DEVELOPING A USER MANUAL

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

User manuals serve as a guide to understanding and operating a product. As a customer facing document detailing a product's features and outlining the steps by which a customer interacts with the product effectively, user manuals are a vital ingredient in overall customer satisfaction. To ensure customer satisfaction, user manuals must be expertly written.

OBJECTIVES

After actively reviewing this guide, the reader should be able to:

- Identify an effective format and organizational structure for a user manual

- Describe the writing style and sentence structure necessary for content in a user manuals

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ORGANIZATION

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1.3 Identifying structural and organizational constraints
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INTRODUCTION

Identify
Purpose

Identify
Audience

Identify
Structure
Constraints

Identify
Organizational
Constraints

Identify
Resources

A **user manual** is a customer facing document describing a product's features and outlining the steps by which a customer interacts with the product effectively. Throughout product design and development, technical writers communicate with product stakeholders and interact with the product extensively in order to develop a guide for product use. Technical writers are responsible for clearly communicating complex concepts, processes, and/or features/capabilities. In other words, technical writers are responsible for explaining things.

User Manual : The Analysis Phase

In order for a technical writer to 'explain things' effectively, (s)he needs a firm understanding of the user manual's purpose and audience. Furthermore, the technical writer needs a firm understanding of the company's organizational and structural constraints, along with the resources available. Technical writers glean this information from communication with product stakeholders throughout the product design process. This section will outline the five items needed to begin the design phase of user manual writing.

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1.1 IDENTIFYING PURPOSE

Technical writers must identify the purpose of the manual. Products that require a user manual are often very complex--software, hardware, or medical technology. User manuals do not attempt to communicate every possible use for a product because the manual would be too detailed, making the resource less helpful.

For example, the Adobe Photoshop user manual does not cover every unique alternation a user can make; the manual simply illustrates and explains the features available for use.

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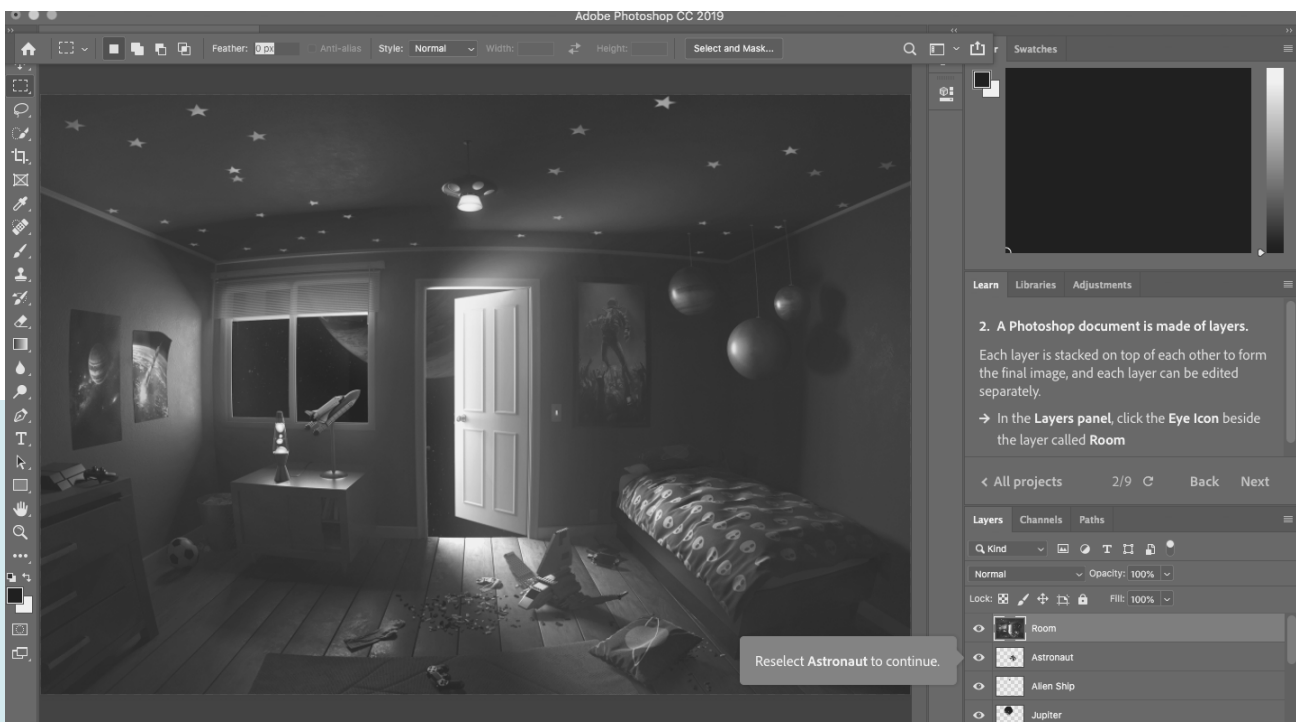
When developing a user manual, technical writers must understand the purpose of the manual. Some questions writers need to ask are:

- What specific things should users be able to do after reading the manual?

- To what extent and level should each feature be elaborated upon?

Once the purpose of the user manual is identified, the technical writer can begin conducting and documenting research on the product.

1.2 Identifying audience

Technical writers must identify the audience of the user manual. The intended audience informs the writer's style, diction, format, and organization.

For example, a user manual for a car is intended for a general audience. Therefore, the manual should have a simple, straightforward style written at the 8th grade level. The manual should also avoid jargon and strongly consider interactive or multimedia user

manuals so that it appeals to and is comprehensible by the general audience.

