Process Analysis Essay- Hints and Tips

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 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 In the middle of the process* At first,…….. Next,.…. In the beginning,…. After that,…..

As you start,….. Continuing with,…. To begin with,….. The next step is…. The first step,…. When this step is finished,….

When you begin,….. As you continue,…… *At or near the end of the process* Finally,…. As you finish,…..Toward the end,….

The last step,…..

|  |
| --- |
|  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Generic Process Outline | Outline for Doing Laundry |
| INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH   * Stage A   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3 * Stage B   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3   + step 4   + step 5   + step 6   + step 7 * Stage C   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3   + step 4 * Stage D   + step 1   + step 2 * Stage E   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3   CONCLUSION PARAGRAPH | INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH   * Stage A: Sorting the laundry   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3 * Stage B: Pre-washing   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3 * Stage C: Washing   + step 1   + step 2   + step 3   + step 4 * Stage D: Drying   + step 1   + step 2 * Stage E: Folding * Stage F: Ironing * Stage G: Storing   CONCLUSION PARAGRAPH |
|  | |
| Notice in the generic outline on the left that the paragraphs do not have an equal number of steps because each stage is not of identical depth. On the right, you see the actual outline for the essay on how to do laundry. It is broken down into 7 different stages. Sometimes it might take too long to describe a total task and you may have to break it down into a smaller component of a task.  Thoroughness  As you are writing this essay, you most likely will get to a point where you think you have said everything you could possibly put down on paper. This is writer-based prose. All it means is that the writer is looking at the subject only from his point of view, not that of his readers. The writer's goal is always to get to a level of reader-based prose. When the writer is able to anticipate questions and concerns that his audience is going to have and deal with those issues before the audience raises them, then the writer is communicating in reader-based prose. As a result, the piece of writing is considered thorough at this point.  For this process-analysis essay, "thorough" means not forgetting any of the major stages of the process nor any of the smaller steps within each of the larger stages. If any of the steps is left out, then the process is doomed to backfire if the reader follows the instructions faithfully. A good test for thoroughness is to give your essay to someone you trust to read your essay thoughtfully and meticulously. You want someone who will follow literally everything you've written. Or at the very least, find someone who is unfamiliar with the process and ask her to try to do what the essay explains. You know you have more work if the reader has questions or gets confused or does the wrong thing. After this test run, you should know where you need to add more details or information.  Writing in the Implied Second Person Instead of the Direct Second Person  It is really tempting to use the pronouns "you", "your", "yourself", "yours". These pronouns are what writers call the second person. In essence, you are directly referring to the reader rather than to a larger public audience. Now in this process-analysis essay--because you are explaining how to do something--it seems natural to use these pronouns. What we want to do is shift these second person point of view sentences into the *second person implied*.  Example #1-  Original version-If by your misguided fortune you happen to carelessly dribble or unknowingly splash bleach on the shelf or interior sides of the basin that don’t get hit with water, you most certainly will drag the next load over the un-evaporated puddle of bleach and irreversibly ruin that pair of $78 Calvin Klein indigo jeans you didn’t intend to perform tie-dye miracles upon.  Revised version-If by misguided fortune some bleach happens to dribble or splash itself on the shelf, or interior sides of the basin, that haven’t been hit with water, most certainly the un-evaporated bleach will find its way into a red polo shirt in the next load and perform its irreversible tie-dye magic on that pair of $78 Calvin Klein indigo jeans.  Compare the passages. Notice that the bleach, an inanimate object, has been given human qualities. No longer is the bleach stain the result of the inept laundry person, but the bleach has come to life and is responsible for getting in and staining the next load of laundry. When inanimate objects come to life, writers call that technique personification. The sentence, from a literary perspective, is much better than the original sentence because now it has a couple layers to it, and a wary reader should be able to notice that and appreciate the sentence on an additional level.  The writer needs to take time to polish their prose down to the selection of and arrangement of individual words. The result, though, is that the writer will be much more satisfied with the sentence, and the writer will develop a keener sense of how to use and manipulate the language.  Example #2  Here is another example from the same essay, but it is a lot easier to change the Point of View from second person direct (you) and even the 1st person (I) to *second person implied*. Study the revised paragraph to understand how this sentence-level change is accomplished:  Original version-I always find that since the sorting stage of laundry requires the most concentration, you should pick a time when your mind is at its peak. For me this is late in the evening, sometime after ten o’clock. Any other time, especially in the afternoon, I risk hazarding sorting an article of clothing into the wrong pile, which means certain failure somewhere else through the process. Aside from your concentration, the laundry demands that you are alert and quick to catch any mistake you might make.  Revised version-Since the sorting stage of laundry requires the most concentration, pick a time when the mind is sharpest. This might be early in the morning or after a freshly brewed cup of Starbuck’s double-shot espresso, but the point is to not to risk sorting an article of clothing into the wrong pile, which means certain failure somewhere else through the process. Aside from concentration, sorting the laundry demands the alertness to catch any irreversible mistake.  You can see that the meaning hasn't changed, but the tone has. The paragraph is less casual--but be quick to notice that it is not formal or overly stuffy either. What a difference it can make to work with word choice and point of view! | |

