

## Process and Analysis

We use process analysis all the time. When we read and follow the directions on a pay telephone or a self-service gas pump, we are using process. Process is a habit of mind involving ideas in logical sequences. There is an orderly and efficient way to do almost everything, although nearly everyone thinks his or her way is best. Basically there are two kinds of processes: directional and informational. The directional process explains how to do something so that the reader can duplicate the action suggested while the informational process explains how a more complicated process is done but not with the intent of duplication. You do not have to be a miner to understand how strip mining works, nor are you expected to run right out and create a strip mine in your back yard if you read about how the process is done.

Process analyses are used in almost anything that requires a step-by-step explanation. When you explain the steps of a chemistry experiment, you are presenting a directional process. You use informational processes every time you explain how the Native Indians were disenfranchised, how a bill becomes law, or how the writing process works. Chapter Two in this book specifically discusses the writing process, for instance.

### Strategy

When you explain a process, particularly a directional one, you should take several things into consideration.

1. Provide an overview of general principles. Give your reader an understanding of the way you intend to develop your plan.
2. Provide complete details. All the techniques you use in describing anything will, of course, be applicable to describing how to do a process or how a particular process is done.
3. Define any technical terms. Keep your audience in mind and try to make your explanation clear enough to communicate effectively.
4. Provide reasons for the steps you include. You should tell why it is important to include certain elements of the process as well as how to do them.
5. Include negative directions as well as the reasons for doing things a certain way in a certain order. You must warn the reader in key places about what not to do. Since cyanide is difficult to remove from all kinds of surfaces, including glass, it is probably better not to mix Kool-Aid for the neighborhood kids in a beaker you usually use for cyanide experiments.
6. Illustrate your process using descriptive techniques. Normally, you will not have diagrams or other visual aids in your writing; therefore, you need to create images to make your process clear.
7. You will have noticed in the course of this discussion that its point of view violates the rules you may have been told about using second person and shifting points of view.

Since this book is designed as a set of directions or instructions for the reader, it often uses second person. The purpose and audience determine the point of view you will use in your writing. Sometimes your instructor will insist that you use third person (“one,” “he,” “she”) in order to practice appealing to certain audiences of the type you will write for in many academic settings. One way to implement the consistent use of third person in a process is to introduce an actor—someone who is logically involved in the process—early in your discussion. If you are describing how to bake bread, the person involved in the process is the baker. When you refer to the baker as the actor in the process, you refer to him or her in the third person. Sometimes you may be asked to use the imperative: a command or request whose implied subject is “you.” An old Paul Simon song advises the audience about “fifty ways to leave a lover” and uses the imperative: “Get on the bus, Gus” “Make a new plan, Stan;” “No need to be coy, Roy.” Likewise, the directions on the service station gas pump are consistently imperative:

1. Select octane grade;
2. Lift handle;
3. Insert nozzle and pump.

No matter what the assignment requires, you must maintain a consistent point of view. Do not shift from “I” to “you” to “he” and back again. Keep your audience firmly in mind.

## Organization

In writing process papers, the same general steps that apply to all writing situations are also important. As you outline, you should group steps logically. You will not put each step in a single short paragraph. The reader should be aware that you have a plan, an outline, but it should not be intrusive. Your outline is the skeleton of your essay; the essay should flesh out that skeleton. Be sure you choose a process which is a suitable length for the paper required, and organize logically, usually chronologically. The thesis statement should indicate the specific groups of steps you will discuss, corresponding to the paragraphs you develop. Throughout the paper, keep your reader firmly in mind: the audience and the purpose will determine your tone, your techniques, and your direction. Do not condescend to or patronize your audience; explain clearly. In a directional process you may want to use personal narrative, especially in the introduction to indicate how you became familiar with the process or why you think knowing about this process is important or worthwhile. Transitions are particularly important in process, usually indicating that the steps are chronological for a reason. Generally you will use transitions like “first,” “next,” “then,” “additionally,” and “finally” in addition to any devices you need to make your ideas clearly logical for your reader. You may want to include phrases like “Be sure to \_\_\_ before you try to \_\_\_” or “Under no circumstance should you do \_\_\_ before doing \_\_\_.” In your conclusion, you should indicate the results of the procedure—a fluffy soufflé, a law, a well-written essay, an embalmed corpse—and their significance.

### CHECKLIST FOR PROCESS ESSAY

1. Did you list all the necessary steps?
2. Is each step explained thoroughly, offering specific, vivid details?
3. Did you define any terms that might be unfamiliar to your audience?
4. Did you provide clear connective words to indicate the sequential nature of the process described?
5. Did you vary your sentences enough to avoid monotony?
6. Is your purpose clear, either to inform and entertain or to help someone duplicate a step-by-step process?
7. Did you edit your paper carefully, checking for major grammatical and spelling errors?