

Heuristic Checklist for Technical Description

Introduction

- ☐ Brief indication of the nature and scope of the description.
 - ☐ The reader knows what information is covered and not covered in the technical description.
 - ☒ The reader knows who the target audience is.
 - ☒ The reader knows what the target audience is supposed to do with the information (learn, learn to do, later interact with object, mechanism, or process).
- ☐ Brief statement of why this object, mechanism, or process is significant to the reader.
 - ☒ The reader knows the value of the description (why he/she is likely being asked to read the description in the context of use)
- ☐ Overview of the object, mechanism, or process – may include any of the following, as applicable:
 - ☐ The reader is given historical background information
 - ☐ Date when the object/mechanism/process came into existence & who created it
 - ☐ Any updates or changes since its original creation.
 - ☐ Any new applications of it since its original creation.
 - ☐ Any known issues/concerns with it since its original creation or later iterations.
 - ☒ The reader is given a definition of object, mechanism, or process
 - ☐ A sentence definition that explains the type/category and distinguishing characteristics.
 - ☒ The reader understands the context of use (where it is used, by whom, and for what purposes)

Detailed Description (body sections)

- ☐ Detailed explanation of object, mechanism, or process:
 - ☒ The description uses appropriate styles of organization (spatial, functional, chronological, partition of the parts of the whole)
 - ☒ Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - ☐ No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.
 - ☐ The description answers the following questions:
 - ☒ What is the object, mechanism, or process?
 - ☒ Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - ☐ No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.
 - ☒ How is it defined (beyond a sentence definition – with an extended definition)?
 - ☒ Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - ☐ No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.
 - ☒ What does the object, mechanism, or process do?
 - ☒ Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - ☐ No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.
 - ☒ What does the object, mechanism, or process look like (size, shape, texture, compared to others (analogy, negation/what it is not like, etc.)?
 - ☒ Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - ☐ No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.

- What is the object or mechanism made of (if you are describing an object or mechanism and not a process) – materials, durability, etc.?
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.
- How does the object, mechanism, or process work?
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.
- Why should the reader be interested in your object, mechanism, or process?
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.

Conclusion

- A brief closing statement that summarizes the value of knowing more about the object, mechanism, or process. It provides closure to the reading process.
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.

Document Design

- The description uses headings and sub-headings appropriately
- The description uses balance, contrast, proximity, and alignment appropriately
- The description uses white space effectively
- The description uses font appropriately
- The description uses layout effectively
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.

Graphics

- The description includes an overview graphic to illustrate the whole object/mechanism/process
- The description includes smaller graphics to illustrate the parts of the whole – or stages of a process
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.

Prose/Language

- The description uses a level of wording appropriately for the target audience.
- The description defines jargon or terms that may be unfamiliar to novice audiences (of a mixed audience with semi-skilled and experts)
- The description is free from grammatical and mechanical mistakes
 - Yes – explain what works well to meet reader & genre expectations
 - No – explain what doesn't work well to meet reader & genre expectations AND what revision suggestions you have to improve the draft.