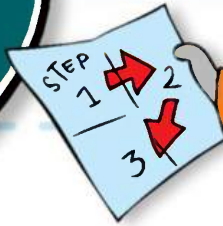


LANGUAGE  
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# How to Write a How-To

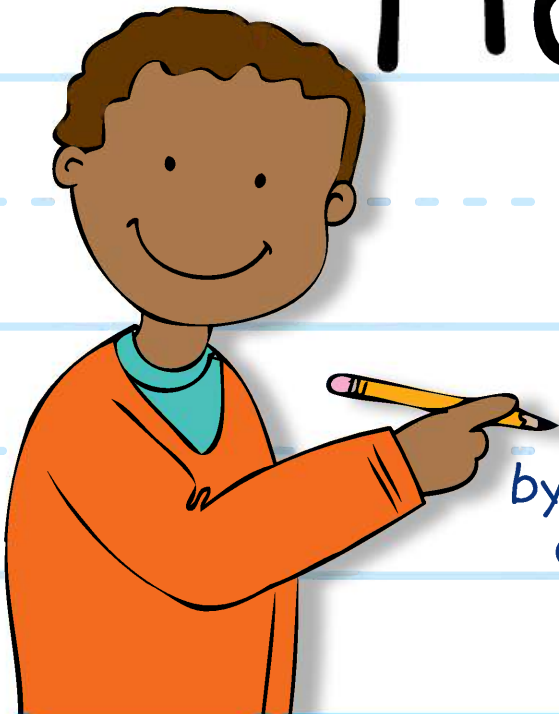
by Cecilia Minden  
and Kate Roth



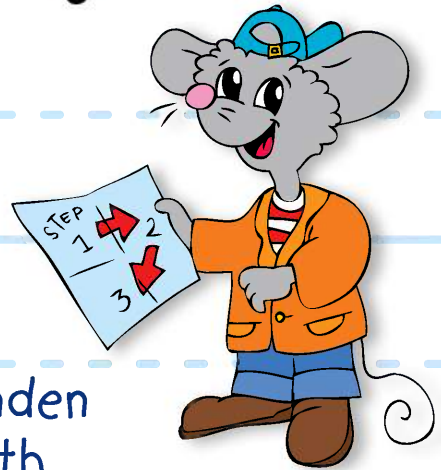




# How to Write a How-To



by Cecilia Minden  
and Kate Roth





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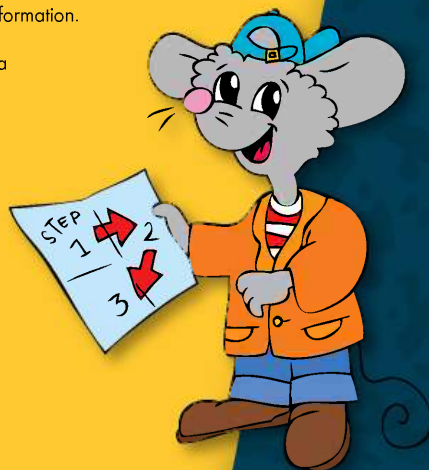
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# How Did They Do That?



Think of all the things you know how to do. Can you tie your shoes? Do you know how to make your bed? You might know how to make a paper airplane. Do you think you could teach someone else how to do one of these things?

Writing how to do something takes careful planning. You need to include all of the **instructions**. A missing step will keep you from reaching your goal. Imagine baking a cake and leaving out the sugar. How would it taste? You are going to learn how to write instructions that are complete and easy to follow. Let's get started!



Plan your instructions  
step-by-step.

# You Can Do That!

Coaches instruct their teams how to play sports.



We all know how to do many things. We sometimes forget that we had to learn how to do them. For example, you had to learn how to read the words on this page!

What can you do that other people might like to learn how to do? Think about your hobbies or a chore you do at home. Do you think you could teach someone how to do one of them? Think carefully! **Instructing** others is sometimes harder than it seems.



## ACTIVITY



# Choose Your Goal

### HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Pencil
- Paper

### INSTRUCTIONS:

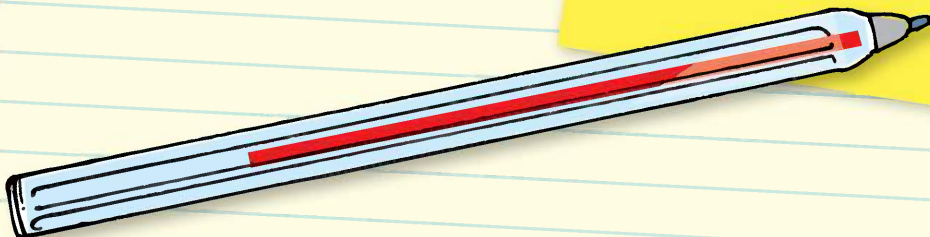
1. Make a list of things you know how to do well.
2. Think about what another person might like to learn.
3. Put a check by the **task** you want to teach.

