
Callum: Hello, I'm Callum Robertson and today's 'How to ...' is all about describing a process, describing a series of instructions that when completed create a finished thing.

There are many situations where you might want to do this but a simple example is a recipe - describing how to make a particular kind of dish, a particular kind of food.

Anita Cormac was one of our guests on our 2007 webcast about cooking. Listen to part of her instructions on how to make the perfect omelette. How many different instructions are there, how many different things are you told to do?

Anita

Use a minimum of four eggs per omelette, you need a little bit of oil in the bottom of a non-stick omelette pan, and just heat the oil, not too much heat, just heat it, and then put just one tablespoon of water in with the egg and just mix the eggs up, just lightly beat them with the fork and then pour that into the hot pan, all of it.

Callum: There were 5 different instructions. Did you get them all? Let's listen one by one. As you listen this time pay attention to the verb form that she uses. What is it? Here's the first one:

Anita

Use a minimum of four eggs

Callum: Use a minimum of four eggs. This is the first instruction. The verb form is just 'use'. Here's the next.

Anita

Heat the oil, not too much heat, just heat it

Callum: Heat the oil, not too much heat, just heat it. The same instruction is repeated here with the verb – heat. Here's the third instruction.

Anita

Put just one tablespoon of water, not milk, in with the egg

Callum: Put just one tablespoon of water in with the egg. The verb is put. Coming now is the fourth instruction. There are actually two different verbs here, but they refer to the same action.

Anita

Mix the eggs up, just lightly beat them with a fork.

Callum: Mix the eggs, beat them with a fork – the verbs are mix and beat. And now the final instruction:

Anita

Pour that into the hot pan

Callum: Pour that into the pan, the verb is 'pour'.

In each of these examples the verb form is the same. It's what we call the imperative and it's very simple to make, it's just the infinitive of the verb without to. You'll also notice another feature of these examples of the imperative is that there is no subject. She doesn't say 'you' or 'we', she just

uses the imperative. This is very very common when describing how to do or make something. Let's listen again to Anita:

Anita

Use a minimum of four eggs per omelette, you need a little bit of oil in the bottom of a non-stick omelette pan, and just heat the oil, not too much heat, just heat it, and then put just one tablespoon of water in with the egg and just mix the eggs up, just lightly beat them with the fork and then pour that into the hot pan, all of it.

Callum: Now we've seen that when describing a process or giving instructions, as in a recipe, the imperative is used. But when giving these kinds of instructions we usually say more than just a list of imperative sentences. It makes instructions easier to follow if we link the instructions together and give some information as to the order that they should happen. Listen again to part of the instructions again. This time don't concentrate on the verbs but focus on what Anita says when moving from one instruction to another. She uses two different linking words, what are they?

Anita

And just heat the oil, and then put just one tablespoon of milk, not water, in with the egg and just mix the eggs up, and then pour that into the hot pan, all of it.

Callum: Did you catch them? They're very quick and not stressed at all, so it's easy to miss them. Here they are by themselves.

Anita

and ... and then ... and and then

Callum: She uses 'and' and also 'and then'. Listen again to them by themselves, then in the flow of what she says.

Anita

and ... and then ... and and then

And just heat the oil, and then put just one tablespoon of water, not milk, in with the egg and just mix the eggs up, and then pour that into the hot pan, all of it.

Callum: 'And' and 'then' are two very simple, but very common linking words. Particularly useful when giving a series of instructions. As you've heard they are not stressed, that helps to maintain the natural flow and rhythm of speech.

Now there are many other linking words that we can use when we are describing processes and giving instructions but we'll look at some more of those in another programme.

That's all we have time for in this edition of 'How to ...' and if you want to learn how to make the perfect omelette you can download Anita's full instructions from the website.