

# Hamming Problems

What are the problems in your life that would be the most impactful to solve?

## Step 0. Initial thoughts

Did anything come up already? Is anything staring you in the face right now? Is anything obvious as your most important problem?

## Step 1. Rate-limiting step

The speed of a chemical reaction is determined by the speed of the slowest step - the rate-limiting step. What is yours? Or: what's your bottleneck? Is there a problem where solving it would be the equivalent of "wishing for more wishes?"

## Step 2. What are you "not allowed" to care about?

Or: Is there some good outcome that you generally don't think about because it's too big to picture? Or too impossible?

## Step 3. Genre-savviness

When you're reading a novel, sometimes it seems like the book is dragging/stuck because there is an obvious thing that the character needs to do next in order to advance the plot (e.g., clearly she needs to go talk to the magician - can't she just do it already?). If your life is a novel: what is that obvious next thing?

#### **Step 4. What are you already pursuing, badly, in a convoluted/distorted way?**

Pica is a medical condition in which people who are iron deficient (for example) eat things like ice cubes, because the signal to eat things with iron is getting distorted into an urge to eat things which share superficial properties with iron. So: what is something you're doing a pica for?

#### **Step 5. Magnitude of your problems**

Which problems in your life have effects that are the largest order of magnitude? You may want to think separately about the effects on you and the effects on the world. For example, for effects on you: If you think about the gap between your current life and a better version of your life, which problem could you solve to cross the largest fraction of that gap? Or, for effects on the world: If you think about the size of your positive impact on the world, which problem could you solve to increase that impact by the largest amount?

#### **Step 6. Focusing**

Say aloud: "My life is fine." (Or: "I feel all fine and good about my life.")

If you're like most people, something will catch in your throat. Write it down.

Then imagine putting that thing aside, and go again: "Apart from Project Eggplant, my life is fine in all respects." See what catches now.

Repeat a few more times. Eventually, the sentence will ring true. ("Apart from A, B, C, and D, my life really is fine.")

#### **Step 7. Final go**

So, having now gone through all of that: What feels most alive? What is the most important problem for you right now?