COM310-902
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Chapter 14

Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions

Overview:

- Writing definitions
- Writing descriptions
- Writing instructions
- Writing manuals

What are definitions, descriptions, and instructions?

- A *definition* is generally provides a brief explanation of a particular item or concept, often enhanced with words and occasionally with graphics for clarity.
- A *description* offers a more extensive explanation, typically supplemented with graphics. It aims to outline the physical attributes or operational features of an object, mechanism, or process.
- A set of *instructions* is a unique type of process description, almost invariably accompanied by graphics. Its purpose is to guide individuals in accomplishing a specific task.

Definitions

- Definitions facilitate a clear understanding of novel development or technologies within a technical field.
- Definitions help specialists in conveying complex information to readers who may possess a lower level of knowledge about the topic.

Decide where to place the definition:

- in the text
- in a marginal gloss
- in a separate hyperlinked file
- in a footnote
- in a glossary
- in an appendix

Consider employing the following strategies when writing for people whose primary language is not English:

1. Add a glossary, which is a collection of definitions
2. Use Simplified English and familiar terms in your definitions to facilitate comprehension.
3. Use graphics to visually represent terms or concepts.

Three types of definitions based on the target audience and the purpose they serve:

Parenthetical

"The computers were infected by a *Trojan horse* (a destructive program that appears to be benign)."

Sentence

"Crippleware refers to shareware in which certain features remain inaccessible until the user purchases a license for the program."

Extended

A detailed explanation—usually one or more paragraphs—of an object, process, or idea.

Sentence definitions typically follow a specific pattern:

The term to be defined is placed within a category of similar items. Subsequently, it is differentiated from those items.

Here are five guidelines to craft effective **sentence definitions**:

1. Be precise when stating the category and the unique characteristics of the term you're defining.
2. Refrain from describing a specific item when your intent is to define a broader category or class of items..
3. Avoid writing circular definitions that simply repeat the term or its distinguishing features.
4. Be sure the category includes a noun or a noun phrase, rather than phrases beginning with *when*, *what*, or *where*. For example,
   Don't: *"Hypnoanalysis is when hypnosis is used to . . ."*
   Do: *Hypnoanalysis is a psychoanalytical technique in which . . .*
5. Consider integrating a graphic to visually represent the concept.

Extended definitions typically employ eight distinct techniques:

Descriptions

Objects

Mechanisms

Processes

For effective descriptions, adhere to these four strategies:

01

Clearly specify the essence and extent of the description.

02

Introduce the description in concise and clear manner.

03

Provide adequate and relevant detail.

04

End the description with a brief conclusion.

For object or mechanism descriptions, answer these five key questions:

What is the item?

What purpose does it serve?

What does the item look like?

How does the item operate?

What are the item's main components?

When detailing mechanism and object descriptions:

- Choose an organizational principle that best suits your content:
  - Functional: Describes how the object or mechanism operates or is utilized.
  - Spatial: Describes the physical structure of the item.
- Use graphics.

For introducing process description, consider answering these six questions:

1. What process is being described?
2. What is the purpose of the process?
3. When and where does the process occur?
4. Who or what is responsible for carrying out the process?
5. How does the process operate?
6. What are the primary steps in the process?

To provide suitable detail in process descriptions:

1. Arrange the step-by-step description in a chronological order.
2. Clarify causal relationships between steps.
3. Employ the present tense for clarity.
4. Use graphics.

To conclude descriptions:

1. For mechanism and certain object descriptions, briefly state how the components function in unison.
2. For process descriptions, offer a concise paragraph summarizing the main steps or discussing the significance or implications of the process.

Instructions

- Descriptions of processes aimed at assisting readers in completing a specific task.
- Written instructions, either online or in print, offer portability and comprehensive details for even the most complex tasks and systems.
- Choose the most suitable combination of media.

