

Writing Assignment #2

Technical Description

Summary of the Assignment:

- **Task:** In this assignment, you will write a **technical description for a non-specialized audience**. You will explain to a non-technical audience how something works. You will choose an object or a process with which you are familiar. You will describe this object or process to an audience that has little or no background of the subject.
- **Length:** 500-800 words, single-spaced
- **Graphics:** You must include at least one graphic.
 - graphics borrowed from other sources need to be cited in APA format
 - all graphics should be labeled

Sample Technical Descriptions from Previous WRTG 393 Students:

In our class in LEO, if you select **Content**, you will see a section labelled **sample papers for WRTG 393**.

If you select that section, you will see some sample white papers written by previous students in WRTG 393.

Brief Description and Strategies:

Keep in mind that you are not writing instructions on how to do something. You wrote instructions for writing assignment #1. For writing assignment #2, if you describe a process, you may want to describe a process that does not involve direct human action. This approach will help prevent you from writing another set of instructions for this assignment. If you describe a process, you will describe an activity or phenomenon that takes place. For example, you could describe how the heart pumps blood in the human body. But you could not give instructions on how to take someone's blood.

Your description will include graphics. The description will use visual detail in both words and images. You might consider one of the following two strategies:

- provide one main graphic and refer to parts in the graphic when writing your technical description
- provide many graphics, integrating each graphic as you write the various parts of the technical description

Examples of topics for this assignment include the following:

- You are an auto mechanic. You could write a description of how spark plugs work to an audience of non-mechanics. *You would not write a set of instructions on how to install spark plugs. You would describe how spark plugs work.*
- You work in technical support at a computer store. You could write a description of how a graphics card works to an audience that is not familiar with computers. *You would not write a set of instructions on how to install a graphics card. You would describe how graphics cards work.*
- You are in a branch of the military. You could write a description of how a function of your unit operates to a non-military audience. *You would not write a set of instructions on how to do something in the military unit. You would describe how a function or process in the military unit operates.*
- You might describe a piece of equipment that you included in your set of instructions for writing assignment #1. For example, assume that you wrote a set of instructions for writing assignment #1 on how to change oil in a car. In that set of instructions, perhaps you listed a hydraulic jack as a piece of equipment. For writing assignment #2, you could write a description of how the hydraulic jack works in lifting up a car. *You would not write a set of instructions on how to jack up a car. You would describe how the jack works.*

Your description should answer the following questions:

- What is the object or process? How is it defined?
- What does the object or process do?
- What does the object or process look like?
- What is the object made of? (if you are describing an object and not a process)
- How does the object or process work?
- Why should the reader be interested in your object or process?

Overall, chapter 20 from Markel, “Writing Descriptions,” should be read thoroughly as you begin this assignment. Different types of descriptions call for different strategies. The chapter from Markel is an excellent resource in guiding your approach. The chapter is available in eReserves in our class.

On page 549, Markel provides an excellent distinction between writing instructions and describing a process. Please become familiar with that section of Markel’s chapter as you consider your topic for this assignment.

Organization and Formatting:

Your technical description should have the following sections:

- Title
- Introduction (general information, including definitions)
- Body (identifying and explaining the parts and characteristics)
- Conclusion (summary of how the parts work together)

Consider one of these styles of organization in planning and organizing your description:

- Functions in spatial order –
 - This style might be used when you want readers to describe an object or process according to its physical layout. For example, in describing an acoustic guitar, you might start with the tuners at the top and work your way to the bridge near the bottom.
- Functions in order of importance –
 - This style would be used if you want to highlight the most important functions first, the next most important functions second, etc. For example, in describing a flatscreen television set, you might start with the pixels, which make up the picture, and then proceed to describe other functions.
- Functions in chronological order –
 - This style would be used if you want to describe the object or process according to time. For example, in describing a how spark plugs work, you might start with what happens first (electrons flowing from the ignition coil) what happens second (the voltage difference that occurs), what happens third, etc.

In addition, the document **should be single-spaced**.

Helpful Guides and Resources:

- “Writing Descriptions,” chapter from M. Markel in eReserves
- [David McMurrey’s Technical Description: What does it look like?](#)
- [Scribd description of a computer mouse](#)
- [How spark plugs work](#)
- Some sample technical descriptions written by previous students in WRTG 393 are provided in our class in LEO.

Due Date:

Your instructor will notify you of the due date. You will write a first draft, your instructor will comment on the first draft, and you will submit a second draft using the comments as your guide.