

Instructions

Write a set of instructions for performing a task with which you are very familiar. Write the instructions for readers who have never performed the task before. Your audience must have a *pressing need* for your written instructions. In order to avoid undertaking a task that is overly complex (or overly simple), you must obtain my approval for the task by completing a topic proposal worksheet.

Choosing a task

The task may involve a device: assembling it, operating it, or fixing it. Or the task may involve some process. You may choose the task from a course, a hobby, a previous job. Consider the following constraints when choosing a task.

- Be sure to choose a task at an appropriate level of difficulty. Some tasks are too easy to need detailed instructions, or might be best taught orally. Others are so complex that they can only be described with a long manual.
- The device or process should have discrete parts that are fairly easy to name and refer to. Avoid tasks that do not involve multiple items or items with multiple pieces. For example, do not plan to write instructions for tasks such as tying a tie, serving a tennis ball, or driving a stick shift car.
- The task should take *no less than 10 minutes and no more than 25 minutes* to perform.
- The task should be one that *can conveniently be performed on campus or close to it*. You will need to have the necessary materials at hand while you are writing the instructions.
- Carrying out the instructions must not be dangerous or expensive.

You may choose a task for which a set of instructions is already available and revise those instructions. In this case, you must discuss the existing instructions in your topic proposal to convince me that you are taking on a challenging revision task. Either you must argue that the existing instructions are seriously inadequate, or you must plan to revise the instructions for a significantly different audience.

Writing the instructions

In order to create a set of instructions, you will need to carry out the task yourself as self-consciously as possible. Also, try to talk with other people who know how to perform the task and ask them to comment on common mistakes that inexperienced people make.

Your reader should be able to carry out your instructions *without seeking help from other sources*. Include sufficient detail and use terms your audience will be able to understand.

Follow the general format for instructions described in class, with modifications as required for your rhetorical situation. The steps should represent a logical division of actions and be clearly expressed as imperatives (commands) and results, with any necessary explanations. Help the reader assess whether the task was completed successfully and tell the reader how to solve common problems. Address your audience directly and use a tone appropriate to the rhetorical situation.

Page design and illustrations

Instructions communicate visually as well as verbally. Your instructions must include at least one original illustration (a drawing you drew or a photograph you took yourself), but you may need many more illustrations. In addition, your instructions must use a page design that makes the information accessible. Remember to consider the conditions under which the document will be used.

Examples of tasks used in the past

conducting sieve analysis of coarse aggregates
operating the PARR 1241 oxygen bomb calorimeter
interpreting Service A data (meteorological statistics)
using an architect's scale
operating a pH meter
creating and analyzing a surface weather map
performing density measurements with a stereopycnometer
using an orienteering compass with a topographical map

Due dates

See syllabus for due dates. **In addition, you will be required to turn in a topic proposal worksheet (due Thursday, Jan. 22). You must bring in hard copies of all documents, including workshop drafts (viewing on computer screens will not be accepted).** Failure to produce enough workshop drafts for your group members during the workshop will result in a 10-point reduction from the final instructions grade; failure to produce a topic proposal sheet will result in a 5-point reduction from the final instructions grade. **Criteria for evaluation**

The following factors are crucial for the success of your instructions. All of the factors are important. If you are uncertain about whether your document meets these criteria, please seek my advice.

- *Audience accommodation.* The instructions must target an audience using reader-centered writing. They must be tailored to the needs, attitudes, and knowledge of a specific audience, and must clearly indicate how the document is relevant to the readers.
- *Thoroughness and helpfulness.* The instructions must include all details necessary for completing the task. Anticipate the questions or problems a reader might face. Provide opportunities for readers to check their progress.
- *Structure.* The instructions must include sections that present a manageable amount of information. Use headings that describe the contents of sections so readers with varying needs can locate the information they want. Use numbered lists in the directions section(s).
- *Document design.* The instructions must include at least one original illustration. The reader's attention should be directed to important parts of the illustration(s), and the illustration(s) should be integrated with the text. The page design must remain consistent throughout the document. The most important elements of the page must be emphasized visually.