

Lesson Plan: Developing Instructional Writing with the “How-To” Zine

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Lesson: Developing Instructional Writing with the “How-To” Zine

Timeframe: 50-60 minutes

Target Audience: College or university students at an upper-division writing level

Materials needed: Assignment overview (enough copies for each student), a laptop, pens/pencils, blank paper, and video projector with sound

Objectives: After this lesson students will be able to

- recognize the imperative mood as a rhetorical strategy.
- use images intentionally in a text.
- construct a zine.
- write an effective how-to essay.

Background: Students in this lesson should already know how to create an outline or mind map. They should have fluency with written English, a working knowledge of English grammatical terms, and the ability to identify the subject and verb in a sentence.

Introduction to Lesson [3 minutes]:

Ask students if they know what zines are. Build a definition from their knowledge and add your own, so that everyone understands that zines are small, homemade magazines that can be on any topic. For example, there are fanzines, which are magazines made by fans of a band or celebrity, how-to zines, which explain how to do something like pickling or knitting, and day-in-the-life zines, which chronicle the zine author’s life. Say, “Today you will be learning how to make your own zine.”

Review the agenda on a slide or the whiteboard.

1. Short Zine Cine
2. Zine Assignment Overview
3. In-class writing (*Please note that this phrase helps students know this writing is part of their overall semester “in-class writing” grade as outlined in the course syllabus.*)
4. Pair and Share
5. Rhetorical Strategies (*As #3 above, this is a recurring theme in my class, so I use this phrase to help students connect with past “rhetorical strategies” discussions and exercises.*)
6. Images and Text
7. Construction
8. Reflection
9. Homework: Make your zine by [due date]

Procedure [40-45 minutes]:

Step 1: Video [5 minutes]

- Watch Nikki Sabalu’s video “How to Make a Zine” at <http://vimeo.com/18312616>. (3:56 minutes)
- Invite students to share their responses to the video.
- Pass out sample zines, ideally with a how-to theme.
- Invite questions. Many questions will be answered in the next step. Use the students’ questions as a transition.

Step 2: Assignment overview [5 minutes]

- Hand out copies of the assignment overview. (See attached “Assignment Overview.”)
- Read through the overview slowly and carefully with students.

Step 3: In-class writing brainstorm [7 minutes]

- Display the in-class writing prompt and read it aloud to the class.
Prompt: Consider your talents and skills. What could you teach someone else? Pick a task or skill that you feel confident teaching. Write for the next seven minutes on how you would teach this skill. Use description, detail, anecdotes, and imagery. Be creative.

Usually, I have the prompt written on the board but hidden behind the projector screen. For teachers in another discipline, feel free to adjust the prompt accordingly.

- Be sure to tell the students exactly how long they have to write.

Step 4: Pair and share [5 minutes]

- Invite students to turn to a person next to them who will be their brainstorm partner.
- Instruct them to share their in-class writing with their partner.
- Ask them to help each other come up with three to five steps for their how-to zine, using traditional outlining format or a mind map.

Step 5: How-to writing strategies [5 minutes]

- Pose the following question to the whole group: “What rhetorical strategies do you use when you are writing a how-to piece?”
- Write student responses on the board.
- Lead the students to share specific and general phrases from their outlines.
- Explain why the imperative is key to this kind of writing. Teach the imperative mood, when the topic arises. For example, ask students if a sentence can be one word. Write “Stop.” on the board and ask students to identify the subject and verb.
- Ask, “What do you notice about an imperative sentence? Where is the subject that is performing the action of the verb?” (You may need to remind students what a verb is by asking them to point out the verb.)
- Explain that an imperative sentence has an implied subject “you,” so that even though imperatives seem to lack a subject, the subject is “you,” which is understood by the person to whom the sentence is addressed. Rather than say, “You stop,” we simply say, “Stop.” This grammatical concept is called the “you understood” rule.

- Invite them to view the imperative mood as a rhetorical strategy that positively persuades the reader to action.

Step 6: Images and texts [5 minutes]

- Invite students to look at the zines circulating around the classroom.
- Ask students what other ways the zines teach, until “pictures” comes up as an answer.
- Ask them how images are used with text.
- Write student answers on the board with the rhetorical strategies.
- Invite them to view images and text as items that can persuade. Text can influence how an image is seen. Ask, “How will you react to a picture of a cute puppy? How might your feelings change if the picture had the word ‘lost’ next to it?”
- Ask, “How else might an image be persuasive?”
- Invite students to notice the frame of the image. The frame of a picture can control what a viewer sees. What is outside of the frame? What is inside of the frame? Why do pictures get cropped?
- Ask, “How are images framed in a ‘how-to’ text?”
- Invite students to notice that often pictures in cookbooks or other instructional materials show images of hands without a face. What might be the purpose of showing “hands without a face” images?
- Ask, “How are such images persuasive? What might be the rhetorical strategy behind such images?”
- This may evolve into a larger discussion related to how images in media display a bias.

