

Annotated ESP Form

You can use this form and thought process whenever you face a difficult problem or important decision. The more you use it, the better you'll get at thinking through the problem-solving and decision-making process.

Step One: Evaluate

Think about a challenging situation you are currently facing. What is the problem? What is going on that you feel upset about or that you aren't sure how to handle? It could be a problem you need to solve or a decision you need to make. What is your role in this situation?

You may not have caused the problem you're dealing with, but if you are upset about it, it becomes your problem to solve. It is important to focus on the issue in terms of what you can do rather than in terms of blame, even if what you can do might be to ask someone else to do something (or stop doing something). Looking at a problem from the perspective of what you can do about it will help you feel more in control of the situation and will help you open up your mind to thinking of solutions.

How do you feel? What is your body telling you? Try to label each feeling as accurately as you can. And remember, it's common to have multiple feelings at once. The better you can identify each individual emotion, the better you'll be able to deal with *all* the emotions you're feeling.

If you're struggling to name some of your emotions, take a look at lists and definitions of different feelings. Carefully and precisely identifying your feelings can guide you in the right direction as you decide how to handle a challenging situation. For example, your reaction to annoyance may be different than your reaction to guilt. Are you annoyed that you are being blamed for something, or do you feel guilty about a part you played in a situation? Feeling unfairly criticized or blamed could lead you to ask for an explanation from someone else, while feeling guilty could cause you to make an apology.

How do you think others are feeling about this situation? (If you are having trouble with this, think about how you would feel if you were in these people's places.)

- Friends:
- Parents:
- Teachers:
- Others (name them and their feelings):

Empathy means knowing and accurately understanding other people's feelings, and it's a powerful skill. In addition, being attentive to how others feel will help you make better decisions involving those people.



For example, if you want your parents to take you to a friend's party, should you ask when they seem stressed out or wait until they're calmer? Similarly, knowing and responding appropriately to a teacher's expectations is more likely to result in a better classroom relationship with that teacher and maybe even higher grades. Exercising and showing empathy can help you in all the relationships in your life, as well as helping you solve problems.

What thoughts do you have about the situation?

- Positive thoughts:

Positive thoughts and self-talk are great. Just remember to make sure your positive thoughts are true. You can say to yourself, "I'm the greatest baseball player since Babe Ruth," but if that's not really the case, then telling yourself this isn't likely to help you practice harder or play better. On the other hand, truthfully saying to yourself, "I am a good player who works really hard," can help you stay motivated and ultimately become a stronger player.

- Negative or exaggerated thoughts:

Negative and exaggerated thoughts can be destructive and demotivating, especially when you're up against a challenge. Thinking badly about yourself, anticipating failure all the time, and feeling like you'll always be rejected by others will not help you do better. As a matter of fact, feeling certain that you can never succeed is the only sure path to failure. Consider times when someone has criticized you in a hurtful way. Did you find it motivating? If not, why would it be any different when you criticize yourself this way?

Step Two: Select

What do you want the outcome of this situation or the solution to this problem to be? What are your goals?

This is about you. No one can tell you what to want. However, as you consider this question, be sure to identify an obtainable and realistic outcome or goal that is under your control. For instance, you can't make your friends call you, so that isn't a realistic goal. But you can be a better listener or a kinder person when you are with your friends, and that might make them more likely to reach out. Similarly, you can't make teachers like you, but you can work harder on homework or participate more in class. Also, think about both your long-term and short-term goals, as they may conflict with each other. For example, you could spend money now on a trendy pair of shoes, or you could save that money and put it toward buying a car in the future when you have your driver's license.



What do others want in this situation?

Having an idea of what others want does not mean you necessarily have to do what others want. But it's still helpful to consider others' desires as you think about how to handle a tricky problem. For example, if someone involved in the situation has any kind of authority over you (such as a parent or teacher), you might want to take into consideration what that person wants. Or, if you really care about the feelings of the other person in a situation, you might want to be sure that the steps you take to solve the problem won't upset that person.

What do others want *for* you?

Ideally, there's a fair amount of overlap between what you want and what others want for you. In many cases, deep down, you and the people who care about you probably want the same things, even though you may not agree on the details. But sometimes peers may try to pressure you to do what's best for them and not what's best for you. Other times, family members or other adults might believe they know what's best for you, but not consider your point of view. Understanding what others want for you will help you clarify your own desires and also talk to those people about your hopes and goals.

What have you tried in the past to deal with similar situations or problems, and what happened as a result?

- What I tried:
- What happened:

If anything worked before, try it again! (Or consider trying something similar.) And if things you tried in the past didn't go so well, think twice about trying them again. At the same time, think about *why* past tactics didn't work. Is there a way you could take an idea that didn't quite go as planned and make it more likely to succeed?

What have others suggested you do about this situation? What might happen if you followed this advice?

- What others have suggested:
- What might happen:

When others offer help and advice, try not to reject their help. Be open to listening. You don't necessarily have to do what others suggest, but it costs nothing to hear what they say and they may have insights or ideas that hadn't occurred to you. In the end, the decision of what to do is still yours.

What other ideas can you think of to try, and what might happen as a result?

