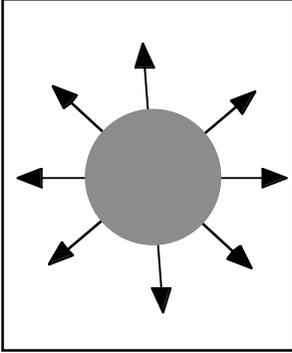


Attribute Listing



Overview, Description, and Purpose

Attribute Listing is a tool for generating options. It involves a systematic approach to generating possibilities by first identifying the main attributes (characteristics or qualities) of an option, problem, or task, and then exploring new, interesting, or unusual variations of those attributes. The variations you consider for one part of a task or problem might also be used to examine other attributes of the task.

Attribute Listing can be applied to any task, challenge, or problem, or question that can readily be analyzed or broken down into several principal dimensions, elements, or parts.

Attribute Listing can be particularly useful for the following purposes, or under these conditions:

- When the group has generated one or more options that seem interesting, but “aren’t quite the way you want them yet.”
- When the task might be broken down into several clearly-definable dimensions, elements, characteristics, or parts, any of which might be modified or changed.
- To make a complex or multi-dimensional task more manageable by dividing it into components that can be changed or varied independently;
- To produce variations or modifications of an option in a systematic way that will help you to “stretch” beyond the original option but still retain some of its essential qualities or features.

Tips and Suggestions

These suggestions may help you to use the Attribute Listing tool successfully.

1. When you list the attributes of the task, try to find three to five major attributes that are the basic elements or parts to work with.
2. As you work on each attribute ask yourself, “What other forms or values might this attribute take other than its present state or condition? How else might this dimension of the task be represented?”

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3. Explore possible modifications for each attribute in a playful way; give yourself permission to search deliberately for unusual forms or modifications.
4. Changes in one attribute might also suggest similar (or related) modifications of other attributes; permit your thinking to “cross over” from one attribute or change to another.
5. Attributes might be characteristics, structural parts of a task, or functional elements; ask, “What are the most important parts of this task?”

Steps for Using this Tool

1. State the task clearly and ask, “What are the main parts of this task? If we were to break this task down into its major components, what would they be?” These major components or parts are the “attributes.” List each of the major attributes of the task.
2. Select one of the attributes (not necessarily the first one you listed), and ask: “How might we change, modify, improve, or enhance this attribute? What different forms might it take? How might it look, sound, work, or act differently?” List several possible modifications for the attribute, and record them.
3. Repeat Step 2 for all (or several) of the other attributes of the task. Think of many, varied, or unusual ways each attribute might be modified or changed. List the possibilities for each attribute.
4. Examine the lists of possible modifications. Look for any modifications or combinations that suggest promising new possibilities. Highlight, or record separately, the most interesting new options.
5. Focus your thinking by choosing the modification(s) you decide to use, apply, or examine in greater detail.

Examples

Some ways to use Attribute Listing with students include:

- Understanding the important elements or parts of a topic being studied (e.g., the major attributes of a country or civilization in social studies, the major elements of a story, or the characteristics of the main characters in a novel);
- Exploring ways to change or modify tasks in assignments or projects for such areas as creative writing, dramatics, art, music, or foreign language, in order to attain variety and interesting new possibilities;
- Investigating attributes of several variables in a science experiment or project, in order to develop new or varied testable hypotheses;
- Exploring many, varied, or unusual ways a specific subject area (e.g., mathematics) might be applied in a particular problem area or setting. Sample: using attribute listing to list ways mathematics might be used at a shopping mall. The attributes of the task could include various people or jobs, different stores, or different areas of the mall (inside and outside).

Learning More About the Attribute Listing Tool

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Treffinger, D. J. (2000). *Creative problem solver's guidebook*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

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