

# Writing a Problem/Opportunity Statement Instruction Guide

## What is a Problem/Opportunity Statement?

A problem/opportunity statement is one or two sentences that identifies and summarizes a condition, problem, or issue that a quality improvement team is seeking to address. Typically included in a Project Charter, a problem/opportunity statement provides a quality improvement team with an articulate expression of what they are setting out to achieve.

However, before a problem/opportunity statement can be written there needs to be an understanding of the difference between the symptoms of a problem and an actual problem. Symptoms are typically the only indication that there is a problem. Symptoms are the shadows of underlying problems; the evidence by which a problem affects staff and makes itself known. In other words, a symptom is not a problem, but rather the outcome of an actual problem. A problem can be defined as a gap between the existing state and the desired state of a process.

## Writing a Problem/Opportunity Statement

To write a problem/opportunity statement, answer the following questions, known as 5W2H, and develop your one or two sentence statement from the answers.

Question	Example Responses
What is the problem?	Check sheets are not being completed.
Why is it a problem?	When the Check Sheets are not completed, the nurses have to spend time searching for the information.
Where do we observe the problem?	Every time the day shift nurses sit down to do their charting.
Who is impacted?	Registered Nurses
When did we first observe the problem?	A few days after the Check Sheet was implemented.
How does it affect clients/family/caregivers/staff?	Nurses feel frustrated, stressed
How often does it occur?	Daily

As the quality improvement team is brainstorming and answering the questions in the first column, write down any key words. Write the first draft of the statement describing the current state using the information you gathered. Thus, the example's problem statement would be as follows:

Day shift nurses are frustrated when they do their charting because they often have to search for information that should be on the check sheets. This takes time away from patients.

## Tips for Writing a Problem/Opportunity Statement

- Look for the problem, not the solutions.
- Focus on one problem.
- Keep the statement to one or two sentences.
- Ensure you can distinguish between symptoms and problems. An effective method for doing this is to use the 5 Whys tool.