Analysing problems.

1) Choose words from list below to fit into each sentence. Only one final solution should be attempted. Note: these sentences are useful for email or oral debate.

suggested / address / major / approach / by / concern / scratch / case / were / look / deal / consensus / question / should / magnitude

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a) This is a problem of ( 1.                   ) importance.
b) A problem of this ( 2.                   ) requires a very careful approach.
c) We should ( 3.                   ) ourselves with the problem at hand.
d) Usually, what I do in a ( 4.                   ) like this is...
e) We've done no more than ( 5.                   ) the surface of the problem.
f) I don't how to ( 6.                   ) with this problem.
g) I'm having problems deciding how to ( 7.                   ) this issue.
h) If I ( 8.                   ) you, I would tackle it like this. Firstly...
i) I think it would be better to attempt a different ( 9.                   ) altogether.
j) What do you think we ( 10.                   ) do?
k) The thing is, it would be a ( 11.                   ) of investing more money than our budget would allow.
l) I think it would be advisable to get a ( 12.                   ) of opinion from everybody first.
m) In a situation of this sort, I usually deal with a problem like this ( 13.                   ) consulting an expert.
n) It depends on how you ( 14.                   ) at it.
o) What you're ( 15.                   ) sounds like a good idea.

2) Analysis. General questions and activities for discussion and practice.

a) Decide which of the sentences above are the least formal. Why?

b) Find synonyms from the sentences above to the following words: problem, deal with, would be advisable. Are the synonyms you've found more or less formal?

c) You are now going to hold a meeting and analyse and solve a problem. Ask your teacher what to do.
**Teacher’s notes.**

(Time for activity: 40 mins approx. Level: intermediate.)

**Analysing problems. (Context: email or meetings.)**

Correct answers to question 1.

1. major
2. magnitude
3. concern
4. case
5. scratch
6. deal
7. address
8. were
9. approach
10. should
11. question
12. consensus
13. by
14. look
15. suggesting

Answers to question 2.

a) Answers: d), e), f), h), j), (and perhaps n) and o).

The main reasons are due to the use of Anglo Saxon words and expressions: eg. "to tackle" a problem sounds less formal than "to address" an issue. Students should be reminded that "less formal" does not necessarily mean "informal". All the above sentences could be included in the usual neutral English correspondence. They are also all good as oral utterances in business meetings.

b) Problem: issue (perhaps also "case"); deal with: address, tackle, look at (also "approach" as a verb); would be advisable: would be better.

Issue, address, approach, advisable are considered more formal as they are Latin-based words.

c) Usually, it would be better for the teacher to think up a problem for the students to discuss which is close to their hearts (or work experience). An example might be: "When employees leave the workplace during work time to smoke a cigarette, time and money are lost. What can be done to reduce these losses?"

Suggestion: arrange the students into two groups and get two meeting going (with a chairperson) on the same subject. After a set time limit they then finish their meetings and report their ideas to the class. Which group had the best ideas and solutions?