

Process writing explains how to do something and why. When your reader finishes reading about the process, he or she should know how to perform the task, or at least know a bit more about the how's and why's of the steps involved.

Process writing typically includes what to do, how to do it and in what order, and why you're doing it. As with all modes of writing, begin by considering your audience. This will determine how much detail to include, the type of language you use, and whether you need to explain more complex terms or ideas.

Two Types of Process Writing

- **Informational:** Explains a process so the reader can understand but is not necessarily intended for the reader to perform the steps.
 - Examples: how a bill becomes a law, how tornadoes are formed
- **Instructional:** Provides instructions in a detailed, step-by-step format, so that a user can follow and perform the process.
 - Examples: how to set up an iPod, how to stop smoking

Processes vs. Instructions

When your instructor asks you to write a process analysis essay, he or she is not looking for a recipe or a list of numbered steps. Process writing uses explanatory paragraphs to guide a reader through a process.

In contrast, if you are asked to write instructions, you may condense a large chunk of information into numbered, simplified steps. Instructional writing is a pared down version of process writing.

If asked to write a process essay, begin with these steps:

1. Make an informal list of all the steps in the process, labeling the difference between the major and minor ones. Put them in their proper sequence.
2. Write an introduction showing the reader why the process is interesting or important, what they'll learn from the process, and what to expect from its outcome.
3. Tell the reader the equipment or supplies they'll need BEFORE they get started.
4. Use the second person, *you*, or the understood you, to address your reader.
5. Present each step in one paragraph so that each is distinct and easily grasped. Depending on the complexity of the step and the audience's knowledge of the topic, you can also include some explanatory or supplementary information for each step (the why's and how's).

6. Use a variety of transitions as you move between steps to avoid sounding repetitive (*first, next, after, while, lastly, etc.*)
7. Let your reader know if a step is dangerous by flagging it or making it stand out (e.g.):
(**Caution:** Make sure all power to the circuit is turned off before proceeding!).
8. Conclude with a summary that tells the reader what the end result will be.

Overall Guidelines for Good Process Writing

1. If two steps are to be performed simultaneously, tell the reader at the START of the first one.
2. Maintain an even tone and tense (i.e. all present tense or all future tense verbs).
3. Similarly, keep the pronouns the same throughout. Second person “you” pronouns are usually considered acceptable in process writing because the *yous* and *yours* are referring directly to your readers and what they would need to do to successfully complete the process.
4. Note the reasons for every action, unless it’s obvious.
5. Define any terms your reader may not be familiar with.
6. Some processes can take place in only one order; some offer a choice. If you have a choice, choose what has worked best for you in the past.
7. If allowed by your instructor, consider adding illustrations or graphics to help emphasize your point.
8. Tell readers what to expect. Feedback lets the readers know they’re on the right track.
9. Test your instructions or have someone else test them to ensure accuracy.

Examples of Process Writing

See the Online Writing Center’s “WINK: An Online Journal” to read well-written examples of process writing by Western Technical College students.