

W.O.W. FACTOR

Words Of Wisdom for FPS Coaches and Students

UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

WHAT MAKES A GOOD UNDERLYING PROBLEM (U.P.)?

- **COMPLETENESS** – This means you have all the necessary parts:
 - **Condition phrase:** Uses actual information from the FS (*facts*, not assumptions); tells what caused you to choose your KVP
 - **Stem:** “How might we . . .” or “In what ways might we . . .”
 - **Key Verb Phrase (KVP):** the main *singular* verb phrase that tells what you want to accomplish
 - **Purpose:** tells why you want to achieve your KVP
 - **Three parameters:** Time, place (from the FS) and topic
- **FOCUS** – High focus means your Underlying Problem:
 - Has a clear and manageable goal
 - Is narrowed, but not trivial
 - Has a definite impact on the FS
 - Addresses the charge found in the final paragraph. The charge in the Desertification problem was to *help the AAP address a critical African desertification issue for use in its upcoming discussion at the AAP’s meeting on June 17, 2040.*
- **ADEQUACY** – An Underlying Problem high in adequacy:
 - Is an appropriate, important, significant issue/subproblem given the facts presented in the FS
 - Makes no assumptions
 - Would have a positive impact on the FS if solved



EXAMPLES OF COMMON U.P. ERRORS

Restatements

- The African Panel is tasked with combating desertification in the African region. How might we reduce the number of desertification issues faced by the Panel, so that the negative effects from desertification in Africa are reduced in 2040 and beyond? (*This restates the whole issue in the FS charge.*)
- Today over 485 million people live in the shadow of drought and desertification in Africa. How might we reduce desertification there, so that Africa’s people can have a better life? (*Although the condition phrase contains an accurate fact from the FS, the KVP simply restates the topic. The purpose is also broad/nonspecific.*)
- Because areas of drought continue to spread throughout Africa, in what ways might we curb desertification in 2040 and beyond, so that ecosystems can be restored? (*This U.P. could have been written without even reading the FS.*)



Too broad/nonspecific

- Since desertification affects over 485 million African people, how might we improve the lives of people affected by desertification, so that they have the chance for a better life in Ethiopia in 2040 and beyond? *(The KVP is nonspecific – improve lives how? What does “a better life” mean?)*

Two or three main parts say the same thing (repetitive)

- Since land degradation is a growing problem in Africa, how might we reduce land degradation, so that desertification will not continue to degrade the soil in 2040 and beyond? *(The KVP basically repeats the idea stated in the condition phrase; degrading the soil is also land degradation.)*
- There is a loss of food-supplying plants in the 2040 African desertified areas. How might we increase the amount of food-supplying plants, so that plants can supply food to the towns? *(Condition phrase, KVP and purpose all express the same concept.)*



Condition phrase, KVP, and or purpose have no clear connection

- Since drones may scare off natural organisms in the ecosystem, causing the environment to break down due to lack of nutrients, how might we prevent these drones from causing populations to migrate, so that the nutrient level increases in 2040 and beyond? *(What organisms? How does scaring them off break down the environment? How does that relate to populations migrating? Which populations? How do populations migrating affect nutrient levels? Nutrient levels where?)*

Getting off topic

- Many farmers in Africa seek to make money quickly to feed their families instead of following improved policies recommended by the AAP. In what ways might we educate farmers about desertification in 2040, so that they will follow the AAP's recommended policies? *(Education is a broad issue -- we could educate just about anyone on any topic/issue in an attempt to improve it. Solutions will often get away from the topic entirely.)*
- The AAP loses money to political organizations that take cuts of funds in exchange for keeping rogue officials and guerilla forces in check. How might we raise money for the AAP in 2040, so that they will be more equipped to deal with desertification in Africa? *(Again, we could raise money for any topic/issue. And once again, you will probably get away from the topic with solutions, thus having no chance to use your research.)*
- Desertification is causing the population of rural communities in Africa to decline because people are relocating to urban areas. How might we prevent overpopulation in cities, so that residents there can be more comfortable in 2040? *(This stems from the FS; however, focusing on overpopulation in cities is getting away from the topic. The purpose is broad/vague as well.)*