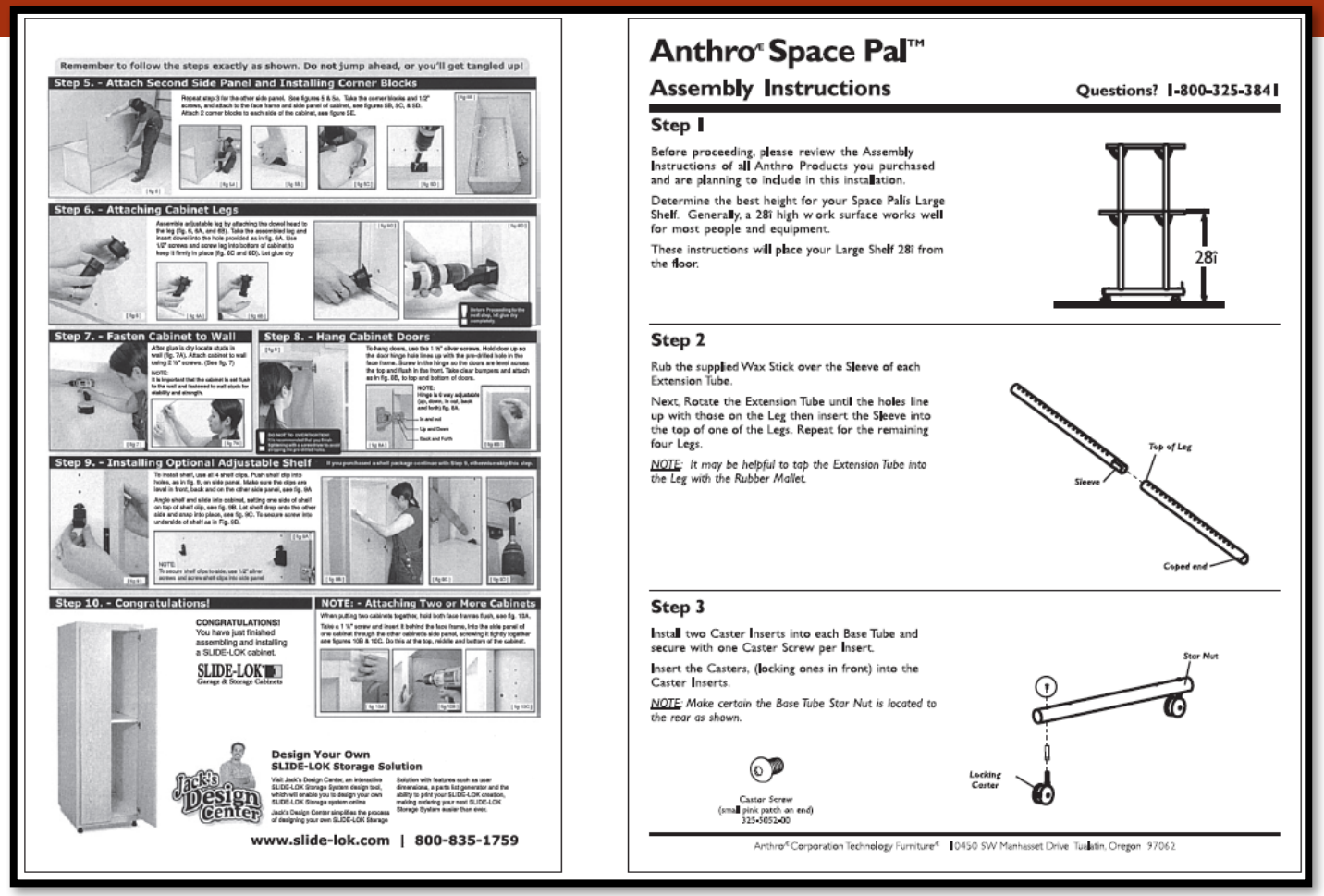
Consider these six questions when designing a set of instructions:

- What expectations do your readers have?
- What abilities do your readers possess?
- Should you develop more than one set of instructions for varied audiences?
- What languages should you use?
- Will your readers feel anxious about the information?
- Will the environment where the instructions are read influence the document's design (technological infrastructure)?

Follow these two guidelines for clear and appealing page design:

1. Create an spacious and inviting design.
2. Make sure that text and graphics are clearly connected.

Examples of a cluttered page design and an attractive page design for instructions:



Remember to follow the steps exactly as shown. Do not jump ahead, or you'll get tangled up!

Step 5. - Attach Second Side Panel and Installing Corner Blocks

Step 6. - Attaching Cabinet Legs

Step 7. - Fasten Cabinet to Wall

Step 8. - Hang Cabinet Doors

Step 9. - Installing Optional Adjustable Shelf

Step 10. - Congratulations!

CONGRATULATIONS! You have just finished assembling and installing a SLIDE-LOK cabinet.

SLIDE-LOK Garage & Storage Cabinets

NOTE: - Attaching Two or More Cabinets

Design Your Own SLIDE-LOK Storage Solution

Jack's Design Center

www.slide-lok.com | 800-835-1759

Anthro® Space Pal™

Assembly Instructions

Questions? 1-800-325-3841

Step 1

Before proceeding, please review the Assembly Instructions of all Anthro Products you purchased and are planning to include in this installation.

Determine the best height for your Space Pal's Large Shelf. Generally, a 28" high work surface works well for most people and equipment.

These instructions will place your Large Shelf 28" from the floor.

