



Problem-solving Strategies for Word Problems: 4-Step Method

Step 1: Understand the Problem

To understand a word problem, you need to answer these questions.

- What information is given?
- What are you asked to find?
- Does the question need an exact or approximate answer?

Use one or more of the following strategies to help you answer these questions.

- [Interpret visuals, such as pictures, charts, tables and graphs.](#)
- [Identify keywords.](#)
- [Identify important and unimportant information.](#)

Step 2: Think of a Plan

Keywords and important information will help you develop a plan for solving problems. Some strategies you may use to solve problems include the following.

- [Look for patterns.](#)
- [Draw a picture or use manipulatives.](#)
- [Make it simpler.](#)
- [Guess and check.](#)
- [Work backwards.](#)
- [Organize information.](#)

Step 3: Carry Out the Plan

Solve the problem using a pencil and paper, manipulatives, a calculator, a computer or another strategy you identified in your plan. State the solution to the problem in a conclusion sentence.

Step 4: Look Back

Use some or all of the following strategies to check your solution for reasonableness and accuracy.

- Use the information and/or numbers in the word problem to estimate a solution. Then compare your answer to this estimate to help you determine the [reasonableness](#) of your solution.
- Check that decimals are placed correctly.
- Use a calculator.
- Compare your answer with classmates and discuss.
- Use the [opposite operation](#).

Look back and rethink the problem-solving strategies you used to solve the problem. Think about and discuss answers to the following questions to help solve similar problems in the future.

- Is there another strategy that may have worked just as well or better to solve the problem?
- What other problems could I use these strategies for in the future?