

How-to (H2)

ENG 180, Bradley Dilger, Spring 2007

Summary: in three pages, describe how to complete an activity you enjoy. Avoid a “step by step” format, opting instead for well-organized prose which flows smoothly, allowing your reader to complete your task easily.

For this first assignment, you will write out a detailed, descriptive “how-to” for an activity which you engage often. The hard part of this assignment is using prose for a form which often uses recipe or list formats. However, this form will allow you to include personal details and a unique perspective—your *ethos* as a writer knowledgeable about your subject.

Your process should be completely described and should make sense to the reader. You should not leave important details to the imagination, but must describe the methodologies and reasons for completing the task in the manner you describe. Ideally, readers will be able to use your essay quite literally as a how-to document.

Your activity can be nearly anything. In the past, students have described the following:

- how to ride a Go West bus (more complicated than you might think);
- throwing a legal fraternity party at Western, including details about paperwork and discouraging crashers;
- sewing a pair of pajama pants.

The organizational framework you choose should suit your subject matter. Chronology can function for many how-tos, but in some cases it’s better to break the task down into components and describe them separately. Additionally, some steps might be more important than others, mandating additional coverage. For example, when changing a tire, setting the parking brake and ensuring the jack is stable is necessary so the car won’t move when lifted.

Like professional writers, who often engage revision deliberately, you will produce several forms of this essay. The first will be brief, using a step-by-step format. From that “procedure,” you will create a revised prose version which fills in the details, using a different organizational structure if necessary. You will revise that draft, in turn, to produce a final essay.

Schedule & assessment

<i>milestone</i>	<i>date</i>	<i>points</i>
Assignment distributed	Jan 18	
Review assignment in class	Jan 23	
Write procedure in class	Jan 23	10
Draft due (two copies!)	Jan 30	25
Finish peer review in class	Feb 1	15
Draft returned	Feb 6	
Final essay due	Feb 15	100
Total points		150

Requirements

- ✓ **Originality matters**—don't describe something mundane in a standard way. Explain your particular way of completing a task. Find a unique angle on an everyday process, or write how to do something most people haven't thought about. (On the other hand, don't get so obsessed with being unique that you miss on the assignment otherwise.)
- ✓ Make sure your essay has the features Keith Hjortshoj identifies—a **beginning, middle, and end, and clear direction**. Work carefully to ensure your ideas are organized—look to *Reading Rhetorically* or my handouts for techniques. Your “middle” should be connected to your beginning and end, and should not be jumbled. For a short how-to essay, this should not be difficult. But it will be easier if you think through the process carefully ahead of time (hence our multi-step approach).
- ✓ “Three pages” means three full pages. In other words, **your essay should be longer than three pages, but shorter than four**. Also, don't worry too much about correctness, grammar, and style—but don't be overly sloppy. Print and re-read your final draft, and spell-check it as well.
- ✓ **Follow MLA format** as described in my formatting handout and *Reading Rhetorically*. If you have a question which isn't answered in those references, try the *MLA Handbook* (sixth edition) by Joseph Gibaldi—if you don't have a copy, visit the University Writing Center, the library, or my office.
- ✓ Bring **two copies** of your essay to class on January 30. We will begin peer review then and finish it on February 1.
- ✓ Turn in your original procedure, draft, and peer reviewed draft with your final essay.

Procedure

In class, create a step-by-step process for your activity. Think out loud about the activity you're describing. Start with the big picture and fill in details as you move forward. If you know the angle you want to take, things you want to highlight, or places where you aren't sure what to write, note that as well. Use this document to get you started—it will indicate parts of your activity which you need to think about carefully or try out and then draft.

Remember to **write your name and the assignment out in Word and save your document before you do anything else**, so AutoSave will be enabled.

Turn in what you have completed at the end of the period (email me an attachment and/or print out your procedure). Keep a copy for yourself as well (on the network or your flash drive).

Strategies

- Feel free to envision your how-to as a commentary—for example, you can describe the way you like to prepare for classes in a manner different than the usual way of doing it, and by doing this make a subtle argument that your way is better.
- Avoid second person (“you”)—better to use first or third.
- Visit my office hours or the University Writing Center (Simpkins 341) for additional help with this assignment.