

## Giving instructions

In this lecture, you will learn to write a paragraph that gives instructions. This kind of paragraph is sometimes called a “how to” paragraph because it explains how to do something or how to make something—how to change a flat tire or how to perform a science experiment, for example.

There are four keys to writing clear “how to” paragraphs.

1. Begin with a topic sentence that names the topic and says the paragraph will give instructions about it.
2. Divide the instructions into a series of steps. For some topics, you will put the steps in order by time and use time-order transition signals to show the order.

e.g.

First, do this. Next, do that.

For other topics, you can use listing order.

3. Explain each step one by one.
4. Use transition signals to introduce each new step.

e.g.

### How to Have a Successful Garage Sale

Prepare ahead in order to have a successful garage sale. First, collect used items in good condition. These items can be clothes, toys, books, dishes, lamps, furniture, TVs, pictures, and sporting goods. Clean everything well and store it in your garage until the day of the sale. Next, decide on a day and time for your sale. Third, decide on the prices, and mark a price on each item. If you are not sure how much to charge, check the prices at other garage sales in your community. Fourth, make signs advertising the date, time, and address of your sale, and put them up around your neighborhood. Then get some change from the bank. Get at least twenty dollars in one-dollar bills, a roll of quarters, and a roll of dimes. Finally, get up early on the morning of the sale, and arrange the items on tables in your driveway and in your garage. After that, sit back and wait for your customers to arrive. Be prepared to bargain! If you follow all of these steps, your garage sale will be a great success.

NB! Use the command verb form to give instructions.

## TOPIC AND CONCLUDING SENTENCES FOR “HOW TO” PARAGRAPHS

The topic part of a topic sentence for a “how to” paragraph names the topic. The controlling idea part tells your readers that they will learn how to do or make something. In the model paragraph, the topic sentence names the topic: *a garage sale*. It also tells what your paragraph will tell your reader about garage sales: *how to prepare in order to have a successful one*.

Here are other examples of topic sentences for “how to” paragraphs. Notice that they use expressions such as *by taking these steps*, *if you follow my advice*, and *follow these instructions*. These expressions tell your reader that this is a “how to” paragraph.

e.g.

Anyone can change a flat tire by taking these steps.

It’s easy to soothe a crying baby if you follow my advice.

Follow these instructions to make delicious pizza.

The concluding sentence of a “how to” paragraph mentions the topic again to remind the reader what the paragraph was about.

e.g.

In no time at all, your flat tire will be repaired, and you will be on your way again.

If you follow these four steps, your baby will fall asleep within five minutes.

You now have a delicious pizza to enjoy.

## TIME-ORDER SIGNALS

In a “how to” paragraph, you can use either **listing-order signals** or **time-order signals**. You learned about listing-order signals in Lecture 2. Notice that many listing-order and time-order signals are the same.

- If the steps in your instructions must be in a specific order (such as in the model paragraph about how to have a successful garage sale), use time-order signals.
- If the order doesn’t matter, use listing-order signals.

Listing-Order Signals	Time-Order Signals	
First,	First,	before a test
First of all,	First of all,	in the morning
Second,	Second,	during a flight
Third,	Third,	
In addition,	Next,	
Also,	After that,	
Finally,	Then	
	Finally,	

1. These transition signals usually appear at the beginning of a sentence, followed by a comma. *Then* is an exception. Do not put a comma after *then*.

e.g.

First, make the pizza dough.

Then add 2 cups of flour.

2. You can use any time expression as a time-order signal. You can put time expressions such as these almost anywhere in a sentence.

e.g.

Before a big test, get a good night's sleep.

In the morning, be sure to eat breakfast.

Drink a lot of water during a flight.

NB! Do not put a transition signal at the beginning of every sentence in a "how to" paragraph. A paragraph with too many transition signals is just as confusing to the reader as a paragraph with none! Use a transition signal with important steps, not with every step.

## LISTING AND OUTLINING

In Lecture 1, you got ideas by freewriting. In Lecture 2, you got ideas by clustering. **Listing** is another way to get ideas. In listing, you make a list of every word or phrase that comes into your mind when you think about a topic. As with freewriting and clustering, you don't stop to wonder if an idea is good or if your spelling or grammar is correct. You just keep writing down words in a list until you run out of ideas.

e.g.

buy price tags

make sure everything is clean

wash and iron the clothes

advertise

After you have made a list, the next step is to edit the list. Decide what you want to include in your final paragraph and what you want to omit.

e.g.

1. buy price tags

2. make sure everything is clean

~~wash and iron the clothes~~

The next step is to make an outline. To make a simple outline, change the numbers to capital letters (A, B, C, D, and so on), write a topic sentence at the beginning, and add a concluding sentence at the end.

e.g.

### How to Have a Successful Garage Sale

It's easy to have a successful garage sale if you prepare for it ahead of time.

- A. Collect used things in good condition
- B. Clean the items and store them in the garage
- C. Decide on a day and time for your sale
- D. Decide on the prices and mark a price on each item
- E. Make signs to advertise
- F. Put signs around the neighborhood
- G. Get change from a bank
- H. Arrange items on tables in your driveway or yard
- I. Be prepared to bargain

If you follow all of these steps, your garage sale will be a great success.

### SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A third kind of sentence is a **complex sentence**. Before we study these, let's learn about clauses. A **clause** is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. There are two kinds of clauses in English: **independent clauses** and **dependent clauses**.

cf. (compare)

It rained.

because it rained.

1. An **independent clause** has one SV pair and expresses a complete thought. *Independent clause* is just another name for a simple sentence.

s v

Paris has excellent art museums.

s v

We finished our homework.

2. A **dependent clause** is an independent clause with a subordinating word, such as *because*, *after*, and *when*, added to the beginning of it.

e.g.

... after we finished our homework ...

A dependent clause does not express a complete thought, so it is not a sentence by itself. It is only half of a sentence. It **MUST** be joined to an independent clause. Together, the two clauses express a complete thought.

e.g. After we finished our homework, we watched TV for a while.

## ADVERB SUBORDINATORS

There are many subordinating words that can make a dependent clause. In this chapter, we will study **adverb subordinators**. We call them adverb subordinators because they introduce dependent clauses that act like adverbs. That is, they answer the questions *when?*, *why?*, *where?*, and so on.

Certain adverb subordinators introduce time clauses. Here are some common **time subordinators**.

Time Subordinators	
after	I will go straight to bed after I finish writing this paragraph.
as soon as	She felt better as soon as she took the medicine.

before	Wait for a green light before you cross a street.
since	It has been a year since I left home.
until	We can't leave the room until everyone finishes the test.
when	Where were you when I called?
whenever	Whenever I don't sleep well, I feel sick the next day.
while	My neighbors were having a party while I was trying to sleep.

**NB!**

In addition to time-order transition signals, such as *first*, *next*, *after that*, and so on, you can use time clauses to show time order.

e.g.

Before you start writing, look over the test.

**COMPLEX SENTENCES**

A **complex sentence** has one independent clause and one (or more) dependent clauses.

- When the dependent clause begins with an adverb subordinator, the clauses can usually be in any order.

e.g.

We ran for shelter as soon as it started to rain.

As soon as it started to rain, we ran for shelter.

- If the independent clause is first, don't use a comma.
- If the dependent clause is first, put a comma after it.