Too narrow/more trivial

- AAP members wear Motorola gel phones that adhere to their skin. How might we make the phones more comfortable, so that the wearers will be sure to put them on in Africa in 2040? *(Given the scope of all the issues referred to in the FS, this is very low on the scale of importance.)*

Condition phrase doesn't have accurate FS information or is an assumption

- Because the AAP and African political bodies have a tense relationship, the political bodies might shut down the AAP, causing the drought to continue which causes the people to starve. Therefore, how might we help the AAP succeed, so that desertification can be diminished in 2040? *(The first sentence sounds like one of the challenges that might have been written. Political bodies shutting down the AAP is an assumption that seems unlikely. Choose specific information from the FS for your condition phrase.)*
- Because there are wars in Africa, how might we reduce desertification, so that wars can stop in 2040? *(Although there may be wars in Africa, the FS makes no mention of one. This U.P. makes no clear connection between wars and desertification.)*

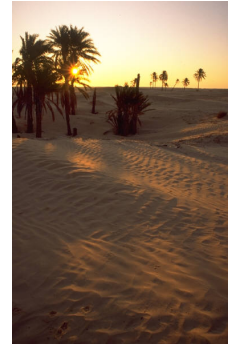
Inappropriate absolute verb

- Because political organizations take a cut of the funds from the AAP to keep rogue officials and guerilla forces in check, in what ways might we prevent all corruption in Africa in 2040, so that more money can be spent to halt desertification forever? *(It's doubtful that one can totally prevent all corruption anywhere. Also, the words “halt forever” in the purpose make this seem less likely to accomplish.)*



Multiple verb phrases/objects

- Because of deforestation, a cause of desertification in Africa in 2040, there aren't a lot of trees to stop the wind, and the soil is infertile. How might we stop high winds and keep the soil fertile, so that more crops can grow successfully? *(Technically, each solution will have to do both in order to be relevant – stop high winds AND keep the soil fertile.)*
- Since self-interest and lack of global cooperation with the AAP is preventing the reclamation of desertified land in Africa in 2040, how might we gain support from the general public, African political bodies and major corporations across the globe, so that solutions to desertification may be reduced more easily? *(For a solution to be relevant, it will have to gain support for all three entities: the general public, African political bodies AND major corporations.)*
- Because farmers are trying to make quick money to support their families, how might we provide for the families while reclaiming desertified land, so Africa can be more prosperous in 2040 and beyond? *(The word “while” in the KVP gives it a dual focus; to be relevant, each solution will have to provide for families while the land is being reclaimed.)*



Two or more purposes

- Since 485 million people live in areas of desertification in Africa, in what ways might we increase plant growth, so that farming and finding water will be an easier task in 2040 and beyond? *(Because of the word “and” solutions will have to address making farming AND finding water easier while increasing plant growth. Also, it's not clear how increasing plant growth could make finding water an easier task.)*
- Because desertification is greatly affecting the people of Africa in 2040, how might we reduce desert encroachment, so that farmers have better living conditions and make more money? *(Solutions will have to address better living conditions for farmers AND make farmers more money.)*

No purpose

- Since many people live in desertified Africa, in what ways might we restore desertified land to its former state without causing impairment to any plants, animals, and people in the 2040 and beyond? *(Besides not having a purpose, the KVP is really four-pronged: solutions will have to restore desertified land, not cause impairment to any plants, animals, AND people.)*

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENT UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

