

What Is a Good PBL Problem?



Institute for Transforming
Undergraduate Education
University of Delaware



Good PBL Problems...

- relate to real world, motivate students
- require decision-making or judgments
- are multi-page, multi-stage
- are designed for group-solving
- pose open-ended initial questions that encourage discussion
- incorporate course content objectives, higher order thinking, other skills



Rubric to Evaluate PBL Problems

| Criteria | Descriptors | | |
|-------------------|--|---|---|
| | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Realism | Based on an actual or fictionalized real-world situation linking topic to learner. | Contrived or contains unrealistic elements that decrease credibility. | Unrealistic, lacking relevant context. |
| Content | Addresses significant conceptual issues; directly related to major content goals. | Encourages superficial rather than in-depth understanding concepts. | Relevance of topic peripheral or not apparent. |
| Engagement | Stimulates discussion and inquiry through its relevance and presentation. | Generates limited or superficial discussion; provokes little curiosity. | Lacks a "hook"; obscure or pedantic presentation. |



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|-------------------|---|--|---|
| | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Complexity | Appropriately challenging; group effort and cooperation required; some ambiguity appropriate; integrates multiple concepts. | Difficult but may encourage a "divide and conquer" approach. Concepts not well integrated. | Solution accessible to most students working alone; focused on single concept. |
| Resolution | Open to multiple resolutions or multiple pathways to solution, depending on student assumptions and reasoned arguments. | Resolution is more obvious but allows reasonable opportunity for judgment and discussion. | One right answer is expected; limited opportunity for analysis and decision making. |



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|------------------|---|--|--|
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| Structure | Progressive disclosure via multiple stages, builds on existing student knowledge. | Staging does not flow well; transition could be improved. | Too much or too little information provided at once; short cuts thinking/research. |
| Questions | Limited in number, short, and open-ended; encourage deeper understanding. | Most are directive; preempt student-generated learning issues. | Lead to "yes-no" answers rather than thoughtful discussion. |
| Research | Promotes substantive research using multiple resources. | Research limited to textbook material. | Limited necessity for research. |