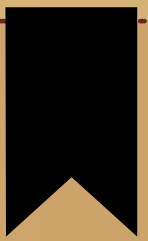


Writing Technical Instructions



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In writing technical instructions, our choice is more limited. To begin with, structures which start with ‘**please**’ would get tedious, and eventually absurd. **Abandoning politeness** is a valid aim, so, there remain two major areas of choice in structures:

- 1st : the name used for the person addressed.
- 2nd : the variety of verb form chosen.

Instructions can start:

- Second person
 - *You* must turn off the printer after use.
- Third person
 - The *operator* must turn off the printer after use.
- Third person pronoun
 - *He* must turn off the printer after use.
- Impersonal
 - The printer must be turned off after use.

‘**He**’, ‘**she**’ or ‘**the operator**’ sounds coldly impersonal; ‘**you**’ sounds over-friendly. Raising issues of authority in instructions should be avoided

Sometimes it is necessary to specify who is to do something.

Example:

The **supervisor** must check the setting before the next operation is begun.

Use of Modal verbs

Problems are also raised by the use of modal verbs ('ought', 'will', 'shall', etc) because exact difference of meaning between 'must' and 'ought' is uncertain.

For example:

‘I should, but ought I to?’

‘I have to do it, but am I to?’

‘I must do it, but do you think I ought?’



Use of Modal verbs

Modal verbs such as ‘should’ reduce the instruction to the status of an observation. They appear to be passing information, rather than instructing. Many modal verbs carry less than total obligation, because they express shades of obligation.

Example:

“The valve should be closed” is less precise than the instruction “Close the valve” .

The verb ‘should’ blunts the impact of the instruction verb ‘close’.

Use simple imperatives

- Problems of authority, repetition and uncertainty are removed by using the simple imperative form of the verb.
 1. Close the valve immediately.
 2. Open vent C to blow off steam.
 3. Drain the boiler casing.
 4. Switch off the oil supply.

Use simple imperatives

In each case, the first word in the instruction names the type of action which will be required, and helps to focus users' attention on what they have to do. Furthermore, active sentences are easier to read than passive or modal ones. For these reasons, normally use the simple imperative in instructions.



Use simple imperatives

But if the activity first requires a decision, then the instruction should start with the 'If...' clause, before the imperative verb, so that the condition is understood before the action is ordered.

Example:

- Close the steam valve by turning V4 clockwise, if the temperature reading is over 275°C.
- If the temperature reading is over 275°C, close the steam valve by turning V4 clockwise.

Thank you!

The image features the words "Thank you!" in a highly decorative, hand-drawn style. The letters are thick and outlined in black. The word "Thank" is positioned above "you!". The letter 'T' is yellow with a red vertical line and a wavy pattern. The 'h' is orange with a red wavy line. The 'a' is green with a black and white dotted pattern. The 'n' is purple with a red wavy line. The 'k' is orange with a red wavy line. The word "you!" is below it. The 'y' is green with a black and white dotted pattern. The 'o' is pink with a black and white dotted pattern. The 'u' is blue with a red wavy line. The exclamation mark is blue with a green wavy line. There are several flowers: a blue flower with a purple center at the top right, a blue flower with a purple center to the right of the 'k', a pink flower with a yellow center in front of the 'y', and a blue flower with a purple center to the left of the 'y'. A small blue flower with a green center is at the bottom right.