Problem/Solution Text Structure Clue Cards

What Is a Problem/Solution Text Structure?

These texts set up a challenge, obstacle, or conflict (the problem) and then explain how it is resolved (the solution). Authors often signal the shift with clue words like because, so, as a result, finally, or in order to.

Understanding this structure helps students see how authors organize ideas and makes it easier for them to follow and explain what they've read.

Teaching Script (K-5)

Step 1: Introduce the Concept

"Good readers don't just think about what happened in a story—they also notice how the author organized it. Today we're going to become text structure detectives. We'll look for clues that tell us when there's a problem and how it gets solved."

Step 2: Model with a Read Aloud

- Read a short section aloud.
- Pause to ask aloud:
  - "What is going wrong here?" → Problem
  - "What did the character do to fix it?" → Solution
- Point out signal words (because, so, finally) and label them as evidence that proves the structure is problem/solution.

Step 3: Guided Practice

Introduce the Detective Work:

"Detectives need the right tools. Today your tool is a set of clue cards. Some cards show signal words—words like because, so, as a result, finally. Others have guiding questions—like What's the problem? How is it solved? Together, these clues will help us crack the case of how the author organized the text."

- Pass out one or two cards to each student or pair of students.
- Explain that as you read aloud, they'll hold up their card when they hear or see a clue that matches it.

- Pause at a key moment in the story and invite students to share what they noticed.
- Record their evidence on a chart labeled Problem / Solution / Clues.

This way, every student is engaged: some are listening for signal words, some are focused on questions, and together they build the case for identifying the structure as problem/solution.

Differentiation Ideas

K-2

- **Model First:** Read a short passage aloud and hold up a card yourself when you spot a clue. Think aloud before inviting students to do the same.
- **Choral Response:** When you pause in the text, have all students with "problem" cards say the problem together; those with "solution" cards say the solution.
- **Partner Detective Teams:** Pair a strong reader with an emerging reader. Give one the problem card and the other the solution card so they can listen and respond together.

3-5

- **Card + Evidence:** Give each student a clue card, but require them to point to or read aloud the exact sentence or phrase that proves their answer.
- **Multiple Clues:** Challenge students to find more than one clue (a signal word and an illustration, for example) before they can "make their case."
- **Debrief the Case:** After reading, have groups present their "case file" — problem, solution, and the evidence that proves it — to the class.
- **Alternative Structures:** Occasionally hand out a "trick card" (e.g., cause/effect) and ask those students to argue why the text is not that structure.
- **Upgrade the Clues:** Ask students to add new signal words or guiding questions they discover in their independent reading to a growing class list.

Struggling Readers

- Offer sentence starters: The problem is… / The solution is…
- Pair them with a partner who highlights or underlines signal words.
- Provide short passages with signal words bolded or color-coded for support.

Advanced Readers

- Ask students to analyze effectiveness: Did the solution really solve the problem? Could there have been another?
- Invite them to rewrite a passage using a different text structure (e.g., cause/effect).
- Have them create their own "clue cards" with new signal words they discover in independent reading.

Classroom Application Ideas:

- **Detective Notebook:** Give each student a two-column chart (Problem / Solution) where they record evidence during a read-aloud, guided reading, or independent reading. Add a third column for the clue (signal word, phrase, or illustration) that helped them decide.
- **Clue Hunt:** Hide signal word cards around the classroom. As you read, students search for a matching card and bring it forward when they hear or see that clue in the text.
- **Partner Case Files:** Pair students as detective teams. Each team gathers one "case file" — the problem, the solution, and their best piece of evidence — and presents it to the class for verification.
- **Exit Ticket:** At the end of reading, students jot down one problem, one solution, and the signal word that pointed them there. Collect and review as a quick formative check.
- **Class Evidence Board:** Build an anchor chart where students add sticky notes with problems, solutions, and clues from each new story. Over time, it becomes a visual record of how different authors use the same structure.
- **Chapter Book Detective Work:** For longer texts, assign different detective teams to track problems and solutions across chapters. Each group posts their findings to a timeline or flow chart so the whole class can see how smaller problems build toward a bigger resolution.

Signal Word Clue Cards (K-2)

Problem Clues

- problem
- trouble
- hard
- couldn't
- didn't work
- the challenge was

Solution Clues

- so
- then
- next
- to help
- to fix it
- the answer
- finally

Result Clues

- worked
- better
- fixed
- now
- after that
- in the end

Signal Word Clue Cards (3-5)

Problem Clues

- problem
- issue
- difficulty
- challenge
- the trouble was
- obstacle

Solution Clues

- so
- therefore
- as a result
- to solve this
- the solution
- one way is
- in order to
- finally

Result Clues

- result
- outcome
- effect
- success
- improved
- resolved

Guiding Questions Clue Cards (K-2)

Finding the Problem

- What went wrong?
- What was hard for the character?
- What didn't work?

Finding the Solution

- How did they fix it?
- What did they try?
- Who helped?
- What happened next?

Checking the Result

- Did it work?
- How do we know it's better?
- What happened at the end?

Signal Word Clue Cards (3-5)

Finding the Problem

- What challenge or obstacle does the character face?
- What caused the problem?
- How does the author show that this is a problem?

Finding the Solution

- What steps does the character (or group) take to solve the problem?
- Which signal words show the solution?
- Were there other possible solutions?

Checking the Result

- Did the solution work? How do you know?
- What was the result or outcome?
- How would the story be different if the problem had not been solved?

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What went wrong?

What was hard for the character?

What didn't work?

How did they
fix it?

What did
they try?

Who helped?

What
happened
next?

Did it work?

How do
we know it's
better?

What
happened at
the end?

What challenge or obstacle does the character face?

What caused the problem?

How does the author show that this is a problem?

What steps does the character (or group) take to solve the problem?

Which signal words show the solution?

Were there other possible solutions?

Did the solution work? How do you know?

What was the result or outcome?

How would the story be different if the problem had not been solved?