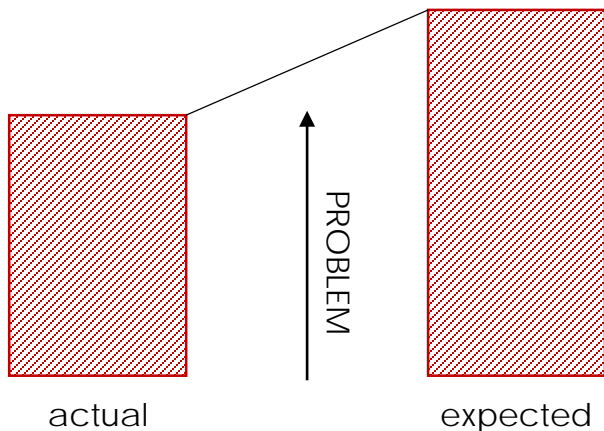


How to Write a Problem Statement

The first step in problem solving: clearly state the problem you are trying to solve.

It's important for everyone to agree on the problem that is being addressed

A problem is a gap in performance (*actual versus expected*)



You should not approach a problem with a solution in mind: a problem statement is not a lack of something or the solution you would put in place.

For example: you may be inclined to state: "Lack of standard work creates inefficiencies and delays in the process." Standard work in this case is a possible solution. A better statement is: "Variation in the process causes inefficiencies and delays."

A well-defined problem statement should address these questions:

1. What is the problem?
2. Why is it a problem?
3. How does the problem impact the customer & the process?
4. When does the problem occur?
5. Where does the problem take place?

Note: It is helpful to be able to support the answers to these questions with data, but often the analytical component isn't yet available this early in the process. Anecdotal observation is a good starting place.

Example #1

"Psychiatric patients bound for UNI were waiting in the ED, sometimes up to 8 hours. Multiple factors contribute to delaying patients' acceptance and transfer to UNI: the speed of acceptance, doctor to doctor communication, nurse to nurse communication, etc. Delaying transferring the patient to UNI from the ED meant a delay in providing the patient with the right treatment resources"

- **What is the problem?** Psychiatric patients bound for UNI were waiting in the ED, sometimes up to 8 hours.
- **Why is it a problem?** Delaying transferring the patient to UNI from the ED meant a delay in providing the patient with the right treatment resources
- **How does the problem impact the customer/process?** Delays in patient treatment
- **When does the problem occur?** When patients are being admitted from the ED to UNI
- **Where does the problem take place?** At the ED, psychiatric patients being admitted at UNI

Example #2

"Women presenting for screening mammography at the Huntsman Cancer Institute had to wait an average of 6 days to receive final normal results; for the 97-98% of women who can be given normal results after routine and/or additional views only, this in an unnecessary delay. Delay in receiving results, particularly if additional views are required, are a major source of anxiety (harm) for this population; Time to results serves as a surrogate target measure for reducing harm."

- **What is the problem?** Women presenting for screening mammography had to wait an average of 6 days to receive final normal results
- **Why is it a problem?** For the 97-98% of women who can be given normal results after routine and/or additional views only, this in an unnecessary delay
- **How does the problem impact the customer/process?** Delay in receiving results, are a major source of anxiety (harm) for this population
- **When does the problem occur?** When patients are waiting for the results of their screening mammogram
- **Where does the problem take place?** At the Huntsman Cancer Institute Mammography Department