

Talking about problems

In our everyday life, whether professional or personal, we are faced with problems. In order to deal with them sometimes we need to talk about them as we might not have a solution to a problem ourselves or we might not be the person responsible for solving it. In order for learners of English to be able to talk about problems, they will need to know some of the most frequent collocations of the word *problem*.

Let us first look at some verbs that collocate with the word *problem*. They can be divided in five major groups:

1. When a problem happens: *arise, come up, crop up, occur*, etc.
2. To find you have a problem: *be beset with/by, be confronted with/by, be dogged by, be faced with, be fraught with, come up against, encounter, face, identify, run into, run up against*, etc.
3. To deal with a problem: *address, approach, attack, attend to, clear up, combat, come/get to grips with, confront, contend with, correct, cure, deal with, fix, get round, grapple with, handle, iron out, overcome, resolve, solve, sort out, straighten out, struggle with, tackle, wrestle with*, etc.
4. To prevent problems: *avoid, circumvent, find a way round, get round, guard against, hedge against*, etc.
5. To think about or talk about a problem: *analyse, consider, debate, discuss, explore, look at/into, talk out, talk over, talk through, think over, think through, trash out, work through*, etc.

A Complete the sentences with one of the following phrasal verbs: *crop up, sort out, grapple with, run into, get round, talk through, talk over, be confronted with, hedge against, deal with*.

1. If problems _____, I want to be able to troubleshoot a known system.
2. In the south, the people _____ the problem of unemployment every day.
3. We're having a problem with one of the computers, but don't worry, we'll _____ it.
4. By allowing patients to _____ their problems, doctors can help them to cope with their illness.
5. They will _____ many problems next year, but they will overcome them.
6. Many businessmen _____ legal problems associated with deals over seas.
7. Long term contracts allow to _____ the problem of investment.
8. I still tried to _____ my problems on my own, which was not a good idea at all.
9. _____ your problem with somebody before it gets out of proportion.
10. Linda revealed that she went to a psychiatrist to _____ her problems.

Key: 1. crop up, 2. grapple with, 3. get round, 4. talk through, 5. be confronted with, 6. run into, 7. hedge against, 8. deal with, 9. talk over, 10. sort out

Another important group of words that collocate with the word *problem* are adjectives. Here we are going to look at two types of adjective:

1. Adjectives describing the complexity of a problem: *complex, complicated, daunting, difficult, insoluble, insuperable, intractable, perplexing, thorny, tricky, troublesome, troubling, vexing, worrisome*, etc.
2. Adjectives describing the size of a problem: *egregious, enormous, grave, great, little, minor, petty, serious, severe*, etc.

In the exercises that follow you will find other examples of adjectives belonging to the two above-mentioned types.

B Choose the correct adjective describing the complexity of a problem.

1. I invested my time and expertise in helping solve the *trustworthy/tough* problems.
2. Many scientists have raised a lot of theories to interpret this *bright/baffling* problem, but none of them has been acknowledged by the public.
3. There is an *insurmountable/insatiable* problem of lack of drinking water in the town.
4. The difficulty and cost of seeing a doctor has become a *knotty/knightly* problem for impoverished areas.
5. The size of the crime presents a *formidable/fantastical* problem, but we fight on despite the odds.

Key: 1. *tough*, 2. *baffling*, 3. *insurmountable*, 4. *knotty*, 5. *formidable*

C Choose the correct form of the adjective describing the size of a problem.

1. Is obesity a *bigger/big* problem than we thought?
2. Nowadays a shortage of skilled farm workers is an *acute/acuteest* problem in this region.
3. There have been *tremendous/tremendouser* problems with box office staff in cinemas.
4. Why is liquidity risk a *major/the most major* problem for banks?
5. Raising money for projects might be a *huge/huger* problem.

Key: 1. *bigger*, 2. *acute*, 3. *tremendous*, 4. *a major*, 5. *huge*