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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1980 Volume VII: Problem Solving

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## Teaching Word Problems

Guide for Curriculum Unit 80.07.09  
by James Francis Langan

Word problems are not a unit to be covered and then forgotten, they are a unit to be returned to throughout the year. The paper is motivated by Polya's book *How to Solve It*. It also presents the material mindful of the students who may believe they have "Math Anxiety." The unit reviews the solutions of word problems starting with the concept of a variable. This may be used independently by the mature student who feels a need for improving word problem skills. Teachers are referred to Polya for greater detail. The paper is introductory. It serves as a reminder for those who have read Polya or remember teaching word problems more clearly at an earlier date, but now cannot see why students are having difficulty. The unit relates the solution of word problems to a process or scheme as given by Polya: 1) Understanding the problem, 2) Devising a plan, 3) Carrying out the plan, and 4) Reviewing the solution and the problem.

(Recommended for all Algebra courses.)

### **Key Words**

*Word Problems Basic Skills Mathematics*

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