Step 7: Construction [7-10 minutes]

- Invite students to begin making their zines with the available materials, such as blank paper and writing utensils.
- Circulate around the classroom.
- Play indie music from the 1990s on your laptop, such as Yo La Tengo, Nirvana, or Ani DiFranco. (Zine culture blossomed the early 1990s with the drop in cost for photocopies and the proliferation of the copy machine such that every corner store had one.)

Closure/Evaluation [5 minutes]:

Reflection: [3 minutes]

- Invite students to pause in their work.
- Ask them to share the rhetorical strategies they are using in their zines.
- Use the whiteboard (still covered with language from the discussion earlier) to remind students about the imperative mood and the concept of “framing” as a persuasive technique.

Homework: [2 minutes]

- Review the key components of the homework, using the assignment overview sheet.
- Remind students to bring enough copies of their zines for everyone to the following class, or, if this is a one-time workshop, arrange a time for a zine swap.
- Ask, “What other questions are there about this project?” Address questions as needed.

Lesson Analysis:

The strengths of this lesson reside in its holistic hands-on approach to knowledge construction and skill building. Students create a meaningful product that can then be used by the instructor or student for further review if the “how-to” prompt is focused on a particular subject matter. In the sciences, this zine project could be focused on a particular aspect of a course, such as preparing a microscope slide. Challenges in this lesson lie in the instructor’s ability to communicate the zine concept effectively such that students will be able to produce one of their own. As with most holistic activities, this lesson relies on prior knowledge, so that expectations for what students bring to the lesson and what they produce can vary. On the other hand, I have successfully used this lesson with a group of students who had a wide range of abilities. In that case, I had the class as a whole produce one zine, assigning higher-performing students with the task of proofreading and producing the master copy. The group folded and stapled the zines.

How-to Zine Assignment Overview
Points: 40 Due: TBA

In the late 1970s, with the proliferation of photocopy machines and the rapid drop in cost per copy to under a dime, a subculture of DIY publishers emerged and called their publications “zines” short for “magazine.”

Today, the zine is a hybrid publication, known for a certain handmade aesthetic. People from all walks of life make zines to educate, entertain, and inform. For this assignment, you will write and construct a zine designed to teach.

Drawing on your knowledge of a particular subject, you will teach your readership how to do something specific using words and images. Consider how you will need to organize your lesson into steps for your reader. Keep it simple.

For example, if you were writing a how-to zine on composting for a garden, you would need to instruct your reader about what good compost is and then teach them how to make it with clear steps. These steps could be building a compost bin, gathering the necessary components, proper layering of the components, and then how and when to churn the components. You could use pictures from a magazine, clip art, or your own drawings to help illustrate the steps.

For this zine, you need the following components:

- Two 8 ½ x 11 (or A4) pieces of paper. Photocopy them double-sided, as demonstrated in the movie. This will allow you to have eight interior pages (or “guts”).
- One 8 ½ x 11 (or A4) piece of paper for your cover. Feel free to be creative.
- A 300-word essay that instructs your reader in how to perform a specific task. For example, you could write your essay on how to train for a marathon. Break your instructions into meaningful steps. Provide an introduction and conclusion.
- Images. You are not required to use a certain number of images. Only use images in your text if they serve an instructional purpose.

You need to make enough copies for everyone in this class, including your instructor, and bring your copies to class by the due date.

Zine Grading Rubric

Zine contains a 300-word instructional essay for how to do something. (10 pts.)	
Zine consists of 3 double-sided 8 ½ x 11 pp. in the proper order. (10 pts.)	
Zine demonstrates the rhetorical strategies discussed in the workshop, including the imperative mood and intentional use of images. Pictures are not simply included to fill space, but have a clear purpose. (10 pts.)	
Language in the zine demonstrates proper grammar and punctuation as appropriate for the context. (10 pts.)	

Total: /40

References:

Sabalu, Nicki. (2011) *How to Make a Zine*. (Video file) Retrieved from

<https://vimeo.com/18312616>.

Watson, Esther. (2006) *Whatcha Mean What's A Zine?* Boston: Graphia.