

Learning and Teaching Approach: Overview of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

The essence of problem-based learning (PBL) is that it is a group approach that encourages you to become a self-directed and independent learner.

As the name suggests, the approach is based on providing you with a problem or issue that you will encounter in everyday organizational life and you are expected to explore the nature of the problem, analyse the issues, and use relevant theoretical frameworks to research possible solutions, dilemmas and conflicts.

In this way, you are encouraged to become more responsible for the learning achieved and your tutor becomes a facilitator in that learning. Instead of providing answers, your tutor will encourage useful lines of questioning and, only where necessary, provide some problem solving structure.

Since PBL is directed by you, it both taps into your existing knowledge and it allows you to identify and explore gaps in your knowledge. This in turn leads to a greater self-awareness and provides students with not only new knowledge in the area being explored, but also encourages the development of problem solving and other skills. In particular PBL:

- Fosters a deeper approach to learning
- Promotes a wider range of study methods
- Encourages greater use of library resources, both physical and virtual
- Develops greater knowledge retention
- Encourages you to exhibit stronger knowledge application skills
- Ensures that you work within strict time limits
- Encourages effective teamwork
- Encourages effective communication

Thus, you can acquire knowledge and develop skills that are useful in your everyday lives and in your jobs or careers either now or after higher education. Moreover, since the PBL approach is based on group work, it will also facilitate the development of interpersonal skills, including listening skills, conflict management and negotiation.

The PBL Process

The PBL process can initially seem frustrating to those who have only worked in traditional teaching environments. The goal will not be to provide a specific answer to a set question. You will need to consider not only how the knowledge of the subject can be applied but also take into account skills and attitudes that will mediate between the problems and solutions in 'real life'.

Initially, there will be differing views about what the problem means that will need to be explored to ensure that your group share the same conceptions of the problem under discussion. Starting from identifying the nature of the problem, through developing knowledge about the problem, toward providing a workable solution to the problem requires a structured and thorough approach. Consequently, working in groups, you are encouraged to address the problem in a fairly systematic way. This has been identified in a series of stages:

1. Clarify difficult terms or concepts
2. Define the problem being tackled
3. Establish what is already known
4. Analyse the problem and clarify issues
5. Formulate learning objectives
6. Carry out self-study of the identified learning objectives
7. Report findings back to group and synthesize work

These steps can be considered as cyclical:



Steps 3 to 6 may need to be repeated several times.

During your first group discussions, **Step 1**, the group is required to:

- Allocate tasks to each group member to be completed before the feedback in step 5.
- Identify a **task leader** (who should be different for each task) who will be responsible for keeping the discussion going and ensuring that all members participate in team discussions.
- Appoint a **task recorder** who has the responsibility of recording the research responsibilities delegated to members during the meetings and for reviewing this information at the start of subsequent meetings.
- Students are responsible for all decisions arising from the above activities and the tutor/facilitator will not interfere with any group governance procedures.

At feedback sessions, **Step 5**, you should:

- Report back to the group on outcomes research activity undertaken, this can be done via the class files in Learnwise
- Formulate an agreed response to the problem, again use the Liverpool Hope email system Groupwise or through Learnwise shared class files

At **Step 7** you will be required to present (through submission on forums or via the submit facility in Learnwise) a written response to the problem, this may be assessed summatively or formatively.