

# 20 Questions to Ask *in the mill, or in the woods*

by Ben Hoffman



**No matter what kind of work you do in the mill or woods, or even at home, always ask yourself the following 20 questions—**

the familiar what, where, when, why, who, and how, with some variations. Going through the process will cause you to think about what you are doing and can save you much time and grief.



**The first 4 questions might help eliminate unnecessary work:**

What is being done?

What else could be done?

Is it necessary? (Or is it just nice?)

What should be done?



**The next 12 look for ways to rearrange or combine work to make it more efficient:**

Where is it done?

When could it be done?

Why is it done there?

Where should it be done?

Where else could it be done?

Who does it?

Where should it be done?

Why does he/she/it do it?

When is it done?

Who else could do it?

Why is it done then?

Who should do it?



**And the last 4 seek to find ways to simplify the work:**

How is it done?

How else could it be done?

Why is it done that way?

How should it be done?

So, let's run through the questions using a simple example with multiple options, limbing softwood pulp, a costly process prone to many accidents.

Q. What is being done?

A. We're removing the limbs from the tree, silly.

Q. Is it necessary?

A. Are you kidding? The mill won't accept logs with limbs on, and the trucker will gripe because they cut down on his load size.

Q. What else could be done?

A. Well, we could top the trees and skid them to

the landing. A lot of limbs would break off, making less work.

Q. What should be done?

A. I don't know—I'll have to chew on that.

Q. Where is it done?

A. In the woods, where the tree is felled.

Q. Why is it done there?

A. That's where it has always been done! (Often the answer you'll get to every question.)

Q. Where else could it be done?

A. Well, you could limb in the trail where there's less brush to work in, or at the landing after skidding

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breaks off many limbs.

**Q.** Where should it be done?

**A.** In deep snow, it's easier to limb in the trail.

**Q.** When is it done?

**A.** Usually right after falling.

**Q.** Why is it done then?

**A.** Because that's the way we always did it.

**Q.** When could it be done?

**A.** Actually, anytime, as long as it doesn't interfere with or delay other work.

**Q.** When should it be done?

**A.** Have to chew on that one.

**Q.** Who does it?

**A.** The chopper, who else?

**Q.** Who else could do it?

**A.** You could use an extra person in the woods, or do it at the landing.

**Q.** Who should do it?

**A.** Good question. It depends on a lot of things.

**Q.** How is it done?

**A.** Usually, the chopper falls the tree, then works up the stem, removing the limbs, and severing the stem at the top of the merchantable bole.

**Q.** Why is it done that way?

**A.** Don't you know anything about logging? How else could it be done?

**Q.** How else could it be done?

**A.** There are several options. A mechanical delimeter could be used in the woods or at the landing. Using chain saws, there are several options: (1) limb several trees together, (2) cut only the green limbs and let the dead ones break off in skidding, (3) just top the tree and limb at the landing, or (4) top the tree at the

first green limb and let skidding break off the dead ones. (I knew a cutter who dropped 2–4 small trees close together, limbed them all at the same time, and doubled his productivity.)

**Q.** How should it be done?

**A.** This depends on a lot of factors. Since a skidder and operator cost a lot more than a chain saw and sawyer, cutting must not delay the skidder.

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A good example of this questioning process occurred in a time and motion study of skidding with a small farm tractor and a 3-point-hitch winch. Because the winch did not raise the load very high, many delays were caused by stumps and other obstacles in the skid trail. Most delays occurred when stems were longer than 24 feet, so we began to cut long stems into shorter lengths. Surprise, productivity declined! Why? The extra time spent in choking more, but shorter, stems exceeded the skidding delays with long stems. The extra cutting also reduced sawyer productivity. When two activities are interconnected, you can't change one without considering the effects on the other.

I have used this technique successfully in the woods, in a factory, and in an office. It works. It is a very basic approach to reducing and simplifying work. But the answers do not tell how much change, if any, will occur; they simply point to where to look. Effects on time, cost, and production require additional study. ■

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*Ben Hoffman is a forester with 28 years experience in state, federal, and private forestry and 17 years in academia. Ben is retired as a Maine Licensed Forester, and Vermont Land Surveyor.*



***This small tractor used in the time study traveled much faster, with fewer delays, when skidding wood shorter than 24 feet. But the extra time to cut and choke the more numerous, but shorter, stems increased production costs. More but shorter stems meant more trips.***



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