



How To Make A Manual

A Guide by

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Step 1: Planning

Any good manual requires detailed planning in order to understand its function. Some questions to consider are:

1. Who is the targeted audience?
2. What is the purpose of the manual?
3. What is the required information for the task?
4. How long is the project?
5. What is the project timeline?
6. Who will be on the team?
7. How will the manual be distributed?
8. What are the necessary tools for this project?
9. Who will be responsible for reviewing and approving the final output?

Step 2: Research

Once a plan is defined, the research process can begin. This is the critical time during which the foundation of the manual is revealed. The steps during the research process include:

1. Scheduling meetings with the key personnel who will provide information.
2. Collecting the supporting documentation to use in the manual.
3. Capturing digital images to support the content of the manual.
4. Creating illustrations to support the content of the manual.
5. Creating the outline of the manual.
6. Forwarding requests for additional support documentation to the appropriate personnel or organizations.

Step 3: Writing

Once the initial information is obtained, it is time to start writing the manual. Again, it is important to remember your target audience so that the appropriate verbiage is used. If the writing is not geared to the audience's needs, then the manual has failed before it's even used.

Concentrate on writing the actual content first. Editing should be completed after all of the information has been written, so that proper attention is paid to the continuity of the word flow.

If there are questions during the writing process, find the appropriate experts to answer your questions. Take copious notes, make necessary copies of supporting documents that will help to clarify the information. Sometimes, your line of questioning will open an alternate view that can help your user to understand the topic.

As the chapters start to develop, have the team review it in the early stages to catch problems before the manual is fully developed. It is easier to change the manual's content or direction when it is in the early stages of development.

Remember to keep your information flow open to catch all pertinent data. But make sure that you are leading the documentation process, so that the project stays on focus.

Step 4: Layout

Once the text is completed, the layout process can be started. The layout design is as important as the content. If the manual has a poor design, the audience will not be able to absorb the information that was collected and written. White space, content flow, and image placement are critical to the success of the document.

When the layout is designed, the digital images can be edited to fit the text content. If the images are not properly edited to remove extraneous details, the image can interfere with the meaning of the text. Cropping and enhancing techniques are used to create the final image that will match the size of the image placeholder. Remember to maintain consistency of the image sizes throughout the document so that the audience can comfortably read the information. If the images are too large or change their dimensions haphazardly, then the audience will lose their focus and learning is inhibited.

Once this stage is completed, the document is basically completed and needs to be reviewed for errors and changes.

Step 5: Review

After the document has been laid out in its final draft, the content can be reviewed for changes. As the changes are completed, the editing process will reveal any necessary corrections before the final production:

- It catches any errors to the content flow.
- It reveals any missing content.
- It catches grammar and punctuation errors.
- It verifies that the design elements (e.g. color) in the document are correctly portrayed.
- It allows the balance to be properly analyzed and corrected where needed.
- It verifies that all of the document elements are collected and properly linked for pre-press production.

Step 6: Production

Once the manual has been completed and approved, it is ready to be sent to the printers for production. The following items are necessary for the printer to provide a good product:

- All electronic files for the document.
- All electronic files of the supporting images.
- All electronic files for the fonts used in the document.
- A paper or electronic copy in the final layout for reference.
- Instructions including required services, font sizes, color matches, and list of contents.

How To Reach Me

My name is **Carolyn S Brajkovich**, and I'm a technical communicator.

If you want to find out more about what this technical communicator can do for your communication needs, just reach out and find me.



I'll be more than happy to help you find a customized communications solution that will fit your needs.

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