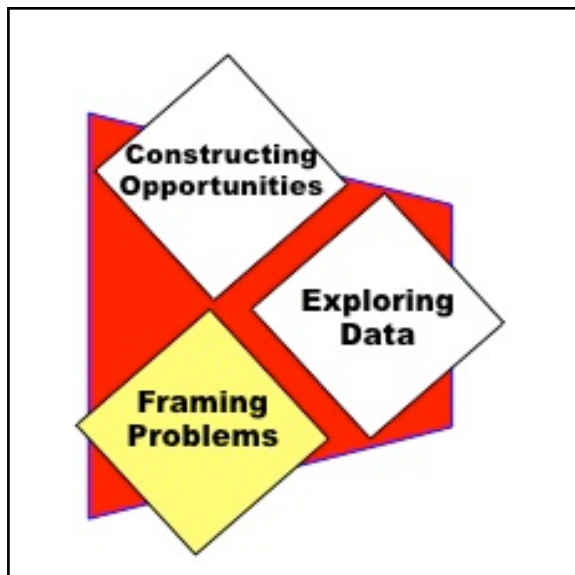# Framing Problems

Component Locator for this Stage

This stage is part of the "Understanding the Challenge" component in the CPS framework.

Goals and Purposes for this Stage

The major purpose of Framing Problems is to identify a focused or targeted question that can be used to stimulate the search for many, varied, and original possibilities or new ideas. When Framing Problems, problem solvers begin a with a specific direction or broad goal, and with a good sense of the key element(s) of that goal that need to be worked upon. When Framing Problems, problem solvers generate many possible specific problem statements. Then, the client (with the resource group's input and support, if working in a group) chooses or constructs a summary problem statement. You enter the Framing Problems stage with a clear sense of the task or challenge on which you are working, and an understanding of the most important aspects or elements of that situation. You exit Framing Problems with a specific, focused question for which you want and need to generate new possibilities.

Key Vocabulary and "Stems"

Review the related CPS text references (see page 3) if the following terms are not familiar to you or to the group participants:

     IWWM…
     How Might…
     H2…

Carrying Out the Framing Problems Stage

Items A-F on this page summarize the principal steps to follow when you are applying the *Framing Problems* stage in the *Understanding the Challenge* component of CPS. Worksheets for two FP tools, Word Dance and the Ladder of Abstraction, are on pages 4-5 of this guide. Several other forms for Framing Problems, which might be copied for each participant, can be found in *The CPS Kit* (2006). You may also find it helpful to give each student in a class (or each participant in any CPS group) a list of these steps or to create and display a poster of them to display when applying the stage.

A. Briefly state the task and the key background data.

B. Use an invitational stem (IWWM… HM… H2…), a clear statement of ownership, a productive verb, and a goal or objective phrase.

C. Keep problem statements concise and free of limiting criteria.

D. Use tools to generate many, varied, and unusual problem statements.

E. Select and use appropriate tool(s) to focus the problem statement for creative attack.

F. Decide how to proceed next.

Key Elements When Framing Problems

- Begin by stating (or restating) the task on which you are working, an opportunity statement (in WIBNI form), and a brief summary of the key data about the task or situation.
- Review the three kinds of stems for problem statements (IWWM…, HM…, or H2)
- Generate many possible problem statements. (Use the Word Dance or Ladder of Abstraction tools to help the group stretch or expand their search for possible problem statements.)
- Ask the client (with input and support from the resource group, if you're working in a group) to identify (by choosing, or by combining or restating) a specific problem statement that best expresses the question for which new ideas would be helpful to have. (Use the hits, hot spots, and highlighting tools to assist as necessary.)

Facilitator Tips for this Stage

- Keep the problem statements concise (IWWM… Who? Do What?).
- Be certain the problem statements are free of criteria. Including criteria in problem statements may lead to questions that are too narrow and restrictive, and thus may inhibit your ability to generate possibilities for them at a later time.
- Look for opportunities to use various tools to stimulate many, varied, or unusual problem statements, or to choose or construct a summary problem statement.
- Keep in mind that, in this stage, your focus is on looking for the question that you want to ask, and not yet on trying to find any answers or solutions.

Sample Exercises for Practicing this Stage

Generate possible problem statements about…
- The situation faced by a principal character at a key point in any story. (What is the character's problem here? For what, or about what, might he or she need some new ideas?) [It can be enjoyable to go back and look at possible problems in stories for young children, especially from a new or unusual viewpoint. In *The Three Little Pigs,* for example, what might be the problem from the wolf's perspective?]
- Making the school or classroom a "friendlier" or more attractive environment.
- Many kinds of math problems, or science problems, that might be found in relation to any large public place (e.g., shopping mall, football field, grocery store…)
- Dealing with the challenges many students face today (e.g., resisting pressures to engage in unhealthy, unsafe, unwise, or illegal activities).
- Getting along with others (peers, younger or older siblings, adults).
- Demonstrating responsibility at home or school.
- Dealing with boredom when there's bad weather on a weekend or holiday.
- Responding to situations students perceive as unfair.

Related CPS Text References

Ch. 3 in *Creative Approaches to Problem Solving, 3rd Ed.* (Isaksen, Dorval, & Treffinger, 2011).
Ch. 4, pp. 46-52, in *Creative Problem Solving: An Introduction, 4th Ed.* (Treffinger, Isaksen, & Dorval, 2006).
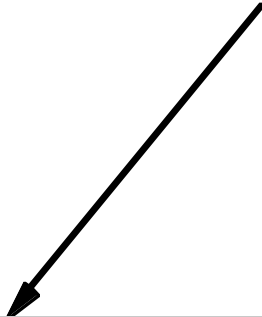
Word Dance Worksheet

IWWM _____ _____ _____?