Sample Essay

**Texas Chili By Andy Savage**

Some people identify Texas with cowboys, horses, oil, or even J.R. Ewing – but not me. I think of the great food of Texas, and that food is chili. A staple dish in my household, chili is a dish with a long history. From the “pioneer” days of the early West to today, chili remains a favorite among many in the West, but particularly in Texas. My chili recipe is based on the contributions of friends, relatives, and hometown chili parlor. Prepared with its own special ingredients, my Texas Chili will make your guests’ eyes and mouths water and leave them with a satisfied appetite.

First, you will need to get the equipment and ingredients you will need to make Texas Chili. Several pieces of equipment are necessary: an electric skillet (with cover), a small wooden spatula, a can opener, a set of measuring spoons, a measuring cup, a glass plate, a microwave, four to six medium-sized bowls, and four to six spoons. A lengthy but appetizing set of ingredients is also vital to this heavenly dish: one pound of lean ground beef, two sixteen-ounce cans of Del Monte whole peeled tomatoes, four tablespoons of Gebhart chili powder, one tablespoon of garlic powder, two teaspoons of ground black pepper, one teaspoon of ground cayenne pepper, two teaspoons of ground cumin, one teaspoon of table salt, and one-half cup of water. Now that the equipment and ingredients are clear, let’s get started.

When you have obtained all of the specified equipment and ingredients listed above, the next step is to prepare your ingredients. Measure the water and leave it in the measuring cup until you need it. If the beef is frozen, defrost it in the microwave for approximately eight minutes. When it is thawed, unwrap it and place it on a glass plate. Now, place all the measured ingredients, the ground beef, and the tomatoes on the counter and place the electric skillet next to them. Plug the skillet in and turn the dial to 225 degrees. You are now ready to begin the actual cooking.

When the temperature light goes off the electric skillet, or when the inside of the skillet feels warm to a quick touch, it’s time to start cooking the beef. Place the ground beef in the skillet and break it apart with the spatula until it covers the bottom of the skillet. Stirring with the spatula every thirty seconds, cook the ground beef approximately six minutes, or until each piece of beef turns grey inside and out. At the moment the ground beef reaches this stage, pour the garlic powder over the ground beef and stir with the spatula until the garlic is dissolved (approximately ten times around the skillet). When this step is completed, there will be a strong “sinus healing” smell that will tickle the inside of your nose. The garlic makes its presence known.

