What's the difference between "problem", "trouble", and "issue"?

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The words "**problem**", "**trouble**", and "**issue**" are very close in meaning. What's the difference bewtween them? The answer is quite complicated, actually! Let's look at the meaning of each word and some of the ways that they're used:

The meanings of "problem", "trouble", and "issue"

The word "problem" is connected with the word "**solution**". A problem is something negative that needs to be solved. Some bad things that happen can't be called "problems" because they're unsolvable. For example, if you broke your leg, you probably wouldn't call your broken leg a "problem". The broken leg can't be fixed. On the other hand, figuring out how to get to work with a broken leg is a problem.

"Trouble" is less connected to solutions. It's more connected to negative **feelings** that you get when bad things happen.

"Issue" is associated with difficult **decisions** and **disagreements**. We use "issue" in a similar way to "problem" or "trouble", but it also has another meaning. It can mean a**topic** that people are talking about or disagreeing on. Social issues and political issues are examples of this kind of "issue".

Using the word "problem"

"Problem" is used more than "trouble" or "issue". A "problem" is something bad that you have to deal with.

You "have" problems.

*Sorry, I have a problem with my phone.*

Or you say that there "are" problems "with" things:

*There's a problem with the Internet connection.*

*Is there a problem with it?*

"Problems" belong to people, so you can say that something is "your problem", "their problem", etc.:

[*That's not my problem.*](http://www.phrasemix.com/examples/thats-not-my-problem)

Ask "[What's your problem?](http://www.phrasemix.com/examples/whats-your-problem)" when you're angry with someone.

We also use the word "problem" to talk about questions in math textbooks and tests.

Using the word "trouble"

You can "be in trouble" or "get in trouble":

*I used to get in trouble as a teenager for sneaking out of the house at night*

You shouldn't use articles ("a" or "the") with "trouble". But you can say "some trouble":

*I've had similar trouble with this car before.*

Things can "cause trouble":

*I'm so sorry to cause so much trouble for you guys.*

You can substitute "problems" or "issues" instead of "trouble" (though they're not as common). Notice that "problems" and "issues" are countable, but "trouble" is *usually*uncountable.

You can say that a person "is trouble", which means that they're dangrous or they cause trouble for other people:

*That boy is trouble.*

You can use "trouble" with a gerund ("have trouble \_\_ing"):

*If you have trouble seeing it, feel free to move closer.*

[*But I still have trouble expressing myself.*](http://www.phrasemix.com/examples/but-i-still-have-trouble-expressing-myself)

"Problems" can fit into this pattern too, but it's much less common.

Say "It's no trouble" when you're politely offering to help someone.

*A: I can drive Jared to school*

*B: Really? Are you sure?*

*A: Yeah, it's no trouble.*

Using the word "issue"

"Issue" is softer-sounding than "problem". You can use the word "issue" to talk about problems at work:

*This issue keeps coming up again and again.*

*I just spoke with Karen. I think we might have an issue.*

[*If there are any issues that require immediate attention, I can be reached on my mobile at 646-469-XXXX.*](http://www.phrasemix.com/examples/if-there-are-any-issues-that-require-immediate-attention-i-c)

If you say that a person "has issues", it means that they are mentally or emotionally unhealty. They may need a psychiatrist's help.

*You have serious issues.*

"Problems" can work in this phrase too, but it's not as common.

To say that you don't like something or disagree with it, use the phrase "have an issue with \_\_\_":

*I don't have an issue with you talking to other guys. What I do have an issue with is you flirting with them.*

"Problem" can work in this way too.

When discussing a problem, you can say "the issue is \_\_\_" to talk about what the most important part of the problem is.

*The issue is the cost.*

You can use "problem" the same way, but not "trouble":

*The problem is the cost.*

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