

Lesson 8: Explaining a Process

Lesson Focus: Informative Writing/Sequencing

Materials

- ☐ *Teaching day:* Toothpicks and/or Cuisenaire™ rods.
- ☐ *Practice paragraph day:* All the fixings for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
- ☐ *Brainstorming day:* Digital camera or smart phone

Pre-writing Activities

- ☐ Game: “Duplicating a Design”
 1. Student sits back to back with you (or a sibling).
 2. One will create a simple design using toothpicks or Cuisenaire rods.
 3. As she lays down each toothpick or rod, she verbally explains how she positions it, directing you to do the same. For example, “Set down the toothpick so it lies horizontally on the table.” “Place a toothpick vertically below the first toothpick so it touches it and forms a ‘T.’”
 4. You attempt to duplicate the design as she continues building, following her directions (one step at a time).
 5. The student should make a design using a minimum of 6 steps.
 6. Partners may switch roles and play the game several times.
 7. Students learn the value of giving careful, specific instructions.
- ☐ Define informative writing.

Say: *“Up to this point, you’ve been writing descriptive compositions. Today we begin to learn about informative writing. What do you think might be a definition of informative writing?”*

(Answer: Writing that provides the reader with information that is educational, inspirational, or useful.)
- ☐ Game: “Scavenger Hunt”
 1. Have the student look both around the house and online for reading material that fits the definition of informative writing.
 2. Ask her to write a list of five to ten types of literature she finds. *(Possible types include textbooks, recipe books, instruction manuals, craft books, biographies, history or science books, documentaries, newspapers, magazines, instructions on packages, encyclopedias, emails, blogs, self-help books, scientific writings, brochures, and business letters.)*

☐ Define transition words.

1. Refer to the glossary on p. A-6 (student manual p. x) for a definition of transition words.
2. Refer students to their “Transitions and Conjunctions” word list (Word List pp. 14-15).
3. Explain that transition words act as traffic signs to the reader by telling him where the paragraph will take him next.

Practice Paragraph

☐ Have the student write a step-by-step paragraph explaining how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

1. Just assign the activity. DO NOT help her or make suggestions. (For fun, if you have other children, let them get involved in this activity. Very small children may dictate their steps to you.)
2. Next, prepare a sandwich following one of the students’ instructions. (Choose one that omits important steps.)
3. As one of the children reads the paragraph aloud, follow the directions exactly. If she wrote, “Get out two pieces of bread and a plate. Put peanut butter on one side and jelly on the other. . . ,” then you should put peanut butter on the top of the plate and jelly on the bottom! Even if she wrote, “Spread peanut butter on the bread,” you might try spreading it with your hand because no knife was mentioned.

This humorous exercise is designed to make a point about the importance of giving clear directions. However, when it’s time to write their actual paragraph, some students will take it to the extreme by detailing insignificant or unnecessary details or steps. (For example, readers should understand that the use of a knife is implied, even though it is not necessarily mentioned specifically.)

☐ Read the student instruction sheet “Explaining a Process” (p. 8-1).

☐ Review the “Process Planning Worksheet” (p. 8-5).

- For practice, pick a process (baking brownies, washing the dog, etc.)
- Use the Planning Worksheet as a guide and follow the brainstorming/outlining instructions in the student workbook (p. 8-2).

☐ If time permits, use the information you have gathered to write a practice paragraph.

- Follow the instructions for writing the “sloppy copy” (p. 8-3).

Brainstorming

- ☐ With your student, review the “Explaining a Process” instruction sheet.
- ☐ Take photos of the student performing the steps of her process.
- ☐ Then have her make her outline using the “Process Planning Worksheet.”

Sloppy Copy

- ☐ Student writes her “sloppy copy.”
 - Because students are giving instructions directly to the reader, they will, of course, write in second person. However, caution them to avoid using the actual word “you.” Instead, teach them to *imply* it.

Example: Instead of “Next, *you* apply a thin coat of paint to the sanded wood,” suggest “Next, apply a thin coat of paint . . . ” (*you* is implied here).

- ☐ Student Writing Skills Checklist Lesson 8.

First Revision

- ☐ Have student write her first revision of “Explaining a Process.”