After the garlic power is dissolved, add the tomatoes and remaining spices. Pour the tomatoes, including the juice, into the skillet. Using the spatula, cut up the tomatoes into small pieces and stir them around with the spatula until they are evenly distributed in the skillet along with the ground beef and garlic powder. At this point, add the chili powder and cayenne pepper to the mixture and stir with the spatula to dissolve these spices. Next, pour the table salt, ground black pepper, and ground cumin into the skillet and stir until these ingredients are also dissolved in the mixture. Add the water to the skillet mixture and stir it approximately twenty times around. After these ingredients are combined, the chili will appear a dark red color and will provide a mixed aroma of sweet-smelling tomatoes and spicy hot chili powder along with its cayenne cousin. Now, raise the heat to 350 degrees by turning up the dial on the skillet.

In the final stage of cooking, the chili will start to boil. This is easy to see because the chili will resemble a miniature lava pool with its dark red mixture giving off steam by its bubbling and belching. Let the mixture boil (and belch) for three minutes, stirring with the spatula every fifteen seconds. Then, turn the dial on the skillet to ‘simmer” and put the cover on top of the skillet. Let the chili simmer for eight minutes, stirring with the spatula every minute and reapplying the cover each time. At the end of eight minutes, turn the dial on the skillet to “off” and take the cover off the skillet. The finished product will be a thick, spicy-smelling red mixture filled with chunks of beef halfway submerged in a hot tub of spicy juices.

The chili is now ready to eat! This recipe serves four Texas-sized portions or six regular portions. With the spatula, place the chili in bowls, and then tell everyone to use a big spoon and “dig in.” This chili is spicy and even hot at times, but its combination of sweet and sour flavors is both unique and delicious. A bottle of Corona, twenty crackers, and a big pickle are optional.

Sample Essay #2

**Successful Exercise**

Regular exercise is something like the weather—we all talk about it, but we tend not to do anything about it. Exercise classes on television and exercise programs on videos and CDs—as well as instructions in books, magazines, and pamphlets—now make it easy to have a low-cost personal exercise program without leaving home. However, for success in exercise, you should follow a simple plan consisting of arranging time, making preparations, and starting off at a sensible pace.

Everyone has an excuse for not exercising: a heavy schedule at work or school; being rushed in the morning and exhausted at night; too many other responsibilities. However, one solution is simply to get up half an hour earlier in the morning. Look at it this way: if you're already getting up too early, what's an extra half hour? Of course, that time could be cut to 15 minutes earlier if you could lay out your clothes, set the breakfast table, fill the coffee maker, and gather your books and materials for the next day before you go to bed.

Next, prepare for your exercise session. To begin with, get yourself ready by not eating or drinking anything before exercising. Why risk an upset stomach? Then, dress comfortably in something that allows you to move freely. Since you'll be in your own home, there's no need to invest in a high-fashion dance costume. A loose T-shirt and shorts are good. A bathing suit is great in summer, and in winter, long underwear is warm and comfortable. If your hair tends to

flop in your eyes, pin it back or wear a headband or scarf. Prepare the exercise area, too. Turn off the phone and lock the door to prevent interruptions. Shove the coffee table out of the way so you won't bruise yourself on it or other furniture. Then get out the simple materials you'll need to exercise with.

Finally, use common sense in getting started. Common sense isn't so common, as anyone who reads the newspapers and watches the world can tell you. If this is your first attempt at exercising, begin slowly. You do not need to do each movement the full number of times at first, but you should *try* each one. After five or six sessions, you should be able to do each one the full number of times. Try to move in a smooth, rhythmic way; this will help prevent injuries and

pulled muscles. Pretend you're a dancer and make each move graceful, even if it's just getting up off the floor. After the last exercise, give yourself five minutes to relax and cool off—you have earned it. Finally, put those sore muscles under a hot shower and get ready for a great day.

Establishing an exercise program isn't difficult, but it can't be achieved by reading about it, talking about it, or watching models exercise on television. It happens only when you get off that couch and do something about it. As my doctor likes to say, "if you don't use it, you'll lose it."