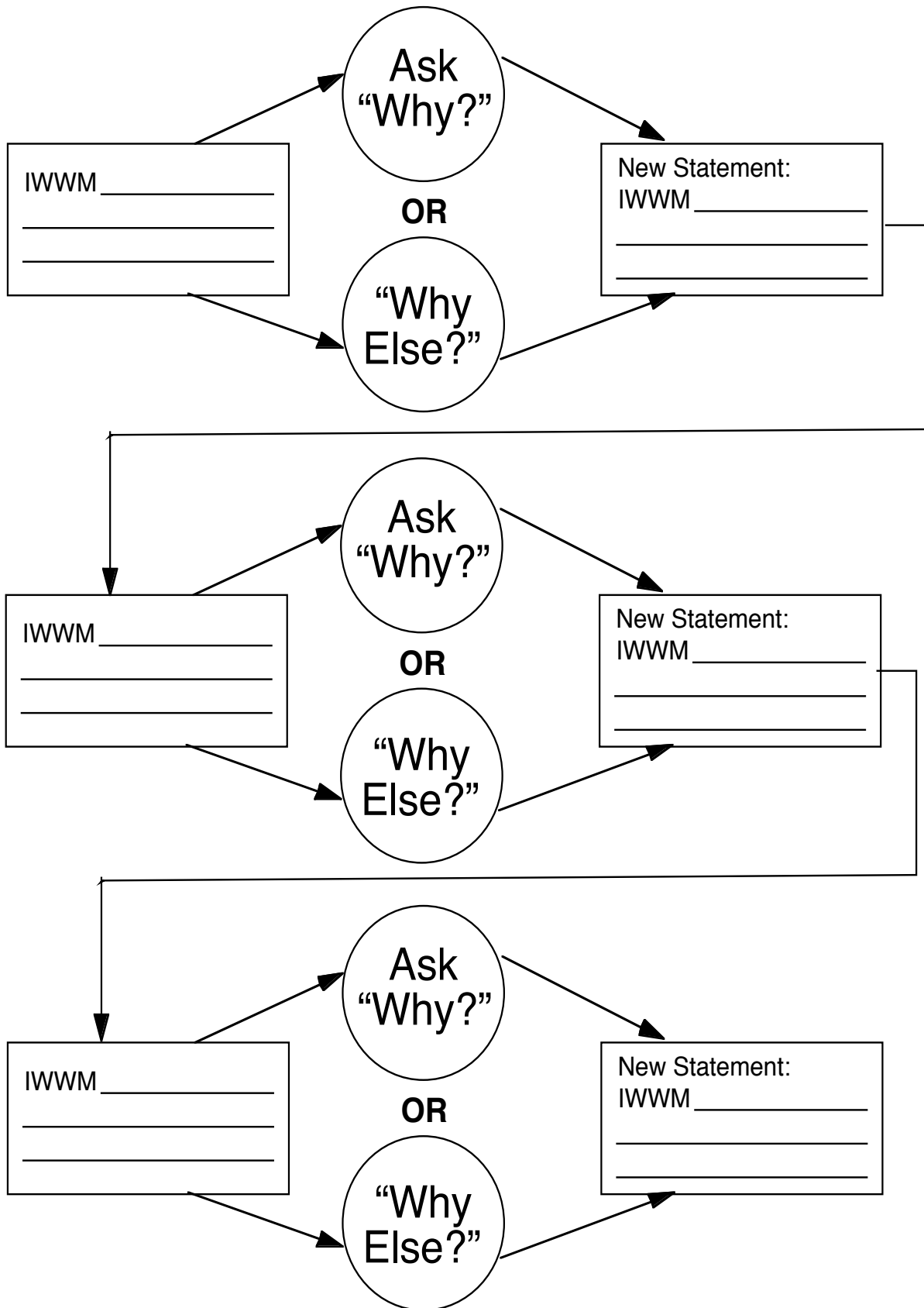(who?)   (do)   (what)

Other Verbs?

Other Actions?

Mix and Match Various Combinations!

Ladder of Abstraction Worksheet

Ask "Why?"

OR

"Why Else?"

IWWM_____
_____
_____

New Statement:
IWWM_____
_____
_____

Ask "Why?"

OR

"Why Else?"

IWWM_____
_____
_____

New Statement:
IWWM_____
_____
_____

Ask "Why?"

OR

"Why Else?"

IWWM_____
_____
_____

New Statement:
IWWM_____
_____
_____

Assessing Effectiveness When Framing Problems

Expert *Meets expectations for "Accomplished," plus:*
- Demonstrates skill in posing problem statements in unique, imaginative, and inviting ways;
- Shows good grasp of verbs that state the problem concisely but constructively;
- Focuses effectively and efficiently.

Accomplished *Meets expectations for "Competent," plus:*
- Recognizes need for tools to explore broader or narrower problem statements;
- Selects and applies varied tools;
- Constructs or selects a problem statement rich in potential for generating options.

Competent
- Uses IWWM, HM, or H2 format;
- Words problems concisely, constructively, and with clear statement of ownership;
- Uses appropriate tools to generate many problem statements;
- Uses appropriate focusing tools to select/form problem statement.

Novice
- States a problem, but may use wording that limits the search for options or "constrains" the problem;
- States problems too broadly to provide focus or direction for generating options;
- May omit or be vague about ownership.

Unprepared
- Focuses immediately on an initial, impulsive or strongly emotional view of the problem, without generating options;
- May express the problem in an unconstructive way that fails to invite the generation of many, varied, or unusual options;
- Does not use an effective stem or statement of ownership.