

# Lesson 3: Academic and Technical English

## Further Reading

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Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2021

### What are the differences between “manual”, “guide” and “instruction”?

There is considerable overlap among the three, and to some extent they can be interchangeable. They can be coupled together or with other terms, as in **instruction manual** or **reference guide**. In addition, there are a number of similar terms like **handbook**, **guidebook**, **primer**, or **vade mecum**.

**Manual** refers specifically to a reference document which provides detailed information about operation and maintenance of a product. Manufacturers will often provide an official manual for a product to provide assistance to its owners or users: cars, for example, usually come with an *owner’s manual*, machinery with an *operator’s manual*, and official documentation for Unix programs with *manual pages*.

**Guide** is a more generic term. Whereas *manual* implies a written document, one that could be a booklet for a video game or a large book for a complex product such as a car, a guide can be just a card, or in another medium altogether such as a video. It may be a detailed reference, but it can also indicate a very simple overview or instructions for a small subset of features.

Because “manual” has connotations of dense, boring text, some manufacturers or technical writers prefer the label “guide” for what would traditionally be called a “manual.”

**Instructions** is the most generic term, and may be synonymous with directions—step-by-step guidance on how to perform a specific task or function. A manual or guide will include many sets of instructions. Used alone, however, “instructions” can refer to the simplest explanatory text — *push cap and twist to open, or use other door*.

The presence of user in the phrases you cited suggests an electronic or software product, in which case I would say all three phrases you cited are synonymous. For example, Apple labels the documentation section of its website as “Manuals,” yet the documents themselves are the iPhone User Guide, iPad User Guide, and so on.

The above article is extracted from *StackExchange: English Language & Usage* website, post *What are the differences between “manual”, “guide” and “instruction”?*. It is available online [here](#) (accessed on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2021).