To get a copy of this activity, visit [www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities](http://www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities).

### WHAT CAN I DO?

- Fly a kite
- Ride a bike
- ✓ • Make a jam sandwich
- Brush my teeth
- Play checkers

Reading other **how-tos** may help you learn how to write them.



# What You Need



What materials will your project need?

Instructions usually begin with a list of materials. Set out all of the materials someone will need when following your instructions. It will be easier to write your list if you are looking at the items.

Write the name of each item on your list. You do not need to write complete sentences. Be **specific** when you describe your materials. Include the color, size, and amount of what the reader will need. That will make it easier for the reader to copy what you've done. Let's say you are teaching someone how to make a paper airplane. Write down the exact size of paper that will be needed.



# ACTIVITY



## Gather Materials

### HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Pencil
- Paper
- Items needed for instructions

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Gather the materials you need to teach someone how to do the task.
2. Write a list of the materials your reader will need. Write them in the order that they will be used.
3. If needed, include the color, size, and amount of each item.

Food materials are called **ingredients**. A set of instructions for cooking is called a **recipe**.

Mention every item someone would need for the project.



### MATERIALS:

- plate
- butter knife

### INGREDIENTS:

- jam
- butter
- bread

To get a copy of this activity, visit [www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities](http://www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities).



# Step-by-Step

Now it is time for the most important part of writing instructions. You must explain everything the reader needs to do to finish the task. Go step-by-step. Number each of the steps. This will help the reader understand the exact order in which to do them.



Think about the ways your teachers help you learn things at school.

Make sure you give clear instructions. Your readers will not be able to ask you questions. You need to explain clearly what to do. Let's say you are teaching someone to make a sandwich. You write, "Put the jam on the bread." A reader might put a jar of jam on top of a loaf of bread. That is not what you mean!



## ACTIVITY



# Write the Steps in Order

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Pencil
- Paper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Write out each step a reader needs to follow to complete the task.
2. Number each step so the instructions are in order.

To get a copy of this activity, visit  
[www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities](http://www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities).

### How to Make a Jam Sandwich

1. Place two slices of bread side by side on a plate.
2. Take the lid off the jam jar.
3. Put jam on one side of one piece of bread.
4. Take the lid off the butter dish.
5. Put butter on one side of the second slice of bread.
6. Put one slice of bread on top of the other slice.
7. Use the knife to cut the bread in half.

# Use Details!



Now you have the steps written in order. It is time to go back to edit your words to make them more specific.

Use action words. Action words help readers understand exactly what you want them to do. For example, what actions do you use to make a sandwich? Do you *place* the



bread on the plate? Do you *spread* the butter?  
Do you *scoop* up the jam?

You also need to include details about what the reader needs to do. For example, "Use the butter knife to spread 1 tablespoon of jam on one side of one slice of bread."



## Add Details and Action Words

### HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Pencil
- Paper or Computer

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Reread each line of your instructions.
2. Begin each line with an action word.
3. Add any details you think will help make your **directions** more clear.

To get a copy of this activity, visit  
[www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities](http://www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities).

## HOW TO MAKE A JAM SANDWICH

### Materials:

- A small clean plate
- A butter knife
- Two measuring spoons: a tablespoon and a teaspoon

