

PITFALLS IN WRITING

Synonyms of *pitfall*

TRAP ENTRY

: a pit flimsily covered or camouflaged and used to capture and hold animals or people

: a hidden or not easily recognized danger or difficulty

□ one of the *pitfalls* of ignorance is that people will also assume you're stupid

SIX COMMON PITFALLS ARE

Not regularly consulting with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs),
Making assumptions about the audience's knowledge,
Using too much technical language,
Writing overly long sentences,
Rushing through the writing process, and
Not improving published documentation.

NOT CONSULTING WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

- Not consulting with SMEs at the right time—or at all—to verify the information and ask for clarification will result in inaccurate and incomplete documentation.
- Once you've written the documentation, the review/edit stage should incorporate feedback from SMEs and other stakeholders.

ASSUMING HOW MUCH THE AUDIENCE KNOWS

- Assuming instead of determining how much your target audience knows is a common mistake made by many technical writers.
- Incorrect assumptions can lead to users being confused and frustrated, misunderstanding the documentation, and consequently, misusing the product itself.
- Overall, good technical writers avoid making assumptions about how much their target audience knows and invest time and effort to better understand their level of knowledge, as well as their specific needs and concerns, in order to create audience-friendly documentation.

USING A LOT OF TECHNICAL LANGUAGE

- Although some technical language is unavoidable in software documentation, good technical writers refrain from using a lot of technical jargon and needlessly complex language that can make the documentation difficult to understand for the target audience.
- Instead of technical jargon, technical writers should write in plain language tailored to the target audience and define technical terms and acronyms, to make sure their audience understands them perfectly.

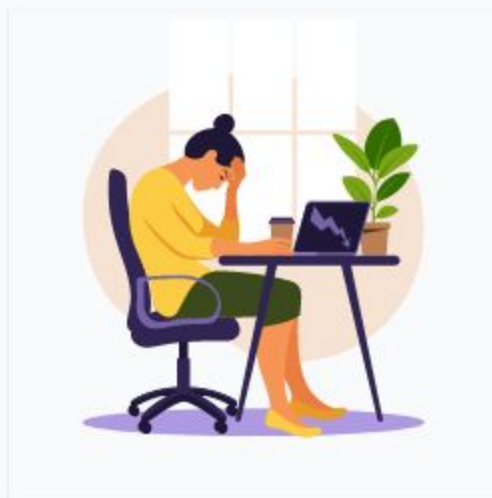
WRITING SENTENCES THAT ARE TOO LONG

- Too long sentences result is that such sentences progressively lose clarity, making them difficult for readers to follow.
- To improve the readability of documentation, technical writers should also strive to break down long paragraphs (e.g., by using bullet points) in addition to using shorter words and sentences.
- To ensure clarity and simplicity in their writing, good technical writers keep their sentences on the shorter side whenever possible.

RUSHING THROUGH THE WRITING PROCESS

- Due to often facing tight deadlines, large workloads, and last-minute changes, Despite often facing tight deadlines, large workloads, and last-minute changes, if technical writers rushes through in the writing process, that can lead to errors, inaccuracies, and inconsistencies in their software documentation.
- These shortcomings can then cause user frustration and adoption issues

Why Technical Writers Rush Their Writing



- Work overload and time pressures
- Last-minute changes
- Difficulty with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)
- Problems with managers
- Ongoing learning challenges and limited access to a product
- Poorly defined and managed projects
- Computer and tool problems
- Workspace environment
- Job security
- Lack of control over the work environment

NOT IMPROVING PUBLISHED TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION

- Technical documentation is a living record that changes over time, meaning it needs to be maintained and improved.
- For starters, users can point out inaccuracies or ambiguities in technical documentation, which need to be corrected or clarified to improve the user experience.
- This also means writers should keep track of how the documentation is performing and listen to feedback from the target audience to make improvements.
- Furthermore, as new features and updates are released, the documentation also needs to be changed to ensure it stays accurate and relevant.
- Therefore, to prevent the documentation from becoming misleading or outdated, technical writers should take measures to keep it up to date.

How to Keep Your Documentation Up to Date



- Work closely with the product and development teams
- Store docs closer to the code
- Get notified about changes
- Schedule updates
- Automate wisely