

Note: This is the first of a series on the Big6™, the most widely used approach to information problem-solving in the world. Students go through the Big6 stages—consciously or not—when they seek or apply information to solve a problem or make a decision. In addition to considering the Big6 as a process, the Big6 can be viewed as a set of basic, essential life skills that can be applied across situations—to school, personal, and work settings, and in school to all subject and grade levels. Students use the Big6 Skills whenever they need information to solve a problem, make a decision, or complete a task.

Each article includes a brief overview of one Big6 stage by Mike Eisenberg, followed by articles by two exemplary Big6 teachers, Barbara Jansen and Rob Darrow, offering practical uses of the Big6 in elementary and secondary situations, respectively. Melinda Tooley and Mike conclude the set by introducing a specific function of the new software product, Big6™ TurboTools, relevant to that Big6 stage.

It seems simple really, “Define the problem; identify the information needed.” But classroom teachers and library media specialists will tell you that *Task Definition* is the stage of the Big6 that gives students the most difficulty. When faced with a project, homework, project, report—even a quiz or standardized test, students should be able to:

- understand the nature or type of the assignment
- select among options
- narrow the scope
- determine exactly what they are expected to do
- envision what the end product will look like
- know how they will be graded
- estimate how much time and effort will be required
- consider how much information will be needed
- determine the types of information to seek out.

Students can improve their task definition capabilities through direct instruction, emphasis, and practice. Here are some ideas for teachers



to use to teach Task Definition:

- Present various assignments and have students analyze them

By Michael B. Eisenberg

for nature, options, scope, end product, grading, time and effort, amount of information, and types of information.

- Have students analyze a wide range of assignments without actually having to complete them.
- Have students apply Task Definition (and later the full Big6 process) to non-school situations such as buying a gift or choosing a product, winning a sport or game, or selecting a TV show or video.
- For important state tests, have students become familiar with and evaluate instructions, format, and styles of questions in advance. Use the same instructions, format, and style in classroom tests.
- Help students learn to use Big6 planning tools such as Barbara Jansen’s Big6™ Assignment Organizer (available on the Big6 for Kids Web site: <www.big6.com/kids>) or the new Big6™ Planner tool in Big6 TurboTools (see page 37).

Imagine a highly successful Big6 school or classroom: whenever students are faced with a new problem, task, assignment, or test, they are able to figure out what needs to be done, how to do it, how long it’s going to take, the types and amount of information required, and what a successful end result will look like. Will that help them succeed? Absolutely, and that’s the goal—for every student in every situation.

Michael B. Eisenberg is dean of the Information School of the University of Washington. Mike, and his co-author **Bob Berkowitz**, created the Big6 approach to information problem-solving, and Mike has worked with thousands of students (preK through higher education), as well as people in public schools, business, government, and communities to improve their information and technology skills. Mike has written numerous books and articles on aspects of information science and librarianship, information literacy, library media work, and information technology. He can be reached at mbe@u.washington.edu or www.ischool.washington.edu/mbe. Visit www.linworth.com for Big6 titles, posters, and bookmarks.

The Big6™

1. Task Definition

- 1.1 Define the information problem
- 1.2 Identify information needed in order to complete the task (to solve the information problem)

2. Information Seeking Strategies

- 2.1 Determine the range of possible sources (brainstorm)
- 2.2 Evaluate the different possible sources to determine priorities (select the best sources)

3. Location and Access

- 3.1 Locate sources (intellectually and physically)
- 3.2 Find information within sources

4. Use of Information

- 4.1 Engage (e.g., read, hear, view, touch) the information in a source
- 4.2 Extract relevant information from a source

5. Synthesis

- 5.1 Organize information from multiple sources
- 5.2 Present the information

6. Evaluation

- 6.1 Judge the product (effectiveness)
- 6.2 Judge the information problem-solving process (efficiency)

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