

## Lesson 8: Explaining a Process

**Informative writing** does exactly what it intends: it provides the reader with information! This type of writing provides the reader with information that is educational, inspirational, or practical. Can you name different kinds of writing that give you information? How about encyclopedias? Nature magazines? Newspapers? These are designed to "inform" you. Study guides help you understand a subject better. Instruction manuals tell you how to program an oven, assemble a drone, or operate a machine. Cookbooks explain step-by-step how to prepare various foods. Textbooks fill your head with information about math, grammar, science, and history. Biographies tell you about the life of another person. Craft books, carpentry books, or art books teach you how to make or build or draw.

One type of informative writing is called **explaining a process**. When you explain a process, you tell your readers, in a step-by-step manner, how something is done. You might wish to help readers understand a process with which they are not familiar, like how paper is made, or how tomatoes go from field to grocery shelf. This type of writing is simply meant to educate.

On the other hand, you may want to enable readers to follow your steps and perform the process themselves, as in making a sandwich or playing a new game. In this case, you must write clear, specific, well-organized details so that no step will be missed or performed out of order.

The following student example may give you an idea of how to add interesting detail to a seemingly ordinary task:

### **Laundry Time**

*by Nick, age 13*

Laundrying is quite a simple task. To begin, sort dirty clothes into stacks according to light or dark colors and heavy or delicate fabrics. Second, check for spots or smudges that will need to be briskly scrubbed with stain remover before washing. After selecting the appropriate water level and temperature cycle, load a pile of laundry into a machine with half a cup of liquid detergent to begin washing. Next, transfer the soggy heap into the dryer, choose the optimum heat and drying time, and add a fabric softener sheet for longer lasting freshness. Finally, when the electronic buzzer sounds, remove the soft, warm garments, quickly fold them and replenish your empty drawers immediately. Satisfied and delighted, stop and smell the laundry!

## Choosing a Topic

This lesson teaches you to write a paragraph that explains a process. *Follow the directions carefully.* If you have trouble thinking of a topic you could write about how to:

- Wash the car, the dishes, or the dog
- Prepare a simple dish, like pancakes or an ice cream sundae
- Play a simple game
- Make an easy craft
- Treat a minor injury
- Perform a household chore
- Make a simple repair
- Sharpen a pencil

## Brainstorming

1. Choose to write about a process with which you are both familiar and comfortable.
2. Go through the process yourself.
3. Have one of your parents **take pictures** of you as you perform each step.  
*IMPORTANT: Print the photos soon; you will need them when you write the final draft.*
4. Imagine that someone is interested in your topic. **Think of a broad question** they might ask, such as "How do you cook scrambled eggs?" or "How do you play Pin the Tail on the Donkey?"
5. **Write this question in the Question Box** on the Process Planning Worksheet (p. 8-5).
6. Recall the steps you performed as you went through the process. On scratch paper, write them down in order.
7. See if you can break down the process into **four main steps**. Write these steps in Boxes 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the worksheet. (Note: You might not have four main steps.)
8. Now think of how each of these steps can be divided into **three smaller steps**. Write these steps in the remaining blanks under the appropriate main heading. (Note: sometimes you might only be able to list one or two smaller steps.)
9. Important Tips
  - **Do not** give exact measurements or other such details.
  - **Do not** list every single ingredient, supply or procedure, just the important ones.
  - **Do not** write what the reader can assume. For instance, it isn't necessary to mention using a knife to slice an apple or tying a knot in the thread before clipping it.
10. Brainstorm for additional *descriptive* details on your "Process Planning Worksheet."

## Writing the "Sloppy Copy"

1. Write a topic sentence. Consider using *paired adjectives* to begin the topic sentence, such as: "Fragrant and colorful, scented bath salts make a unique homemade gift."  
Note: **Don't** write anything like, "I am going to tell you how to make bath salts."
2. Following the plan of your paragraph outline, write the details of the process in a logical, step-by-step order. Use clear, concrete instructions that your reader will easily understand.
3. Use the "Transition Words" list on pp. 14-15. Since this is a short paragraph, do not use the same transition word more than once.
4. Because you're giving instructions directly to the reader, you will, of course, write in second person. However, whenever possible avoid using the actual words *you* and *your*. Instead, imply them, as in the following examples:

*"First you will need to gather your shampoo, a bucket, and old towels"* becomes  
*"First, gather shampoo, a bucket, and old towels."*