- ✓ Because the DSDs are an important part of the Panel's plans for tackling desertification, it is important that they operate accurately and efficiently. How might we optimize the successful use of the DSDs, so that the Panel is more accurately equipped to deal with desertification issues in the African region in 2040 and beyond? *(DSDs are a major part of the Panel's plan to tackle desertification. DSDs are also able to be upgraded and will therefore be part of the long-term plans of the Panel. The phrasing of the purpose also means that it will be easy to solve the purpose once the KVP is solved.)*
- ✓ Political bodies that the AAP works with take a cut of the funds from the AAP in exchange for keeping rogue officials and guerilla forces in check. How might we reduce incidences of corruption related to the operation of the African Panel, so that the AAP will have more funds to help implement solutions for reducing desertification? *(Corruption is a real issue facing Africa in general and the Panel specifically, and it can have extremely detrimental effects if it gets out of control. Reducing corruption will therefore have important long-term effects on the successful operation of the Panel.)*
- ✓ Because the range of biodiversity and crops in rural African areas has been greatly reduced, many communities are relocating to other parts of Africa where they have a better chance of sustaining their livelihood. How might we improve the biodiversity of areas in Africa that suffer from extreme effects of desertification, so that the communities in these areas will be more likely to thrive in 2040 and beyond? *(Biodiversity is a key issue in the topic of desertification and in the African context in the FS.)*



- ✓ Although Panels were created across the world 15 years ago to bring together ideas and solutions for promoting farming in drought-stricken areas, many regions have not had success in combating desertification due to lack of cooperation and other factors. How might we increase the interaction among the Panels, so that the AAP will be better equipped to tackle desertification issues in 2040? *(Interaction and cooperation among the Panels would be a step in the right direction to spread and implement positive solutions for desertification issues.)*
- ✓ Desertification has resulted in less arable land, thus greatly reducing the variety of crops in Africa. How might we increase the use of sustainable farming practices, so that African citizens can live in a more balanced ecosystem in 2040 and beyond? *(Increasing sustainable farming practices will go a long way towards reducing desertification. The word “arable” shows evidence of research.)*
- ✓ Instead of following improved policies recommended by the AAP, many African farmers continue to implement poor land management practices in order to make money quickly to feed their families. In what ways might we promote the collaborative use of new farming techniques, so that greater progress can be made in the fight against desertification in 2040 and beyond? *(Getting farmers to participate in better land management practices would be a big step toward reducing further damage due to desertification.)*

TO SUMMARIZE . . .

The Underlying Problem is the most important step in the process. Take the time to be sure that you are choosing a problem that has high importance given the Future Scene.

Remember:

- **Don’t just restate the topic or the Future Scene charge.**
 - What would a restated surveillance society U.P. look like? *Since personal information is collected in a variety of ways, how might we empower people to protect themselves from surveillance, so that their personal information will be kept private?*
- **Narrow to a specific, important issue.**
 - Look for clues of the big issues in each paragraph of the FS.
- **Use facts from the FS for your condition phrase.**
 - Don’t make assumptions or use a challenge as a condition phrase.
- **Avoid repetition in your condition phrase, KVP and purpose.**
 - If the condition phrase, KVP, and purpose all express the same basic concept, it is determined to be “circular” and will receive low scores for focus and adequacy.
- **Be sure your condition phrase, KVP and purpose have logical connections.**
 - Proofread to be sure the parts all relate and that your U.P. is clearly stated.
- **Be sure your KVP and purpose are singular.**
 - A good rule to help accomplish this is never, never, NEVER use the word “and” in a KVP or purpose.
- **Be careful of using absolute verbs.**
 - Words like “prevent, eliminate, guarantee and ensure” are absolutes that may be more narrow than other choices. Be sure they are really necessary. Sometimes verbs like “improve, reduce, strengthen, or modify” may be more appropriate.
- **Stay on topic.**
 - KVPS that deal with educating, informing, and raising money get off topic and often don’t allow you to use any of your research in solutions.



PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE writing underlying problems as you research for Surveillance Society. When you read about a solution, ask yourself, “What underlying problem does this solve?” Then try writing it up as a complete U.P.