

# Problem Based Learning

## What is it?

Problem based learning (PBL) is a method in which students work collaboratively to solve real-world problems. A student-centered approach, PBL encourages critical thinking as students investigate issues, gather material, analyze and evaluate information, and develop solutions to problems.

## What does it look like in practice?

Students are given an ill-structured problem to solve, such as (1) why one neighborhood in a city has more cases of asthma than others or (2) what impact introducing green technologies would have on a city with an old infrastructure. Working in groups in the classroom or online, students determine what they know and what they need to learn, plan a process of gathering information to analyze, develop and evaluate possible solutions, and finally write up and submit a solution to be defended.

## How does such a method fit into my course?

- PBL assignments can be the cornerstone of an entire course if the problem is large enough, or it can be one of many assignments. PBL assignments can be tied to one or more course goals:
- To help students articulate the issues associated with a field of study
- To help students learn about conflicts and unsolved problems in a field of study
- To help students gain a command of the process of problem-solving to enhance their ability to apply knowledge in their later employment

### Further Reading:

Study Guides and Strategies:

<http://www.studygs.net/pbl.htm>

Problem Based Learning at the U of Delaware:

<http://www.udel.edu/inst/>

Article: Frank, Katherine (2008). "Problem-Based Learning in the Literature Classroom: Empowering Students Through Literal and Metaphorical Collaboration." *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 19 (1): 5-36.