- What I could try:
- What might happen:



Brainstorm, brainstorm, brainstorm. Then brainstorm some more! Try to think carefully and clearly about what might happen—good and bad—as a result of a certain course of action. When we want to do something, we might be tempted to ignore possible negative outcomes. Similarly, when we really *don't* want to do something, it's easy to focus on only the negative possibilities and dismiss the positive ones. But ESP helps you think about both before deciding what to do.

Look at all of these experiences and ideas together and think about what you've learned and what outcomes or possibilities you've considered. Now, what do you really want to do? What is your plan?

This is where it all comes together. Think carefully about what is really best for you and what actions are most likely to get you the results you want or help you achieve your goals.

Step Three: Proceed

What is your plan?

The more carefully you think about your plan before putting it into action, the better chance you have of succeeding. Use the five “W questions” as your guide: who, what, when, where, and how. (*How* isn't technically a “W” question, but it's still important!) Thinking through each of these questions will take time, but it will pay off in the long run. In the business world, people rarely try something big without a business plan. Similarly, in your life, it's best not to try to solve a big problem without a plan for how to proceed. This section of the “ESP Form” will help you create a detailed plan.

Who is involved in your plan?

The people who play a role in your plan might include someone directly involved in the situation you're handling, someone whose advice you'd like on dealing with the situation, or someone whose help you would like as you carry out your plan to achieve the outcome you want.

What do you need for your plan to succeed?

Depending on the problem you face and the plan you have, you might need a variety of supplies and assistance, from transportation and funds to information and moral support or even snacks! Consider what you really need and what might be nice to have but is not absolutely necessary.

When will you carry out your plan?

Make a specific and realistic commitment. Don't say you'll just do something later, or you may never do it. Be as detailed as you can be, even if that only means “this week.” The more specific you are, the better.



Where will you carry out your plan?

Here, too, it's important to be specific. When you put your plan into action, where will it happen? Your kitchen, the local library, the school cafeteria, a friend's home, the Hall of Ornithischian Dinosaurs at the American Museum of Natural History in New York?

How will you put your plan into action?

What action—specifically—will you take? Now that you've figured out the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where*, you can put them together to figure out exactly *how* you'll carry out your plan, whether your goal is to ask a parent for a later curfew, talk to a friend about a disagreement you have, or eat in a healthier way.

What might happen that could prevent you from doing what you plan to do?

The ability to anticipate obstacles helps you deal with those obstacles. It's great to be optimistic, but it's also smart to be prepared in case things don't happen exactly the way you hope or expect—which, as we all know, happens a lot of the time. Preparing for challenges doesn't mean you don't believe you can achieve your goals or carry out your plan. It just means that you'll be more ready to handle complications and roadblocks if they arise. When you try to look into the future and see all the possibilities, you're using your ESP skills.

How could you address this obstacle (or obstacles)?

Your answer to this question is like a plan within a plan. The more you plan, the better your chance of success. Think about how sports teams plan for different options, or how GPS apps give drivers different routes to take when traffic is heavy, or how chefs deal with shortages of ingredients when they have to prepare something.

What skills might you need to carry out your plan successfully? Which of your strengths will help you succeed with your plan? What challenges or weaknesses do you want or need to work on before putting your plan in motion?

We all have many strengths and challenges, but sometimes they can be difficult to be aware of. Take a realistic look at yourself. If it's helpful, refer to your EQ journal and think back to the EQ strengths you identified in Lesson 2. What skills do you have, and what skills do you need to develop? These might include assertive communication skills (such as the BEST skills), empathy, confidence, courage, or staying true to your values, as well as other skills you're learning in our EQ lessons.



Follow-Up

In general, the sooner you can complete this section after implementing your plan, the better, as the details will still be fresh in your mind. However, sometimes you may need to wait until you can see the full results of your plan. If you're not sure when the best time to do this is, talk to a teacher, guidance counselor, or other adult about your questions.

After you carried out your plan, what happened?

One sure thing about life is that despite all your thinking and planning, there's always an element of the unknown. That's why it's so crucial to learn from whatever happens to help us next time. So, what really happened as a result of your plan? Did it work? Did you get the outcome you wanted? Did you get something that was different from your goal but still positive? Did you get what you wanted and realize it wasn't as good as you hoped or thought? Did some things not work at all? When things didn't go your way, be as honest as you can about what happened. It may feel uncomfortable to face up to these not-so-great moments, but it will help you next time. And remember: No one is perfect, and everyone struggles sometimes. It's part of how we learn.

Do you need to do anything else to wrap up your plan, or are there any changes you need to make for future plans? If so, what?

Do you need to go back and revise the plan in any way? Do you need to scrap your original plan and start all over? You may even need to choose a different goal! Remember that it's okay if things didn't go exactly as you expected or wanted. You can learn from every experience.

How do you feel about the situation now? What did you learn for the future to make your ESP skills stronger?

This is what it's really all about. If you feel good about what happened (and no one else got hurt in any way), then you can feel positive about how your plan went. Sometimes you may get what you think you wanted but still not feel great about it. That probably means you hadn't really identified your true goal. That's okay. When that happens, you can start the ESP process again. And this time, because of what you've learned, your results are more likely to be positive. Using your ESP skills means taking what you've learned from the past, looking ahead to the future, and making better decisions and plans before you proceed next time.