

Composition

Second Year

Second Semester

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Process Analysis Essay:

A PROCESS is a series of actions leading to an unexpected or planned end. There are two types of process essays: those that instructor direct and those that explain or analyze. Directional process essays tell how to do something. For example, a directional process might explain how to fix a flat tire. The purpose of this type of essay is to clarify the steps in the procedure so that the reader can recreate the steps and the results. A process essay that explains or analyzes a process tells how something works, how something happened, or how something is or was done. For example, you could explain how World War II got started or how hurricanes form. This type of process essay has a purpose different from a directional process essay. Its main purpose is to inform, explain or analyze. The reader is gaining an understanding of the process; he or she does not necessarily expect to be able to recreate the process.

Although process essays that explain or instruct have different purposes, they can be developed using the same pattern of development and organization.

Planning the Process Analysis Essay

When you are planning your essay, you should bear in mind the following pieces of advice:

- ***Be aware of the audience.***

When you are planning a process essay, the first question is, "What does my reader know about the topic?" Identifying the audience is important in deciding what to include and what to omit in the essay. For instance, let us say that you decided to explain how to paint a room to an inexperienced person. You would have to be very specific and assume that the reader knows little or nothing about the process. On the other hand, if the audience is a professional or experienced painter, you would have to approach the assignment differently. In this case, you would probably explain a special technique that he or she may not be aware of. In general, however, assume that the reader knows little about the topic being explained, but has the same general knowledge you do.

- ***Order the steps chronologically.***

Since a process essay describes a sequence of steps leading to some preconceived end, it is important that the steps be discussed in the order that they occur; in other words, the steps should be arranged in chronological order. Ordering the ideas chronologically is vital, especially if the reader is to be able to recreate the process. The only time to break from chronological order is when you explain some unfamiliar term or give some form of advice or caution.

- ***Make sure that the process is complete.***

Whether you are explaining how to do something or how something was done, make sure to include *all* the steps in the process. Obviously, if you are explaining how to do something and leave out one of the steps, the reader will not be able to recreate the process and get the same result.

- *Be sure to define new or unfamiliar terms.*

This is especially true for process essays that give instructions. Sometimes a process description may introduce a word or phrase that the reader might not understand. Since it makes little sense to have the reader attempt to complete a process without understanding the particular terms involved, always define what he or she might not know. If you are explaining how to repair a flat tire, for example, you might have to describe or define what a lug wrench is; otherwise, the reader would not know which tool is being discussed and could not continue with the process.

- *Warn your reader of difficulties in the process.*

When planning a process essay, try to anticipate what problems the reader might have in understanding or recreating the process. If one step is particularly difficult, warn the reader of this. Be sure to warn him or her what *not* to do as well. For example, if you are explaining how to get a driver's license, it is a good idea to warn the reader about some of the tricky things that might come up during the driving test such as advising the reader what to do if the car stalls.

- *Explain the purpose of a step when necessary.*

A process essay is more than just a list of steps. Expect that the reader wants to understand the process, whether he or she will attempt to recreate it or merely to read it. Therefore, you should explain the rationale behind the steps when the rationale is not obvious. In other words, try to explain the purpose of the steps. This kind of explanation is

especially useful when the reader may skip the step because he or she thinks that it does not serve any real purpose.

- *try to make your thesis statement persuasive.*

A thesis statement for a process essay does not have to have a strong central idea; in fact, it can be as simple as "There are three major steps involved in changing a flat tire." However, since the essay has its underlying purpose more than just a listing of steps (those steps should be explained and analyzed), it is a good idea to have a thesis that contains a strong central idea. The thesis statement might be, "Changing a flat tire is really quite easy." This statement will require showing that the process is indeed easy. On the other hand, the thesis might be, "Changing a flat tire is a horrible experience." Now it would be necessary to show how horrible the process is.

Organizing the Process Analysis Essay

One of the most difficult aspects of writing a process essay is deciding where to divide the essay into paragraphs. Generally speaking, most processes break down into a beginning, middle, and end. Here are a few pointers for dividing process steps logically into paragraphs:

1. *Introduction.* The introductory paragraph should introduce the topic and establish the purpose for writing the process. The reader should understand why the process is being described and in what situations the process is used.

2. *Developmental paragraphs.* The actual description of the process usually begins in the first developmental paragraph. However, if you are

describing how to do something and the process requires that the reader obtain some items first, then you may need to point out in the first developmental paragraph what items are needed.

The actual steps of the process can usually be divided into three or four major steps. For example, if you were explaining how to change a flat tire, the first section could deal with getting the car jacked up; the next section could deal with removing and replacing the tire; the last section could deal with removing the jack. Generally speaking, each major section can be described in a separate paragraph, but the topic sentences in process essays are often implied.

3. *Conclusion.* How to conclude a process essay depends on the type of process being described. Often the conclusion discusses the results of the process.