28"

Step 2

Rub the supplied Wax Stick over the Sleeve of each Extension Tube.

Next, Rotate the Extension Tube until the holes line up with those on the Leg then insert the Sleeve into the top of one of the Legs. Repeat for the remaining four Legs.

NOTE: It may be helpful to tap the Extension Tube into the Leg with the Rubber Mallet.

Top of Leg

Sleeve

Coped end

Step 3

Install two Caster Inserts into each Base Tube and secure with one Caster Screw per Insert.

Insert the Casters, (locking ones in front) into the Caster Inserts.

NOTE: Make certain the Base Tube Star Nut is located to the rear as shown.

Star Nut

Locking Caster

Caster Screw (small pink patch on end) 325-5052-00

Anthro® Corporation Technology Furniture® | 10450 SW Manhasset Drive Tualatin, Oregon 97062

Source: Slide-Lok, 2005 <www.slide-lok.com/assembly/P2468/P2468.pdf>.

Source: Anthro, 2005 <www.anthro.com/assemblyinstructions/300-5237-00.pdf.

Recognize these four safety words commonly used in manuals and instructions:

Danger signals an immediate, serious hazard likely resulting in fatality.

Warning signifies potential for serious injury, death, or substantial equipment dmage.

Caution indicates potential for injuries ranging from moderate to serious or equipment damage or destruction.

Note indicates a tip or recommendation to aid readers in successfully executing a procedure.

Planning for safety: four signal words

SIGNAL WORD	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
Danger ⚠ DANGER	*Danger* is used to alert readers about an immediate and serious hazard that will likely be fatal. Writers often use all uppercase letters for danger statements.	DANGER: EXTREMELY HIGH VOLTAGE. STAND BACK.
Warning ⚠ WARNING	*Warning* is used to alert readers about the potential for serious injury or death or serious damage to equipment. Writers often use all uppercase letters for warning statements.	WARNING: TO PREVENT SERIOUS INJURY TO YOUR ARMS AND HANDS, YOU MUST MAKE SURE THE ARM RESTRAINTS ARE IN PLACE BEFORE OPERATING THIS MACHINE.
Caution ⚠ CAUTION	*Caution* is used to alert readers about the potential for anything from moderate injury to serious equipment damage or destruction.	Caution: Do not use nonrechargeable batteries in this charging unit; they could damage the charging unit.
Note	*Note* is used for a tip or suggestion to help readers carry out a procedure successfully.	Note: Two kinds of washers are provided—regular washers and locking washers. Be sure to use the locking washers here.

When introducing safety words, use the imperative form:

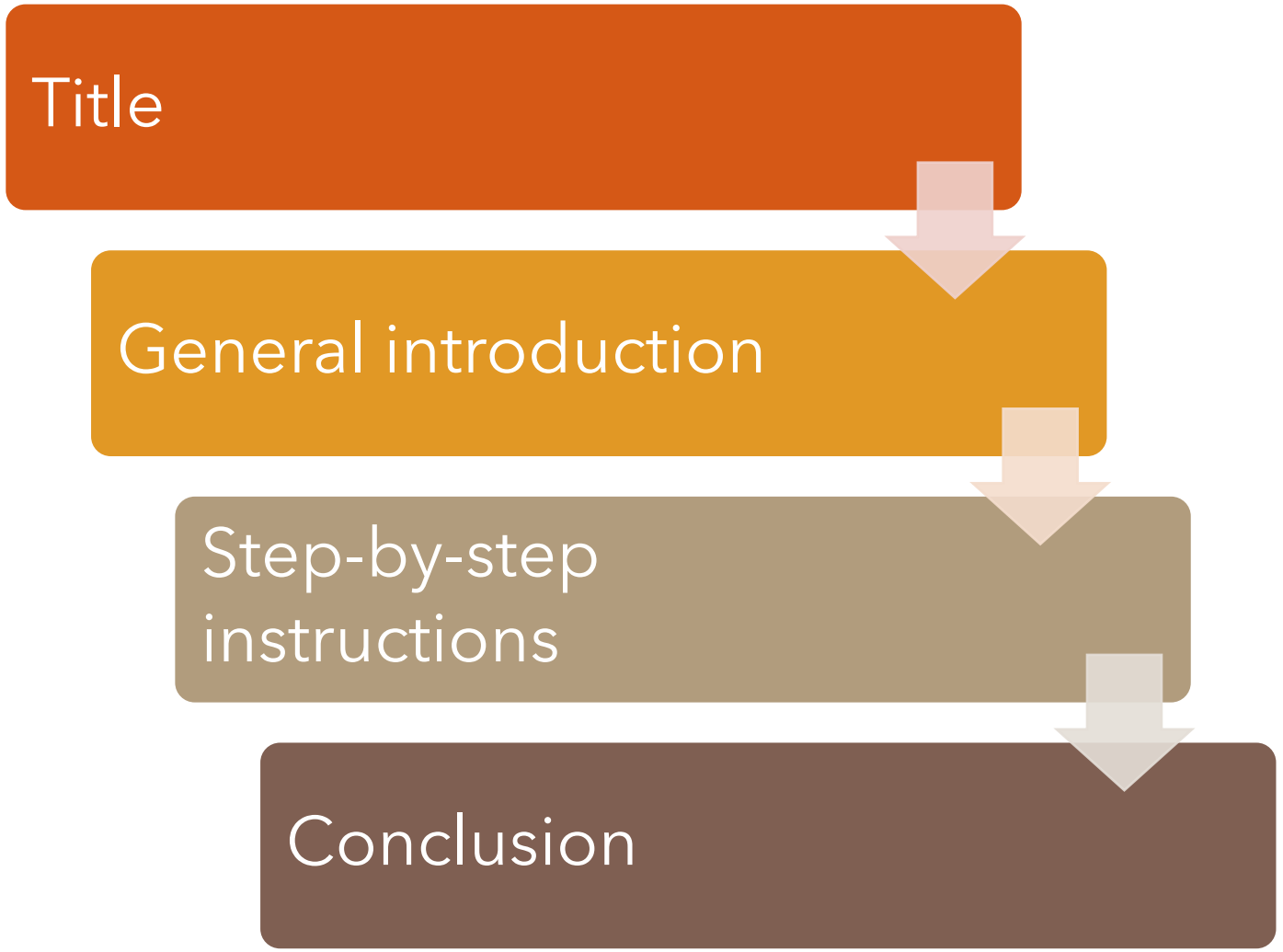
It is required that safety glasses be worn when inside this laboratory.