Teacher/Parent Editing Day

- ☐ Edit your student’s first revision.
 - Use the Teacher’s Writing Skills Checklist Lesson 8 and suggestions on TM pp. 114-15.
- ☐ Paper-clip your checklist to the top of her work.

Final Draft

- ☐ Go over your comments and suggestions with student before she writes her final draft.
- ☐ Student writes her “Explaining a Process” final draft as a decorative “Instruction Manual.”

Grading the Composition

- ☐ Use the Composition Evaluation form.

Lesson 8: Explaining a Process

Informative writing does exactly what it intends: it provides the reader with information! This type of writing provides the reader with information that is educational, inspirational, or practical. Can you name different kinds of writing that give you information? How about encyclopedias? Nature magazines? Newspapers? These are designed to "inform" you. Study guides help you understand a subject better. Instruction manuals tell you how to program an oven, assemble a drone, or operate a machine. Cookbooks explain step-by-step how to prepare various foods. Textbooks fill your head with information about math, grammar, science, and history. Biographies tell you about the life of another person. Craft books, carpentry books, or art books teach you how to make or build or draw.

One type of informative writing is called **explaining a process**. When you explain a process, you tell your readers, in a step-by-step manner, how something is done. You might wish to help readers understand a process with which they are not familiar, like how paper is made, or how tomatoes go from field to grocery shelf. This type of writing is simply meant to educate.

On the other hand, you may want to enable readers to follow your steps and perform the process themselves, as in making a sandwich or playing a new game. In this case, you must write clear, specific, well-organized details so that no step will be missed or performed out of order.

The following student example may give you an idea of how to add interesting detail to a seemingly ordinary task:

Laundry Time

by Nick, age 13

Laundrying is quite a simple task. To begin, sort dirty clothes into stacks according to light or dark colors and heavy or delicate fabrics. Second, check for spots or smudges that will need to be briskly scrubbed with stain remover before washing. After selecting the appropriate water level and temperature cycle, load a pile of laundry into a machine with half a cup of liquid detergent to begin washing. Next, transfer the soggy heap into the dryer, choose the optimum heat and drying time, and add a fabric softener sheet for longer lasting freshness. Finally, when the electronic buzzer sounds, remove the soft, warm garments, quickly fold them and replenish your empty drawers immediately. Satisfied and delighted, stop and smell the laundry!

Choosing a Topic

This lesson teaches you to write a paragraph that explains a process. *Follow the directions carefully.* If you have trouble thinking of a topic you could write about how to:

- Wash the car, the dishes, or the dog
- Prepare a simple dish, like pancakes or an ice cream sundae
- Play a simple game
- Make an easy craft
- Treat a minor injury
- Perform a household chore
- Make a simple repair
- Sharpen a pencil

Brainstorming

1. Choose to write about a process with which you are both familiar and comfortable.
2. Go through the process yourself.
3. Have one of your parents **take pictures** of you as you perform each step.
IMPORTANT: Print the photos soon; you will need them when you write the final draft.
4. Imagine that someone is interested in your topic. **Think of a broad question** they might ask, such as "How do you cook scrambled eggs?" or "How do you play Pin the Tail on the Donkey?"
5. **Write this question in the Question Box** on the Process Planning Worksheet (p. 8-5).
6. Recall the steps you performed as you went through the process. On scratch paper, write them down in order.
7. See if you can break down the process into **four main steps**. Write these steps in Boxes 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the worksheet. (Note: You might not have four main steps.)
8. Now think of how each of these steps can be divided into **three smaller steps**. Write these steps in the remaining blanks under the appropriate main heading. (Note: sometimes you might only be able to list one or two smaller steps.)
9. Important Tips
 - **Do not** give exact measurements or other such details.
 - **Do not** list every single ingredient, supply or procedure, just the important ones.
 - **Do not** write what the reader can assume. For instance, it isn't necessary to mention using a knife to slice an apple or tying a knot in the thread before clipping it.
10. Brainstorm for additional *descriptive* details on your "Process Planning Worksheet."

