

5.

Directions

How to make them
measure up to standard

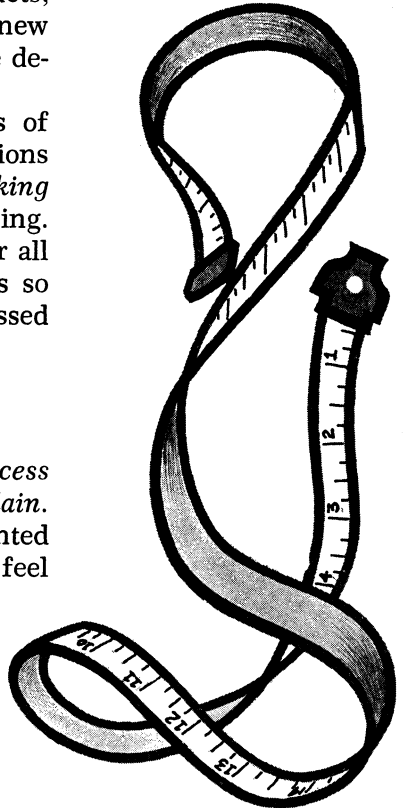
WHATEVER LINE OF WORK you follow in the field of home economics, you are certain to have to write directions. The need for good writing of directions increases daily, as new home products, new home appliances and equipment, and new ways of doing familiar homemaking tasks are developed.

Generally speaking, there are three types of directions needed by homemakers. (1) Directions for *using* something. (2) Directions for *making* something. (3) Directions for *doing* something. (Recipe writing, of course, may involve any or all of these three types of directions. Since it is so highly specialized, the subject will be discussed separately and in detail in the next chapter.)

Directions for Writing Directions

1. *Make sure you really understand the process or the operation you are undertaking to explain.* That means you must get personally acquainted with the product or tool or method — get the feel

Directions, like a tape measure, must be accurate, easy to use, and exactly the right length.



of it — before you attempt to write. Discover possible problems that the homemaker may meet, and figure how to keep her from being baffled and irritated by them. (Haven't you personally felt completely frustrated by a new type of can opener or "easy-opening" carton, or some other complicated device?) No woman likes to feel that a piece of equipment is smarter than she is!

2. *Think the process through.* Act it out as you are thinking. What do you do first? Second? Third? Write down each step in that order, beginning each step with the verb that best expresses the meaning. By starting each step with a verb, you will find it easier to keep your directions in good order and make them march along quickly.

SHORTEN TO STRENGTHEN

After you have written any set of directions, go through what you have written and take out every unnecessary word — especially those empty words such as "a," "an," and "the." Note how this strengthens your copy, helps it to march along.

3. *Think about the space those directions will occupy.* Will they have to be squeezed down to fit a small hang-tag for a blouse, a panel on a carton or bottle of detergent, a few lines on a package of frozen fish? Or are they to be handled in larger type and more words in a folder or leaflet accompanying that new vacuum cleaner? Or may they be expanded into a bulletin or booklet of complete instructions for making slip covers or removing stains? (If it's to be the last-named your problem is simpler in some ways. Look to the chapter, "Booklets, Bulletins, Leaflets," for special advice.)

4. *Estimate the number of lines of type and the number of words you will probably be able to use for those directions.* Now go back and rewrite those steps, trying to get the word count down to fit the space without sacrificing clearness.

You will undoubtedly have to do this over and over. As you work, examine each word, each phrase, to see that it expresses clearly and simply the action involved. Substitute short, simple words for those long, pretentious ones; short sentences

for long, involved ones. Weed out technical terms that have meaning for a manufacturer but not for a homemaker.

5. *Try out your own rewritten directions.* Or better yet, get some inexperienced person to try them "cold," while you watch, answer questions, and make notes.

6. *Begin all over again, probably, and rewrite the whole thing.* Each time you work it over you will recognize real improvement. Keep on working until your directions are as foolproof and failure-proof and easy to follow as you can possibly make them.

Now, and now only, are you ready to retype your material neatly and show it to your editor or advertising manager, or whoever your boss may be.

Of course, the problem of getting women actually to read and follow your directions is not entirely solved by your writing those directions simply. Size and spacing of type, illustration, color and finish of paper stock all have a bearing on whether the woman is tempted to read the instruction sheet. But if your directions are clear in wording, friendly in tone, they are much more likely to be read and followed than if they are technical in wording, cold in tone.

The writing of directions carries heavy responsibilities. You, as a responsible home economist, will not write them carelessly.

WRITING COPY TO FIT SPACE

Many times — as in preparing a set of directions or a leaflet — you will be required to write copy to fit a specific space. If you are working with an artist, he will give you a layout to follow and a sample of the size and kind of type that is to be used. With these you can figure accurately how much to write. Here's how to proceed:

CHILD-TRAINING

If there are little folks around you, encourage them to learn to give clear, complete directions, as telling how to get to the market. Such training is fun for them; will help them in later years.

TOPIC SENTENCE!

In writing directions and/or recipes, you have a topic sentence already established, for you are writing about some narrowed-down idea.

1. Lay the sample of type on the layout and figure how many lines of type it is going to take to fill that space. Next, count every letter and every letter space between words in one of those lines. Write down that number. This is your "character count" per line.

2. Now set your typewriter to coincide with your character count per line and type your copy. At times it may be necessary to run two or three letter spaces over or under that designated count, but try to keep each line within your character count. When you are through typing your copy, count the number of lines that you have, then compare that number with the number of lines needed to fit the layout. All you need do now is to write more, or to cut back some of what you have written, to make the two coincide!

If you are not working with an artist, make a rough layout of your own. Then consult your printer as to the size and face of type that would be best to use. Ask him for a sample of that type, and proceed as has just been described.

If the printer has not yet been selected, look through magazines until you find a size and face of type that seems just right. Cut out a sample of it, lay it on your rough layout, figure character count per line, and count the number of lines required. When copy has been written to fit, show layout and type to the printer who eventually takes over the job. If he does not have that particular type face in stock, he will select one that is similar to your choice.