*After you are through rinsing your dog...* becomes *"After rinsing the dog..."*

5. Eliminate instructions that can be worked into another sentence, such as greasing a pan or turning on the stove. Focus on what is most important and what can be described most vividly. For instance:

Instead of: *"Grease a frying pan with oil. Turn on the stove and heat the pan. Next, pour the mixture into the pan."*

Write: *"Next, pour the (adj.) mixture into the greased and heated pan and let it cook (adv.) until ..."*

Not only does it sound better, it combines **three sentences into one!**

6. Don't forget to use all required *sentence variations*. **Hint:** *Paired adjectives and participial phrases work especially well in topic and closing sentences.*
7. Include some *colorful descriptions*. After all, this is a creative writing assignment and not a technical manual! Refer to your "Process Planning Worksheet," where you brainstormed for details.
8. Also, be sure to include *articles* (a, an, the). They tend to be easily omitted. Instead of saying "Place pan in oven," write "Carefully place **the** pan of creamy batter into **a** preheated oven," including both articles *and* details.
9. Be especially careful of wordiness. Avoid repeating main words and phrases.
10. To double-check for accuracy, read your paragraph *out loud*. If possible, ask someone to follow the steps and perform the same task. Make any necessary changes.

### **Writing the First Revision and Final Draft**

1. Write your first revision and have your parent/teacher edit it.
2. Make necessary corrections and changes.
3. Put together an **Instruction Manual** for the task you have written about. *If you didn't take photos, simply rewrite your final draft as usual and turn it in as a regular paragraph.*
  - Choose the photos you will use to illustrate your process. Use 4-6 photos and sheets of notebook paper. Tape or glue-stick each picture to the top half of each sheet of paper.
  - **Your manual is your final draft.** Write the sentence or sentences that the photo illustrates. Copy your corrected revision word-for-word. This "instruction manual" will be a duplicate of your best rewrite.
  - Assemble your "manual." Design and decorate a colorful cover, using as much creativity as you like.
  - Give your manual an attractive or catchy title.

# Lesson 8: Process Planning Worksheet

A. Write your broad question here:

\_\_\_\_\_ ?

B. Write down the FOUR main steps here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

C. Once you've written your sloppy copy, brainstorm for interesting descriptions.

1. Use an **orange** colored pencil to underline all the nouns. Make a list of these nouns in the spaces below (use extra paper if necessary). Brainstorm to come up with synonyms and adjectives that will make them more descriptive and colorful. Not every noun needs an adjective, but it certainly helps make your writing more lively when you **add a few well-chosen details**.

**EXAMPLE**

If you wrote, "*Massage the shampoo into her fur,*" ask yourself: *How could I describe the shampoo? Thick? Sweet-smelling? Creamy?*

And what about the dog's fur? *Is it wet? Dirty? Stiff? Matted?*

Finally, if you repeated the word *shampoo*, can you think of synonyms?

**LIST NOUNS HERE.**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Repeat the process above, using a **brown** colored pencil to underline verbs. Brainstorm for synonyms and adverbs that make your meaning clear. For example, if the instructions say, "*Stir the batter,*" ask yourself, "*How should the batter be stirred? Briskly? Gently? Carefully?*" Furthermore, do you really mean *stir*? Maybe *beat, fold, whip, or blend* would define the action better.

**LIST VERBS HERE.**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## Lesson 8: Skill Builder

*Arranging in Time-Sequence Order*

**Directions:** Number each group of sentences in time-sequence order.

### DAY ONE

- \_\_\_\_\_ Next, paint a number from one to six inside each can.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Stand back and try to toss six buttons or pebbles into the cans.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Glue six tin cans together to form a triangle.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The player with the highest score wins.
- 

- \_\_\_\_\_ Each player can carry as many beans and make as many trips as he wants.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The first one to move his beans to the finish line wins the game.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ They must use the spoon to move all the beans to an empty cup behind the finish line.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Players place their cup of beans behind the starting line.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ To begin, give each player a spoon and a cup with fifty beans in it.
- 

### DAY TWO

- \_\_\_\_\_ String the macaroni.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Wrap it at one end with transparent tape to make a needle.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Lay the macaroni on paper towels until it dries.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Cut a piece of yarn long enough to make a necklace.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ First, dip large macaroni into different food colors for a few seconds.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Then untie the piece of macaroni and tie the yarn ends together.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Tie a piece of macaroni at the other end.
- 

- \_\_\_\_\_ Squeeze the peeled lemons, strain the juice, and add it to the cooled mixture.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When the water is cool, take out the rinds and throw them away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Peel the rinds from four lemons, put them in a bowl, and cover with one cup sugar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Refrigerate until ice-cold.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Then boil your water and pour it over the sugar and rinds.

