

7. Process Analysis (“How To”)

NOTE: The following is general information about the rhetorical mode. It is not meant to take the place of any specific instructions given by your instructor for this assignment. If your instructor wants you to write your paper in a different manner, then by all means do it the way your instructor requires you to do it.

Processing the Process Essay

Here is some detailed information about writing your process (“How to”) essay.

1. The “big idea” behind the paper:

Practically everyone knows how to do something very well. In fact, many people know how to do something so well that they could actually teach someone else to do it.

That is the main purpose behind the process essay. You are to select something (a process) that you know how to do very well and then write a regular essay which “teaches” the reader how to do that same thing.

2. Here are some important specifics and details. Follow all of them very closely.

The formal name of the mode is process *analysis*.

Process = a step-by-step movement from a beginning point to an ending point.
Analysis = a careful examination; a close, detailed look at something

3. How do I select a topic?

- a. Something you know how to do very well
- b. Maybe something you do as a hobby
- c. Something you do as part of your job
- d. Perhaps something you learned how to do in school (but do not use any textbook to copy from or to get steps from). All ideas should come from only one source: your own experience.

4. What kind of topic should I select?

- a. First of all, select something that is very practical, down-to-earth, and easily visualized by your reader.
- b. Accordingly, you should not select a topic that is general, wishy-washy, and much too philosophical, such as “how to change your attitude about life.” Leave that stuff to Dr. Phil and Oprah.
- c. To be on the safe side, limit your choices to one of two categories:
 1. Making something (a bird house, a swing, a hamburger, etc.)
 2. Performing a service (waiting tables, washing a car, etc.)

- d. Select something easily manageable, not something too big. For example, how to build an entire house would be much too big and complicated for this essay; however, how to repave the driveway would be more manageable.
5. One of the most important purposes of this whole assignment is your ability to look at the process critically (analyze) and to divide the whole thing into several concrete steps.
 - a. Have at least three steps. Obviously, the more complex the process, the more steps you will have.
 - b. Each step should be easy to visualize as you explain it to the reader.
 - c. Each step must be distinct and different from the previous step.
 - d. Write one whole paragraph to explain each step. When a new paragraph begins, the reader of your paper should correctly assume that a new step in the process is also beginning.
6. The process itself should have a definite beginning point, a middle point, and an ending point. (See transitional words and phrases below.) Your paper should seem to be always moving forward through the process to get to the end. Don't dawdle around or get bogged down in the middle of the process.
7. Your introductory paragraph contains no steps; instead, it simply prepares the reader for the topic of your paper. You might try including such information as the following: When did you first try this process? Why is this process important? Why should the reader care about this process or be interested in it?

NOTE: By the time the introductory paragraph ends, the reader should know clearly what the process is and that you are about to explain to him how to do it. Don't make your reader have to "guess" what you're going to talk about.

8. By the same token, the concluding paragraph of your essay also contains no steps. The purpose of the concluding paragraph is to "ease out" of the topic by talking somewhat generally about the product or the service and then ending on a nice, warm, positive note about the topic in general.
9. Even though you are dealing with several steps in this essay, do not literally list and label the steps as steps. For example, do not write anything like this:

Step I: Get two pieces of 2 by 4 plywood.
Step II: Sand them down until both are very smooth.

Instead, explain each step in a regular, normal paragraph using regular, normal words and sentences. In short, this essay is not any different in appearance and style from any of the other essays you have already written for this course.

You are to write a regular, normal essay that has the purpose of explaining to the reader in great detail the various steps involved in how to make a product or how to perform a service. That's it!

10. Do not use the two words “How to...” in your title. This is very unnecessary. By the time the reader finishes your introduction, it should be crystal clear to him what your topic is and that you are about to explain to him how to make it or how to perform it. (It is all right, however, to use the words *how to* in your introductory paragraph if you wish.)
11. Just this one time for this one assignment, you may use the words *you*, *your*, and *yours* if you feel you must. In a way, you are talking directly to the reader, so the use of these pronouns might be considered necessary. However, do not overuse them.
12. Here are some important transitional words you might need to use as you take the reader through the forward journey of explaining your process:

At the start of the process

At first,.....
 In the beginning,....
 As you start,.....
 To begin with,.....
 The first step,....
 When you begin,.....

In the middle of the process

Next,.....
 After that,.....
 Continuing with,....
 The next step is....
 When this step is finished,....
 As you continue,.....

At or near the end of the process

Finally,....
 As you finish,.....
 Toward the end,....
 The last step,.....

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Tips on Doing a Cooking Process Essay

If you choose to tell “how to” cook some dish with which you are familiar, that is all right. However, you must be careful not to make your essay sound like a recipe. Your essay should use regular, flowing, smooth sentences, not little short choppy phrases and sentences like those commonly used in recipes.

Nowhere in your essay should you make a “list” of anything--no listing of necessary utensils or ingredients. You will need to say everything in normal, regular, full-length sentences.

Here are two paragraphs. The first shows how you should NOT phrase your cooking how-to paper. The second talks about the same dish but uses more acceptable sentence structuring.

NOTE: Because in a certain sense you are talking directly to the person who is reading your how-to paper, it will be all right in this one essay for you to use the word *you* when giving your information and instructions. However, do not overuse it.

Unacceptable (this paragraph sounds exactly like a recipe):

It is fairly easy to cook a delicious apple cobbler. Here are the things you need: two cups apples (peeled and sliced); 1 ½ cup of sugar; two sticks of butter or margarine; two cups of flour. Pour apples into a large howl. Add sugar slowly. Blend in butter or margarine. Pre-heat oven to 525 degrees. Place bowl on center rack of oven. Cook for 30 minutes or until brown on the top.

Acceptable (this one uses regular sentences and phrases to say the same thing):

It is fairly easy to cook a delicious apple cobbler. First, you will need to have at least two cups of apples on hand, and they should be peeled and sliced into thin crescent shapes. Almost any type of apple will do--either red delicious or granny style or whatever your local grocery store offers. Next, you will need about one half cup of sugar for extra added sweetness. Either white granulated sugar or brown refined will work equally well. (I have used both kinds with the same success.) Finally, about two sticks of butter or two pounds of margarine will be necessary to give the cobbler that lip-smacking smoothness that my family just loves.

The actual making of the cobbler is also fairly simple. You'll need a very large mixing bowl, into which you will pour all the carefully cut apple slices as well as the sugar and the butter. Now you'll need a rather large fork or spatula to mix and “mush up” all the ingredients together until they are all fairly well blended.

While you have been doing all this, the oven has been pre-heating to a toasty 425 degrees Fahrenheit. When you think the mixture is well blended, then place the bowl carefully near the back of the center oven rack and leave it there for about thirty minutes. After about half that time, you will begin to smell the enchanting aroma of baked apples filling your home, thus telling everyone that the wonderful time of fall is definitely here.