

USER DOCUMENTATION

User Documentation usually comes in the form of instruction sets or learning modules (procedures/directions) which help the user to perform a series of tasks

MODULAR DESIGN

User Documentation is usually designed to provide the reader with just enough information to complete one task at a time.

Each Module Should Contains

- +Short Explanations pertaining to specific tasks/rules/etc.
- +Necessary steps for accomplishing the specific task/adhering to the rules/regulations
- +Hazard Messages/Safety Information/Repercussion Discussion/etc.
- +Deductive Outcomes (teach the individual where the step will take them – what the result will be)
- +List the tools/equipment necessary for the task and clearly explain them
- +Separate the instructions from explanations

USER DOCUMENTATION WRITING PROCESS

1. Audience Analysis

- conduct a study, formal or informal, to determine the user's needs.
- consider (additionally) everyday tasks which may present difficulty or a specifically adapted process which should be addressed
- look at previous documentation (if applicable)

2. Organizing

- Organize in task-oriented, sequential steps (consider this example of task-oriented, sequential steps: Getting an account, logging in, receiving email, sending email, replying, etc.)
- Organize similar types of information similarly

3. Designing

- Clearly labeled figures
- Consistent Formats
- Decision Tables (If... Then...)
- Modular Design (create short steps which explain specific tasks)

4. Usability Tests

Usability tests are test performed to insure that the manual works and is useable.

SUGGESTIONS

Be clear

Be specific

Be coherent (logical)

Be concise

Use international English

Use a consistent method of naming elements (e.g. equipment/personnel/etc.).

Try not to cross-reference (make readers "jump around to different pages")

Accommodate random flipping through pages (most studies indicate that this is the favorite mode of reading)

Illustrate liberally (use graphics, tables, pics, etc.)

Use color/different typography for emphasis

Use symbols for notation (+, <>, smiley faces, etc.) only when needed.

Consider reading patterns (Americans typically read from left to right and up to down)

Select an appropriate size and document format (use the entire page when needed)