

Problem Solving

By Dick Evans

The textbook uses a step-by-step approach to show you how to solve a problem. Even the end of chapter materials such as the review assignment and the case problems work the same way. They guide you through a solution, so you do not have to think about anything but applying the skills learned.

They might explain the problem up front, but then they guide you through the solution. Here is an example of a problem needing a solution.

Dottie's Dresses

You work for a small dress shop. In addition to taking the normal credit cards and cash, they have a number of open accounts for long time customers. They shop and put their purchases on their open account with Dottie. At the end of each month, you send them a statement with the amount they owe. This was accomplished using a paper ledger for years, but the number of accounts has grown to about fifty and it is taking too much time to keep up to date and send statements monthly. You just purchased a new computer with Microsoft Office Professional and want to take advantage of this new technology.

Can this be solved using Microsoft Word?

This is the first question you must ask. Then you need to determine which application is best to use. Is it Word, Excel, or PowerPoint?

How can you keep track of the sales and accumulate what they owe? Is this a Word or Excel solution? What about their contact information like name and address, phone numbers, and email addresses? Do you use Excel to print out statements at the end of month or Word? Can this be automated using Office, or will you just use Office as a printing press?

One solution to the above problem would be to have an Excel file containing the customer name, address, and total amount due. Create a letter explain how much they owe and using Mail Merge in Word, print letters to each customer with a balance due merging their name and address and total amount due. The details of maintaining the Excel file as they make purchases and payments we can leave for another lesson.

The step-by-step approach gives you the files and data needed. It might even give you the letter to send them their monthly totals. Then it tells you one line at a time how to create the Mail Merge to generate them.

In this approach you would not have to think about how to solve it. You would be given the data file to use and told how to create the letter to be merged. You might even be shown a sample of the resulting letter after a successful merge. The instructions might look something like this:

1. Open Word
2. Mailings > Start Mail Merge > Start Mail Merge
3. Select Letters
4. Using the example given, type the body of the statement using your name in the closing
5. Mailings > Start Mail Merge > Select Recipients
6. Select Use Existing List
7. Locate the Excel file for this assignment
8. ...

The former has you determining the best way to solve the problem with the tools you have and the skills you have acquired. The later simply directs you to use which skill, when, and where.

If you cannot understand the needs of your client, boss, or even yourself and translate that into a solution using the tools you have, all you have learned about Microsoft Office is of little use. Learn to problem solve, not just follow steps to do what someone else says is the solution. In life, you have to arrive at your own conclusions and create the steps.