

Giving Instructions



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PART 1 | Organization

“How To” Paragraphs

In this chapter, 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.

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.

Keep these four keys in your mind as you read the model paragraph.

MODEL

“How To” Paragraph

How to Have a Successful Garage Sale

1Prepare ahead in order to have a successful garage sale. 2First, collect used items in good condition. 3These items can be clothes, toys, books, dishes, lamps, furniture, TVs, pictures, and sporting goods. 4Clean everything well and store it in your garage until the day of the sale. 5Next, decide on a day and time for your sale. 6Third, decide on the prices, and mark a price on each item. 7If you are not sure how much to charge, check the prices at other garage sales in your community.

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⁸Fourth, make signs advertising the date, time, and address of your sale, and put them up around your neighborhood. ⁹Then get some change from the bank. ¹⁰Get at least twenty dollars in one-dollar bills, a roll of quarters, and a roll of dimes. ¹¹Finally, get up early on the morning of the sale, and arrange the items on tables in your driveway and in your garage. ¹²After that, sit back and wait for your customers to arrive. ¹³Be prepared to bargain! ¹⁴If you follow all of these steps, your garage sale will be a great success.

Questions on the Model

1. What is the topic of the model paragraph?
2. Which sentence tells you the topic? What is this sentence called?
3. How many main steps does the paragraph explain?
4. Circle the transition signals that introduce each main step.
5. Does this paragraph use time order or listing order to organize the steps?

Writer's Tip

Notice that many of the verbs in the model are commands: *collect*, *clean*, *store*, *decide*, *mark*, and so on. 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.

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.

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.

PRACTICE 1

Topic Sentences for “How To” Paragraphs

Work with a partner or a small group.

A. Complete topic sentences for “how to” paragraphs by filling in the blanks.

1. It's easy to write a paragraph if you follow the four steps in the writing process.
2. It is simple to _____ if you _____.
3. Anyone can learn to _____ if he or she _____.
4. Follow these instructions to _____.
5. Make/Draw/Write/Cook a perfect _____ by following these steps.

B. Now write three original topic sentences for “how to” paragraphs. Use some of the topic suggestions that are listed, or think of other topics that you might want to use later when you write your own “how to” paragraph.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Topic Suggestions

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Get an A in English | Raise a happy child |
| Get an F in English | Raise a spoiled child |
| Meet people in a new place | Catch a fish |
| Learn a new language | Train a falcon/hunting dog/parrot |
| Get the job of your dreams | Make pizza/baklava/borscht/nachos
(or any special food) |
| Check the oil in a car | Make a piñata |
| Change a flat tire | Decorate an egg |
| Study for a test | Use chopsticks |
| Avoid studying for a test | Play a children’s game |
| Get on a horse | |

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 Chapter 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
1. First, First of all, Second, Third, In addition, Also, Finally,	1. First, First of all, Second, Third, Next, After that, Then Finally, 2. before a test in the morning during a flight

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*.

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.

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**.

Writer's Tip

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.

PRACTICE 2

Listing Order or Time Order?

In a small group or with the whole class, think about each of the following topics for "how to" paragraphs. Which topics require time order, and which topics can use listing order? Write *TO* (Time Order) or *LO* (Listing Order) in the space next to each topic.

- TO 1. How to study for a test
- LO 2. How to get fit
3. How to change the oil in a car
4. How to meet people in a new place
5. How to impress your boss

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- _____ 6. How to learn a new language
- _____ 7. How to shop economically
- _____ 8. How to write a paragraph
- _____ 9. How to get a driver's license
- _____ 10. How to prepare for an earthquake

PRACTICE 3

*Transition
Signals*

Each of the following groups of sentences includes a topic sentence and several steps.

Step 1 Decide which sentence is the topic sentence. Give it the number "1."

Step 2 Decide which three of the four groups should be in time order. Number the steps in these three paragraphs in the correct time order. (The remaining group of sentences will be listing order.)

Step 3 Choose two groups of sentences and write each group as a paragraph. Write the paragraphs on a separate piece of paper.

- Copy the title and topic sentence. The topic sentence is the first sentence of the paragraph, so remember to indent it.
- Copy the remaining sentences in order.
- Add a transition signal to some (not all) steps.

1. How to Prevent Jet Lag¹

- _____ 1. Frequent flyers recommend these steps to prevent jet lag.
- _____ Don't drink alcohol or coffee during the flight.
- _____ Go to bed early your first night in the new time zone.
- _____ 2. Eat a high-carbohydrate² meal before your flight.
- _____ Don't nap³ during the day when you arrive.

Paragraph

How to Prevent Jet Lag

Frequent flyers recommend these steps to prevent jet lag. First of all,

eat a high-carbohydrate meal before your flight. Second, . . .

¹jet lag: tiredness caused by travel through several time zones

²carbohydrate: foods such as rice, potatoes, and breads

³nap: sleep for a short time