You must wear safety glasses in this laboratory.

Example of a Safety Label

Source: www.clarionsafety.com/Electrical-Hazard-Safety-Labels.

A **typical instruction set** includes four elements:



For effective instruction titles, follow these guidelines:

1. Write straightforward, clear titles beginning with ‘how to’ or a gerund (a verb in its –*ing* form):
   - How to Install the J112 Shock Absorber
   - Installing the J112 Shock Absorber
2. Avoid long strings of nouns:
   - J112 Shock Absorber Installation Instructions

Answer these six questions when drafting introductions for instructions:

Who is the intended performer of this task?

Why should the reader undertake this task?

When should the reader execute this task?

What safety precautions or considerations should the reader be aware of?

What items will the reader require?

How much time will the task consume?

Keep these six guidelines in mind when drafting instruction steps:

1. Number the instructions for clarity.
2. Include the appropriate amount of information in each step.
3. Use the imperative mood for commands.
4. Avoid confusing steps and feedback statements.
5. Include graphics.
6. Do **not** omit articles (*a*, *an*, *the*) to save space.

In Conclusions

1. Indicate that the reader has completed the task or describe the next steps:

> Now that you have replaced the glass and applied the glazing compound, let the window sit for at least five days so that the glazing can cure. Then, prime and paint the window.

2. You may also include:
   - Maintenance tips
   - Troubleshooting guide (listing common issues and their solutions)

Troubleshooting guide

PROBLEM	CAUSE	CORRECTION
The mower does not start.	1. The mower is out of gas. 2. The gas is stale. 3. The spark plug wire is disconnected from the spark plug	1. Fill the gas tank. 2. Drain the tank and refill it with fresh gas. 3. Connect the wire to the plug.
The mower loses power.	1. The grass is too high. 2. The air cleaner is dirty. 3. There is a buildup of grass, leaves, or trash in the underside of the mower housing.	1. Set the mower to a "higher cut" position. See page 10. 2. Replace the air cleaner. See page 11. 3. Disconnect the spark plug wire, attach it to the retainer post, and clean the underside of the mower housing. See page 8.

To test instructions for usability:

- Determine the aspects you need to test.
- Decide on the objectives of your test.
- Choose a testing method.
- Decide on the testing timeline.
- Determine who should be involved in the test.
- Consider a pilot test for preliminary insights.
- Plan how to analyze and utilize the test results.

Common elements in a manual's front matter:

Preface, which includes:

- an overview of the contents
- a section on conventions
- a "where to get help" section
- a list of trademarks

Common elements in a manual's back matter:

- Set of specifications
- List of government safety regulations and industry standards
- Maintenance and servicing tips
- Copyright page
- Index
- Glossary