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Assignment 3: Instructions

ENGL2338: Technical Writing
Department of English
University of Texas at Arlington

Assignment Overview

Instructions are among the most common types of document in technical writing. Instructions are everywhere informing readers how to make, assemble, or create something. You may have followed instructions on how to log onto a computer at work, to download and use an App on your smart phone, or to make a gourmet dinner at home following recipes. It is likely that you will create them often in your career if not as a formal document then at least in a variety of informal written and oral communications.

Keep in mind the differences among instructions, process descriptions, and procedures:

- **Instructions** inform readers how to assemble, make, create something or perform a specific task.
- **Process descriptions** tell how something works (for example, how a drug works to relieve symptoms of seasonal allergies). While instructions are about how to use something, descriptions are about how that thing works (e.g., how to take a prescription drug vs. how that drug works in the human body).
- **Procedures** are standardized ways of doing things in organizations.

For this assignment, you should focus on creating clearly written, well designed, and effectively illustrated **instructions**.

Assignment Guidelines

Choose a Technical or Scientific Topic. Begin by reviewing Gurak & Lannon, Chapter 13: Instructions and Procedures. You will choose your own topic for this assignment. In order to give you the practice in technical writing, you must choose a technical or scientific topic. Ideally, a topic requiring a series of steps for assembly or various specific tasks to complete is best. A topic relevant to nursing may be a good idea, but such a topic is not required. Consider your hobbies and interests or various topics you know well.

Choose a topic involving **10 or more steps**. The following are just a few examples of instructions projects from previous classes:

- Setting Up a Small Network in Your Home or Office
- Building and Hosting Your Own Web site
- Detailing Your Car
- Creating a Backyard Butterfly Garden
- Designing and Installing a Solar Heating System in Your Home
- Helping Parents Apply First Aid
- Assembling a Skateboard
- Grooming a Horse
- How to Change an Electrical Outlet

- How to Bid an Acoustical Ceiling Project
- How to Sew an A-Line Skirt

Write to a Specific Audience. You must specify an audience for your instructions. In most instances, your audience should be a novice audience—someone who has never performed the task before. Sample audiences for the instructions mentioned above include home computer owners, gardeners, small business owners, and parents.

Acknowledge all Sources. If you use any sources for your instructions, acknowledge your sources on an APA references page and include this page with your instructions (see Gurak & Lannon, Appendix A: Documentation Sources). If you use or adapt illustrations from another source, place the source directly below each illustration.

Warning Against Copying Instructions!

You should write the instructions yourself. DO NOT simply copy instructions you found elsewhere (on a how-to Website, in your nursing textbook) and cite the source. That is not the idea of this assignment. The idea is that you will write your own instructions telling your audience how to complete a task with which you are familiar, so familiar, in fact, that writing a set of instructions for it should be pretty easy. That isn't to say you are not allowed to consult secondary sources; if you need to, you may. But do make sure that you are writing the instructions yourself.

If you transcribe (copy) instructions you found elsewhere, you cannot get a 60 or above on this assignment, even if you cite the sources.

If more than 30% of your paper is copied from other sources, your assignment will receive a 0, even if the sources are properly documented.

Required Sections for the Instructions

Regardless of your task, you must include all of the following contents.

- **Introduction.** Here you'll provide your reader with the following information:
 - The audience in terms of its knowledge and need for the instructions.
 - What the instructions will allow readers to do.
 - What skill level the audience should have to perform the task successfully.
 - An overview of the steps needed to complete the task.
 - A sense of how long the task will take.
 - Where they should perform the task (i.e. in a well ventilated area, outside, on a flat surface, etc.).
- **List of Materials, Tools, or Ingredients**
- **Illustrations** (Diagrams, Drawings, Photographs, Figures, or Tables).
 - Include captions for each illustration or figure.
 - Label charts and diagrams clearly.

- If you used illustrations from other sources, place the source directly below each illustration. The sources of your illustrations must be fully documented in APA style on the Reference page.
- **List of Steps**, in chronological order.
 - Make sure your instructions have **10 or more steps**.
 - Make sure you use the imperative mood. (That is, say this: “Attach the red wire” rather than this: “The red wire is attached.” With the second phrase, readers will not know whether the wire is already attached or if they need to attach it.)
 - Each step must be a specific action, (“Turn the knob one complete turn.”) and not an elaboration or comment (“Turning the knob will result in a better fit.”).
 - Each step may only be one or two sentences.
 - Use second person (you) in instructions.
 - Include warnings or cautions **before** readers will encounter problems.
 - Make sure steps are phrased in parallel form.
- **Troubleshooting or Tips**.

And, if needed, your instructions should also contain:

- Warnings
- Glossary of terms
- References
- Appendixes

Document Design and Illustrations

Give careful thought to illustrations and design elements that will make your instructions effective.

- Make sure all of your steps are numbered throughout.
- Single-space the text in the paragraphs.
- You must include **at least two illustrations** in your instructions. You may create your own, or adapt illustrations from other sources. Make sure you provide source information for all illustrations immediately below each illustration. (For example, for any photos you took: “Source: photo by author.” For any illustrations from other sources: “Source: Website (or other resource).”)
- Use as many of the four basic design principles as possible (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity).
- Design your document for consistency (grid patterns, margins, justification, white space, indentation, font style and size). See pages 136-140.
- Design your document for navigation and emphasis (headings, color, shading, boldface, italic, and underlining, bulleted and numbered lists). See pages 140-145.
- Follow the tips for illustrating documents presented in Chapter 7.

Note: You must use a two-column format or some other format rather than just a full-page format on each page for the text, illustrations, and design elements.

Submission

- Submit ONE WORD FILE and submit via SafeAssign. No assignments will be accepted over email.
- Required title for Word file: your last name-instructions. For example, my file name should be: Zhang-instructions.docx.
- Due by 11: 59 pm on the Sunday of Week 3.

Evaluation Rubrics

- **Completeness (10 pts):** The instructions include all of the sections required.
- **Introduction (10 pts):** The introduction identifies the document's audience in terms of its knowledge and need for the instructions. It tells what the instructions will allow readers to do and provides an overview of the steps. It gives the audience a sense of how long the task will take, where it should be performed, and provides cautions or warnings when need.
- **Text of the Steps (20 pts):** The instructions have 10 or more steps. The steps use imperative mood. Each step is a specific action.
- **Design (20 pts):** The document has a clear hierarchy of headings. The steps are numbered throughout. There is an appropriate amount of white space. It makes effective use of the four basic design principles (contrast, alignment, proximity, repetition). Design features, such as fonts, font sizes, and forms of emphasis are applied consistently. The overall design is clear and consistent.
- **Illustrations (20 pts):** There are at least two illustrations. The illustrations are effective, each serving a functional purpose (meaning, it helps the reader better comprehend the task at hand). It is not merely used for decorative purpose. The illustrations are appropriately documented, displayed, and labeled.
- **Style (10 pts):** The instructions are written as active voice commands. Headings and numbered/bulleted items are in parallel form. The second person (you) is used.
- **Mechanics (10 pts):** Spelling, APA documentation, grammar, and punctuation are correct.



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