

How to Analyze Issues: A Brief Guide

Issue: Often defined broadly as a problem, but the connotations of the word "problem" are simplistic and negative. What we really mean by "issue" is a complex human situation, often involving conflicting interests and solutions.

Critically analyze: By "analyze" we mean to break something down into its parts, so that we can understand the whole. By being "critical" we DON'T mean finding fault. We mean judiciously assessing what we have analyzed, evaluating both its strengths and weaknesses for a specific purpose (i.e., making recommendations for improvement).

In analyzing issues, ask yourself these sets of questions:

1. The Issue:

What are there issues of?

Why do we care about this issue?

What does the literature say about this issue?

2. The Stakeholders:

Who is affected by the issues? (stakeholders)

How are the individual stakeholders affected? Who benefits most? least?

Who has the most power? least?

What bias/perspective does each stakeholder have? Is there a model or theory involved? (e.g., medical vs holistic)

3. The Solutions:

What solutions will benefit the various stakeholders?

How do the stakeholders justify their solutions?

Where do these solutions converge?

Where do these solutions conflict?

What is the "best" solution or solutions? (your recommendations)

How would you justify these solutions? (theory or model)

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the "best" solutions? (evaluation)

How do we implement them? (recommended process)

Where do we go from here? (implications for future theory/research/practice)

Note: "Best" is a relative term. The best solution possible may not be very satisfactory to anyone, but still be the best possible under the circumstances.