Writing the "Sloppy Copy"

1. Write a topic sentence. Consider using *paired adjectives* to begin the topic sentence, such as: "Fragrant and colorful, scented bath salts make a unique homemade gift."
Note: **Don't** write anything like, "I am going to tell you how to make bath salts."
2. Following the plan of your paragraph outline, write the details of the process in a logical, step-by-step order. Use clear, concrete instructions that your reader will easily understand.
3. Use the "Transition Words" list on pp. 14-15. Since this is a short paragraph, do not use the same transition word more than once.
4. Because you're giving instructions directly to the reader, you will, of course, write in second person. However, whenever possible avoid using the actual words *you* and *your*. Instead, imply them, as in the following examples:

"First you will need to gather your shampoo, a bucket, and old towels" becomes
"First, gather shampoo, a bucket, and old towels."

After you are through rinsing your dog... becomes *"After rinsing the dog..."*

5. Eliminate instructions that can be worked into another sentence, such as greasing a pan or turning on the stove. Focus on what is most important and what can be described most vividly. For instance:

Instead of: *"Grease a frying pan with oil. Turn on the stove and heat the pan. Next, pour the mixture into the pan."*

Write: *"Next, pour the (adj.) mixture into the greased and heated pan and let it cook (adv.) until ..."*

Not only does it sound better, it combines **three sentences into one!**

6. Don't forget to use all required *sentence variations*. **Hint:** *Paired adjectives and participial phrases work especially well in topic and closing sentences.*
7. Include some *colorful descriptions*. After all, this is a creative writing assignment and not a technical manual! Refer to your "Process Planning Worksheet," where you brainstormed for details.
8. Also, be sure to include *articles* (a, an, the). They tend to be easily omitted. Instead of saying "Place pan in oven," write "Carefully place **the** pan of creamy batter into **a** preheated oven," including both articles *and* details.
9. Be especially careful of wordiness. Avoid repeating main words and phrases.
10. To double-check for accuracy, read your paragraph *out loud*. If possible, ask someone to follow the steps and perform the same task. Make any necessary changes.

Writing the First Revision and Final Draft

1. Write your first revision and have your parent/teacher edit it.
2. Make necessary corrections and changes.
3. Put together an **Instruction Manual** for the task you have written about. *If you didn't take photos, simply rewrite your final draft as usual and turn it in as a regular paragraph.*
 - Choose the photos you will use to illustrate your process. Use 4-6 photos and sheets of notebook paper. Tape or glue-stick each picture to the top half of each sheet of paper.
 - **Your manual is your final draft.** Write the sentence or sentences that the photo illustrates. Copy your corrected revision word-for-word. This "instruction manual" will be a duplicate of your best rewrite.
 - Assemble your "manual." Design and decorate a colorful cover, using as much creativity as you like.
 - Give your manual an attractive or catchy title.

Lesson 8: Process Planning Worksheet

A. Write your broad question here:

_____?

B. Write down the FOUR main steps here:

1.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

2.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

3.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

4.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

- C. Once you've written your sloppy copy, brainstorm for interesting descriptions.
1. Use an **orange** colored pencil to underline all the nouns. Make a list of these nouns in the spaces below (use extra paper if necessary). Brainstorm to come up with synonyms and adjectives that will make them more descriptive and colorful. Not every noun needs an adjective, but it certainly helps make your writing more lively when you **add a few well-chosen details**.

EXAMPLE

If you wrote, "*Massage the shampoo into her fur,*" ask yourself: *How could I describe the shampoo? Thick? Sweet-smelling? Creamy?*

And what about the dog's fur? *Is it wet? Dirty? Stiff? Matted?*

Finally, if you repeated the word *shampoo*, can you think of synonyms?

LIST NOUNS HERE.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Repeat the process above, using a **brown** colored pencil to underline verbs. Brainstorm for synonyms and adverbs that make your meaning clear. For example, if the instructions say, "*Stir the batter,*" ask yourself, "*How should the batter be stirred? Briskly? Gently? Carefully?*" Furthermore, do you really mean *stir*? Maybe *beat, fold, whip, or blend* would define the action better.

LIST VERBS HERE.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Lesson 8: Skill Builder

Arranging in Time-Sequence Order

Directions: Number each group of sentences in time-sequence order.