### Ingredients:

- 2 slices of bread
- 1 tablespoon of jam
- 2 teaspoons of soft butter

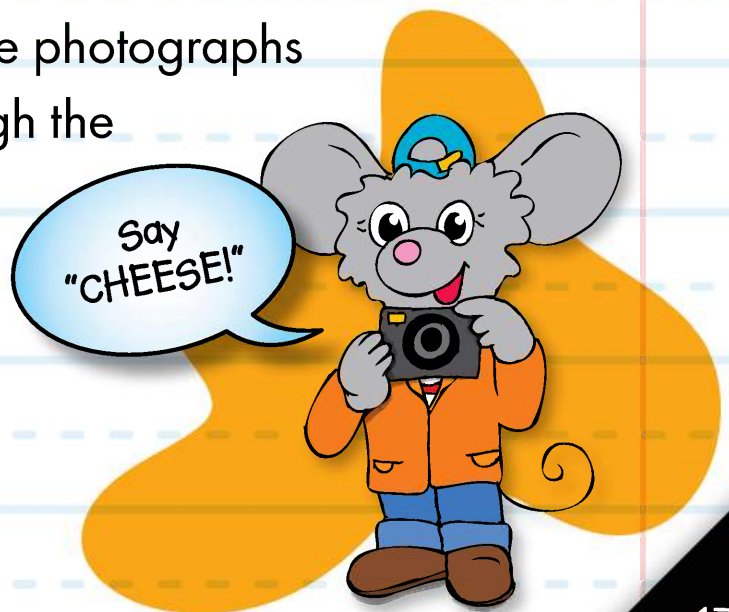
### Directions:

1. Place two slices of bread side by side on a plate.
2. Remove the lid from the jam jar.
3. Use the tablespoon to scoop the jam from the jar.
4. Place the jam on one side of one piece of bread.
5. Use the knife to spread the jam so it covers the top of the bread.
6. Remove the lid from the butter dish.
7. Use the teaspoon to scoop two spoonfuls of butter onto the other slice of bread.
8. Use the knife to spread the butter over the top of the slice of bread.
9. Place one piece of bread on top of the other so the butter and jam are in the middle.
10. Use the knife to cut the bread in half.
11. Enjoy your jam sandwich!

# See What I Mean?

Have you ever heard the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”? Pictures can give readers a clear idea of what to do. A recipe often has **photographs** of exactly how to prepare the dish. Directions for how to put together a toy may have a picture of each step. The pictures help you see what the toy will look like as you build it.

You may want to draw pictures for your how-to. These are called **illustrations**. You can also ask someone to take photographs while you go through the steps. Include the pictures with your instructions.



To get a copy of this activity, visit  
[www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities](http://www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities).

## ACTIVITY



# Include Pictures

### HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Colored pencils
- Paper
- Camera (if using photographs)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Decide if you will use drawings or photographs with your directions.
2. Illustrate some of the steps of your instructions.





## HOW TO MAKE A JAM SANDWICH

### Materials:

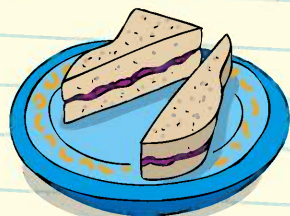
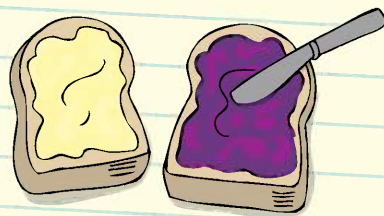
- A small clean plate
- A butter knife
- Two measuring spoons:  
a tablespoon and  
a teaspoon

### Ingredients:

- 2 slices of bread
- 1 tablespoon of jam
- 2 teaspoons of soft butter

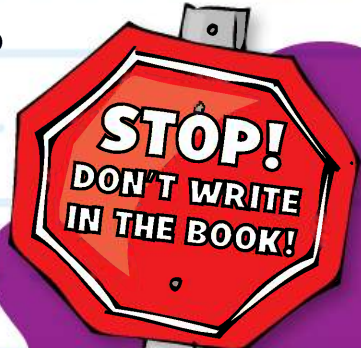
### Directions:

1. Place two slices of bread side by side on a plate.
2. Remove the lid from the jam jar.
3. Use the tablespoon to scoop  
the jam from the jar.
4. Place the jam on one side of one piece of bread.
5. Use the knife to spread the jam  
so it covers the top of the bread.
6. Remove the lid from the  
butter dish.
7. Use the teaspoon to scoop  
two spoonfuls of butter onto the other slice of bread.
8. Use the knife to spread the butter over the top of the  
slice of bread.
9. Place one piece of bread on top of the other so the butter and  
jam are in the middle.
10. Use the knife to cut the bread in half.
11. Enjoy your jam sandwich!



# Final Changes

You're almost finished. It is time to check everything one more time. Read your instructions carefully.



ACTIVITY



## Checklist

- YES  NO Did I list all of the materials?
- YES  NO Did I put the steps in order?
- YES  NO Did I number the steps?
- YES  NO Did I include details and action words?
- YES  NO Did I follow the instructions to make sure everything was included?
- YES  NO Did I include pictures or illustrations?
- YES  NO Did I check for correct spelling and grammar?

To get a copy of this activity, visit  
[www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities](http://www.cherrylakepublishing.com/activities).



