

The process essay is writing that explains how to do something or how something works by giving a step-by-step explanation.

There are three steps to a process essay: present the essential steps in the process, explain the steps in detail, and present the steps in logical order (usually chronological). During each step you must explain (analyze) why that step is necessary and what might happen if you don't do it correctly.

## Process Analysis Essay

For college compositions (and that's what we're getting ready for!), you will often be asked to explain **how something works** or **how to do something**. For example, you might be asked to explain any of the following:

- how the electoral college elects the President of the United States
- how photosynthesis works
- how to teach a blind student Braille
- How the AIDS virus attacks the immune system

Learning to write clear process analysis will help you with essay exams and with sections of any composition in which processes are explained.

If you are assigned to write a **process essay**, remember that the thesis must not only tell the process to be explained, but it must also express your opinion, attitude, or judgment about the process.

**Example thesis:** Practicing good essay structure will result in better grades on every paper you write in college.

**Process analysis development can be divided into two types:**

1. Directional - **how to do something.**

The usual purpose is give directions so that the readers can perform the process.

Text explaining how to do something is sometimes written in second person--addressing the reader as "you." For this essay, you may NOT use "you."

Remember that a sentence written in imperative mood (a command) has an understood subject, "you." For example, in the sentence **First gather materials**, the understood subject is "you."

Informational -

- how something occurred
- how something works
- How to explain a psychological process

The usual purpose is for the reader to gain understanding of the process, not necessarily to perform it. Such compositions are usually written in third person.

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## **Thesis Sentence**

The thesis sentence of the introduction of a process essay must state the process to be explained. Also it must express a point of view (opinion, attitude, or judgment) about that process.

In a student-written essay in *Patterns for College Writing*, third edition, Scott Blackman writes this thesis sentence:

Even if students do not wish to learn their blood type, the exercise [typing one's blood] is useful because it familiarizes them with some simple laboratory techniques, illustrates the use of basic equipment, and prepares them to follow the stages of an orderly scientific procedure. (199)

The sentence tells the reader that the process to be explained is typing blood and points out Blackman's judgment about the procedure – or the reader's REASON to read it.

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## **Organization and Development**

Process analysis describes a series of steps; therefore, the organization will be chronological if it is directional. If it is informational, usually an order of importance is used.

Divide the process into 3 to 5 major divisions for a 500 to 700 word composition. For example, making cookies.  
Division 1 – Gathering and measuring ingredients. 2 – Mixing 3. Baking and cooling

If there are tools or materials needed for the process, perhaps the first paragraph will need to specify the equipment necessary for the task. If you are explaining an historical happening, this paragraph might be background. If it is informational, you might explain who uses this information (for example – how many people get a divorce each year...)

Explain each step very carefully. If you are writing directions, actually try to follow them when you are finished with the first draft. Usually you will find steps you need to add.

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## Suggestions To Aid Development

1. Not only tell what to do but also tell why to do it.
  2. Sometimes it's important to tell the readers what **not** to do. And why.
  3. Inform readers of necessary cautions or warnings.
  4. Include not only information about the process but also enough text to "prove" your point of view about the process.
  5. Define any terms with which the readers may not be familiar.
  6. Use pictures or diagrams that are helpful.
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### Transitions Appropriate for Process Analysis (or for any chronological organization)

first, second, third, after that, next, later, as soon as, until, when, once, at the same time, during, meanwhile, while, finally, last (of all), most importantly, to finish

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### Suggested Topics

(Writers should select topics with which they are familiar. These are college level topics suitable for involved and committed student. )

1. How to avoid hypothermia
2. How to take notes from a text or on a lecture
3. How to use FCHS Library Web Site to find periodical sources
4. How solar cells make power
5. How to become an amateur radio operator
6. How exposure to sun causes cancer
7. How to use Search Engines
8. How industrial waste is polluting our lakes
9. How to improve \_\_\_\_\_ skills
10. How to totally antagonize a teacher and flunk Composition.
11. How to make fried chicken
12. How to design a theater set
13. How to set up your computer
14. How early Disney animation worked
15. How to write a research paper
16. How Napoleon planned the invasion of Russia
17. How to safely extinguish a fire
18. How the Supreme Court operates
19. How gravity works
20. How a bill becomes a law
21. How to receive an injection without crying
22. How to lose a job through incompetence
23. How to operate a VCR – or how a VCR operates