DAY ONE

-
- _____ Next, paint a number from one to six inside each can.
 - _____ Stand back and try to toss six buttons or pebbles into the cans.
 - _____ Glue six tin cans together to form a triangle.
 - _____ The player with the highest score wins.
-
- _____ Each player can carry as many beans and make as many trips as he wants.
 - _____ The first one to move his beans to the finish line wins the game.
 - _____ They must use the spoon to move all the beans to an empty cup behind the finish line.
 - _____ Players place their cup of beans behind the starting line.
 - _____ To begin, give each player a spoon and a cup with fifty beans in it.
-

DAY TWO

-
- _____ String the macaroni.
 - _____ Wrap it at one end with transparent tape to make a needle.
 - _____ Lay the macaroni on paper towels until it dries.
 - _____ Cut a piece of yarn long enough to make a necklace.
 - _____ First, dip large macaroni into different food colors for a few seconds.
 - _____ Then untie the piece of macaroni and tie the yarn ends together.
 - _____ Tie a piece of macaroni at the other end.
-
- _____ Squeeze the peeled lemons, strain the juice, and add it to the cooled mixture.
 - _____ When the water is cool, take out the rinds and throw them away.
 - _____ Peel the rinds from four lemons, put them in a bowl, and cover with one cup sugar.
 - _____ Refrigerate until ice-cold.
 - _____ Then boil your water and pour it over the sugar and rinds.
-

DAY THREE

- _____ Lather the soap on the cloth and thoroughly scrub her all over.
- _____ Second, scrub the baby's hair with shampoo.
- _____ Lift her out and dry her off.
- _____ Gather together baby shampoo and soap, a washcloth, towel, toys, diaper, clothes, and a comb.
- _____ Finally, comb her hair.
- _____ Don't forget all the creases on her chubby body!
- _____ Then change her diaper and dress her.
- _____ First, gently lower the baby into the bathtub.
- _____ Rinse off the soap.

Lesson 8: Student Writing Skills Checklist

CONTENT

- ☐ Are my topic and choice of words appropriate for my audience?
- ☐ Do all sentences support my topic sentence (no "carrots in my cookie jar")?
- ☐ Does the content flow smoothly? Did I organize the details in a way that makes sense to the reader?
- ☐ Does the title capture the essence of my paragraph?

STYLE

- ☐ Did I write a strong topic sentence that introduces my paragraph?
- ☐ Did I use no more than two forms of "to be"? (*is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been*)
Circle to be words in **red**.
- ☐ Did I choose synonyms instead of repeating main words? **Underline** repeated words in blue.
- ☐ Did I use concrete words that are specific, vivid, and sensory? **Underline** vague words in green.
- ☐ Did I check my "Weak Words" list against my paragraph? **Underline** any of these in green.
- ☐ Have I correctly varied my sentence structure by
__beginning one sentence with paired adjectives?
__beginning one sentence with a present (-ing) participial phrase?
__using my Transitions word list?
- ☐ Did I avoid wordiness by crossing out unnecessary words, phrases, or sentences?
- ☐ As much as possible, did I imply *you/your* instead of using the actual words?
- ☐ Did I write a strong closing sentence that gives a feeling of ending?

MECHANICS

- ☐ Did I put my name and date in the upper right-hand corner?
- ☐ Is my paragraph 5-9 sentences long? How many sentences? ____
- ☐ Did I indent my first sentence? If not, draw an **arrow** ➔ to show that you need to indent.
- ☐ Did I leave margins around my paragraph? If not, draw a light **pencil line** down right side of page.
- ☐ Did I remember to skip every other line? If not, draw a light **X** on each line you want to skip.
- ☐ Did I use good spacing between words and sentences? If not, draw two **vertical lines** || to separate.
- ☐ Did I double-check my spelling? **Circle** suspected words; **look up** and make changes.
- ☐ Did I double-check capitalization and punctuation? **Correct** any errors.
- ☐ Did I use complete sentences? Did I check for run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers?
- ☐ Did I complete and **turn in** my Explaining a Process brainstorming worksheet?
- ☐ Did I correctly use this Checklist along with colored pencils? Did I **make corrections** before revising?

- ☐ **BEFORE TURNING IN MY WORK:** Did I staple my papers together in this order: Worksheet on the very bottom, "sloppy copy" on top of that, neatly rewritten copy next, and this Checklist on the very top?

Name _____

Subject Explaining a Process

Lesson 8: Teacher Writing Skills Checklist

Edit your paragraph one more time, making any necessary changes or improvements.