## Do It Yourself!

Go through the instructions as if you are the reader. Complete each action exactly as written. Did you include every step that is needed? Did you use enough detail to make your writing clear? You may want to ask a parent to try out your instructions first. Then you can share them with others.

What else can you teach others to do?

# Glossary

**directions** (duh-REK-shuhnzh) instructions for how to do something

**how-tos** (how-TOOZ) books, videos, or other things that teach how to do something

**illustrations** (il-uh-STRAY-shuhnzh) pictures in a book, magazine, or other document

**ingredients** (in-GREE-dee-uhntz) items used to make something

**instructing** (in-STRUHKT-ing) teaching

**instructions** (in-STRUHK-shuhnzh) directions on how something is done

**photographs** (FOH-tuh-grafs) pictures taken with a camera

**recipe** (RES-uh-pee) instructions for preparing food

**specific** (spuh-SIF-ik) clear, exact

**task** (TASK) a chore or piece of work to be done



# For More Information

## BOOKS

Benke, Karen. *Rip the Page! Adventures in Creative Writing*. Boston: Trumpeter, 2010.

Davis, Todd. *Handy Dad: 25 Awesome Projects for Dads and Kids*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010.

Twohy, Mike. *Poindexter Makes a Friend*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.

## WEB SITES

### Fun English Games—Fun Writing Games for Kids

[www.funenglishgames.com/writinggames.html](http://www.funenglishgames.com/writinggames.html)

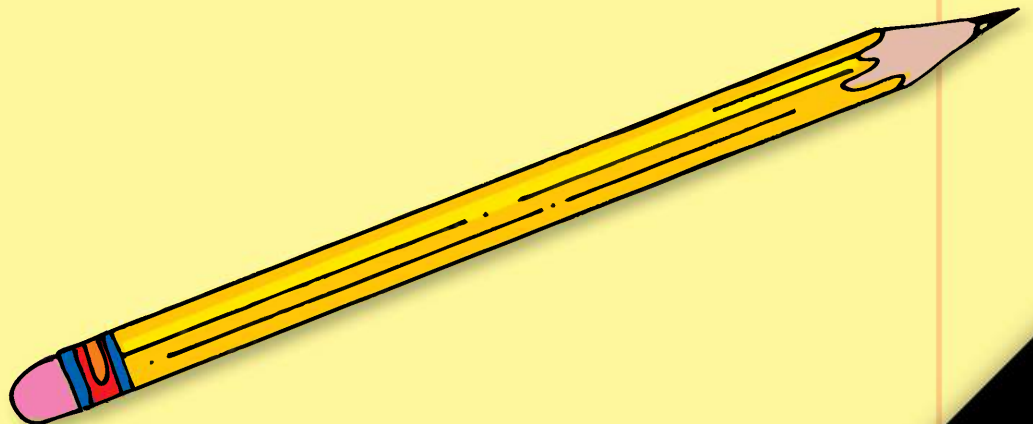
Explore interactive games to help you with your writing skills.

### Professor Pen's Favorite Word Games

#### On-Line to Improve Writing Skills

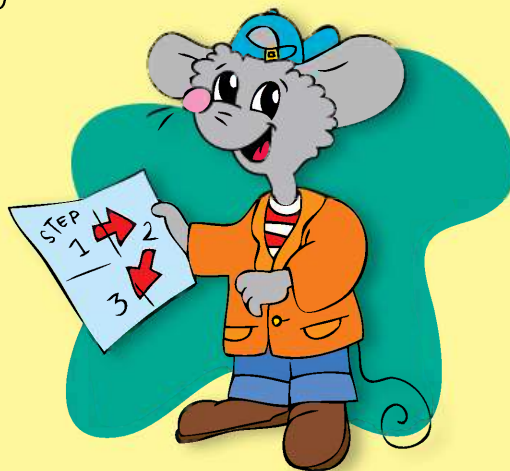
[www.writing-for-kids.com/wordgames.html](http://www.writing-for-kids.com/wordgames.html)

Find links to word games that will help you build your vocabulary.



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## About the Authors

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Kate Roth has a doctorate from Harvard University in language and literacy and a master's degree from Columbia University Teachers College in curriculum and teaching. Her work focuses on writing instruction in the primary grades. She has taught kindergarten, first grade, and Reading Recovery. She has also instructed hundreds of teachers from around the world in early literacy practices. She lives in Shanghai, China, with her husband and three children, ages 3, 7, and 10. Together they do a lot of writing to stay in touch with friends and family and to record their experiences.





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