**DAY THREE**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Lather the soap on the cloth and thoroughly scrub her all over.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Second, scrub the baby's hair with shampoo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lift her out and dry her off.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gather together baby shampoo and soap, a washcloth, towel, toys, diaper, clothes, and a comb.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Finally, comb her hair.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Don't forget all the creases on her chubby body!
- \_\_\_\_\_ Then change her diaper and dress her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ First, gently lower the baby into the bathtub.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rinse off the soap.



## Lesson 8: Student Writing Skills Checklist

### CONTENT

- Are my topic and choice of words appropriate for my audience?
- Do all sentences support my topic sentence (no "carrots in my cookie jar")?
- Does the content flow smoothly? Did I organize the details in a way that makes sense to the reader?
- Does the title capture the essence of my paragraph?

### STYLE

- Did I write a strong topic sentence that introduces my paragraph?
- Did I use no more than two forms of "to be"? (*is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been*)  
**Circle** to be words in **red**.
- Did I choose synonyms instead of repeating main words? **Underline** repeated words in blue.
- Did I use concrete words that are specific, vivid, and sensory? **Underline** vague words in green.
- Did I check my "Weak Words" list against my paragraph? **Underline** any of these in green.
- Have I correctly varied my sentence structure by
  - \_\_beginning one sentence with paired adjectives?
  - \_\_beginning one sentence with a present (-ing) participial phrase?
  - \_\_using my Transitions word list?
- Did I avoid wordiness by crossing out unnecessary words, phrases, or sentences?
- As much as possible, did I imply *you/your* instead of using the actual words?
- Did I write a strong closing sentence that gives a feeling of ending?

### MECHANICS

- Did I put my name and date in the upper right-hand corner?
- Is my paragraph 5-9 sentences long? How many sentences? \_\_\_\_\_
- Did I indent my first sentence? If not, draw an **arrow** ➔ to show that you need to indent.
- Did I leave margins around my paragraph? If not, draw a light **pencil line** down right side of page.
- Did I remember to skip every other line? If not, draw a light **X** on each line you want to skip.
- Did I use good spacing between words and sentences? If not, draw two **vertical lines** || to separate.
- Did I double-check my spelling? **Circle** suspected words; **look up** and make changes.
- Did I double-check capitalization and punctuation? **Correct** any errors.
- Did I use complete sentences? Did I check for run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers?
- Did I complete and **turn in** my Explaining a Process brainstorming worksheet?
- Did I correctly use this Checklist along with colored pencils? Did I **make corrections** before revising?
- BEFORE TURNING IN MY WORK:** Did I staple my papers together in this order: Worksheet on the very bottom, "sloppy copy" on top of that, neatly rewritten copy next, and this Checklist on the very top?

## Lesson 8: Teacher Writing Skills Checklist

*Edit your paragraph one more time, making any necessary changes or improvements.*

### CONTENT

OK Needs improvement

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Topic and choice of words are appropriate for the audience                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Followed instructions for this assignment   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All sentences support topic sentence (no "carrots in your cookie jar")                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Content flows smoothly; details are organized in a way that makes sense to the reader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Title captures the essence of the paragraph   |

### STYLE

OK Needs improvement

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong topic sentence that introduces the composition   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used no more than <b>two</b> forms of "to be"   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Chose synonyms instead of repeating main words  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used concrete words that are specific, vivid, and sensory   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoided the use of "weak" words   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Varied sentence structure by correctly using each of the following:<br>___began one sentence with paired adjectives<br>___began one sentence with an "-ing" participle<br>___used Transitions Word List |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wrote concisely, avoiding wordiness   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Implied <i>you/your</i> instead of using the actual words (as much as possible)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong closing sentence that gives a feeling of ending  |

### MECHANICS

OK Needs improvement

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Name and date in the upper right-hand corner                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Paragraph is 5-9 sentences long  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Indented first sentence of the paragraph; left margins around the paragraph        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Skipped lines  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used good spacing between words and sentences                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Double-checked spelling by <u>circling</u> and <u>looking up</u> suspected words   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Capitalized the first word of each sentence as well as proper nouns                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoided improper capitalization  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used punctuation correctly   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Used complete sentences; avoided run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Writing is neat and easy to read   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Correctly used checklist and colored pencils, circling and underlining as directed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Included brainstorming sheet, all drafts of this paragraph, and your checklist     |

Comments \_\_\_\_\_