back and evaluate the effects of your activity.

Think of an example of a problem which you had to deal with in your academic life, at a workplace or in your private life. In selecting examples ensure that you try to make it as relevant as possible to the role you are applying for.

- **Identify a problem** - Describe in detail the nature of the problem in the context of other problems you had encountered.
- **Define a problem** - Describe how you analysed that problem and identified the key elements which had to be addressed.
- **Explore solutions** - Describe the various options for tackling the problem, listing their pros and cons.
- **Act on strategies** - Describe what you did to solve the problem.
• **Look back and evaluate** - Describe the outcomes, reflecting on the success or otherwise of your actions.

**Examples**
- Your computer has stopped working and you have an urgent presentation to prepare for the following day.
- A supplier has not delivered an order you placed for an imminent event.
- The external speaker you booked for a cultural activity has let you down at the last moment.
- You are dissatisfied with your child’s progress at school.
- As a wheelchair user you find getting to university on public transport a problem.

**References**