CONTENT

OK Needs improvement

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | Topic and choice of words are appropriate for the audience |
| ☐ | ☐ | Followed instructions for this assignment |
| ☐ | ☐ | All sentences support topic sentence (no "carrots in your cookie jar") |
| ☐ | ☐ | Content flows smoothly; details are organized in a way that makes sense to the reader |
| ☐ | ☐ | Title captures the essence of the paragraph |

STYLE

OK Needs improvement

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| ☐ | ☐ | Strong topic sentence that introduces the composition |
| ☐ | ☐ | Used no more than two forms of "to be" |
| ☐ | ☐ | Chose synonyms instead of repeating main words |
| ☐ | ☐ | Used concrete words that are specific, vivid, and sensory |
| ☐ | ☐ | Avoided the use of "weak" words |
| ☐ | ☐ | Varied sentence structure by correctly using each of the following:
__began one sentence with paired adjectives
__began one sentence with an "-ing" participle
__used Transitions Word List |
| ☐ | ☐ | Wrote concisely, avoiding wordiness |
| ☐ | ☐ | Implied <i>you/your</i> instead of using the actual words (as much as possible) |
| ☐ | ☐ | Strong closing sentence that gives a feeling of ending |

MECHANICS

OK Needs improvement

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| ☐ | ☐ | Name and date in the upper right-hand corner |
| ☐ | ☐ | Paragraph is 5-9 sentences long |
| ☐ | ☐ | Indented first sentence of the paragraph; left margins around the paragraph |
| ☐ | ☐ | Skipped lines |
| ☐ | ☐ | Used good spacing between words and sentences |
| ☐ | ☐ | Double-checked spelling by <u>circling</u> and <u>looking up</u> suspected words |
| ☐ | ☐ | Capitalized the first word of each sentence as well as proper nouns |
| ☐ | ☐ | Avoided improper capitalization |
| ☐ | ☐ | Used punctuation correctly |
| ☐ | ☐ | Used complete sentences; avoided run-on sentences and misplaced modifiers |
| ☐ | ☐ | Writing is neat and easy to read |
| ☐ | ☐ | Correctly used checklist and colored pencils, circling and underlining as directed |
| ☐ | ☐ | Included brainstorming sheet, all drafts of this paragraph, and your checklist |

Comments _____

Name _____
Subject Explaining a Process

Additional Comments and Feedback

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Name _____

Subject of Composition _____

Title _____

COMPOSITION EVALUATION

Content 15 points

Points Possible Points Earned

Followed directions for assignment	<u>2</u> _____	_____
Communicated clearly	<u>4</u> _____	_____
Paragraph unity (sentences support main idea; use of details)	<u>5</u> _____	_____
Appropriate for audience	<u>2</u> _____	_____
Title (descriptive= 2; adequate=1; poor or no title=0)	<u>2</u> _____	_____

Style 20 points

Sentence variation and style (including limiting "to be" words)	<u>4</u> _____	_____
Sentence fluency/readability (awkwardness)	<u>3</u> _____	_____
Concreteness (wise use of vivid, specific words)	<u>4</u> _____	_____
Conciseness (avoids wordiness; also not flowery or verbose)	<u>3</u> _____	_____
Proper use of tense	<u>2</u> _____	_____
Topic sentence (strong=2; adequate=1; poor or none=0)	<u>2</u> _____	_____
Closing sentence (strong=2; adequate=1; poor or none=0)	<u>2</u> _____	_____

Mechanics 10 points

10 _____

- Form (margins, indentation, spacing, name and date)
- Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization
- Grammar (homophones, possessive vs. plural, contractions, etc.)
- Sentence structure (complete; no run-ons; no misplaced modifiers)

General 5 points

Included all drafts of composition (including brainstorming)	<u>2</u> _____	_____
Correct use of Student Writing Skills Checklist	<u>2</u> _____	_____
Overall neatness of final draft	<u>1</u> _____	_____

TOTAL: _____ /50 = _____ % = _____

Comments: _____

_____ (over)

100% = A+	87-89% = B+	77-79% = C+
94-99% = A	84-86% = B	74-76% = C
90-93% = A-	80-83% = B-	70-73% = C-

Below 70%: rewrite composition

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The paper itself is a clean, off-white color.