When developing a user manual, technical writers must understand the intended audience of the manual. Some questions writers need to ask are:

- Who are the primary customers of this product?

- What are the characteristics of the primary customers of this product?

1.3 Identifying structural and organizational constrainst

Every product owner's expectations for the user manual differs by structure and **organization**.

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For example, a user manual for the iPhone earbuds may need to be able to fit into the product's container. This structural constraint will impact the writer's style, as (s)he may need to be more concise.
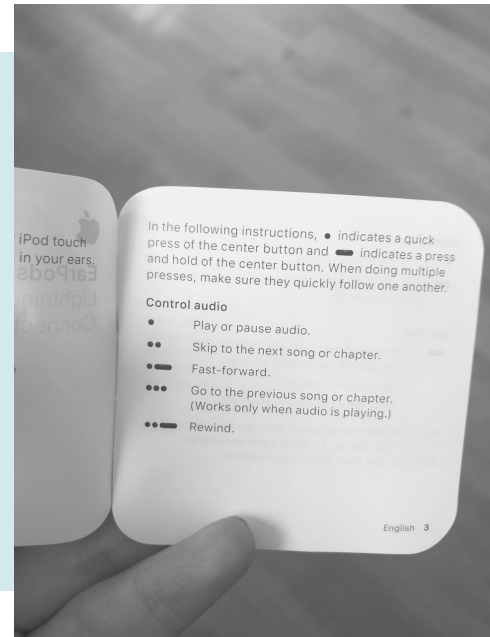
Furthermore, a user manual for Google Suite may need to be formatted by frequently asked questions. This organizational constraint impacts writer's organization, as he will be using questions rather than subtitles for the different sections of the manual.

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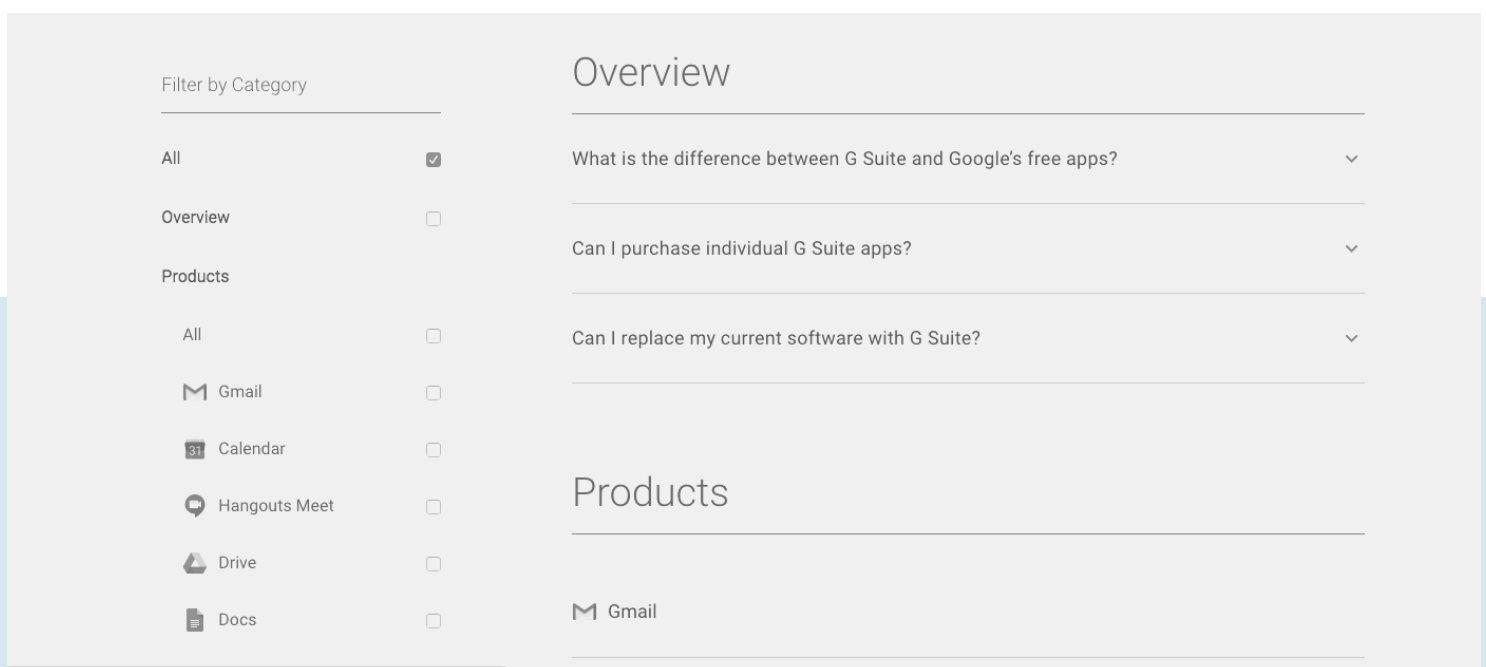
When developing a user manual, technical writers must understand the structural and organizational constraints of the manual. Some questions writers need to ask are:

- What medium will the company be using to present this manual?

- How many pages can this manual be?

- What are the formatting expectations for this manual?

1.4 Identifying available resources

Available resources refers to budget available to design UI/UX, and it refers to platform availability for housing. For example, Virgin America's budget for its user manual allowed the company to create a video illustrating customer safety responsibilities.

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Turn your electrical devices off as fast as you can

Whereas, Canon's budget for its user manual allowed for the company to create a traditional paper manual and an online manual with training videos.
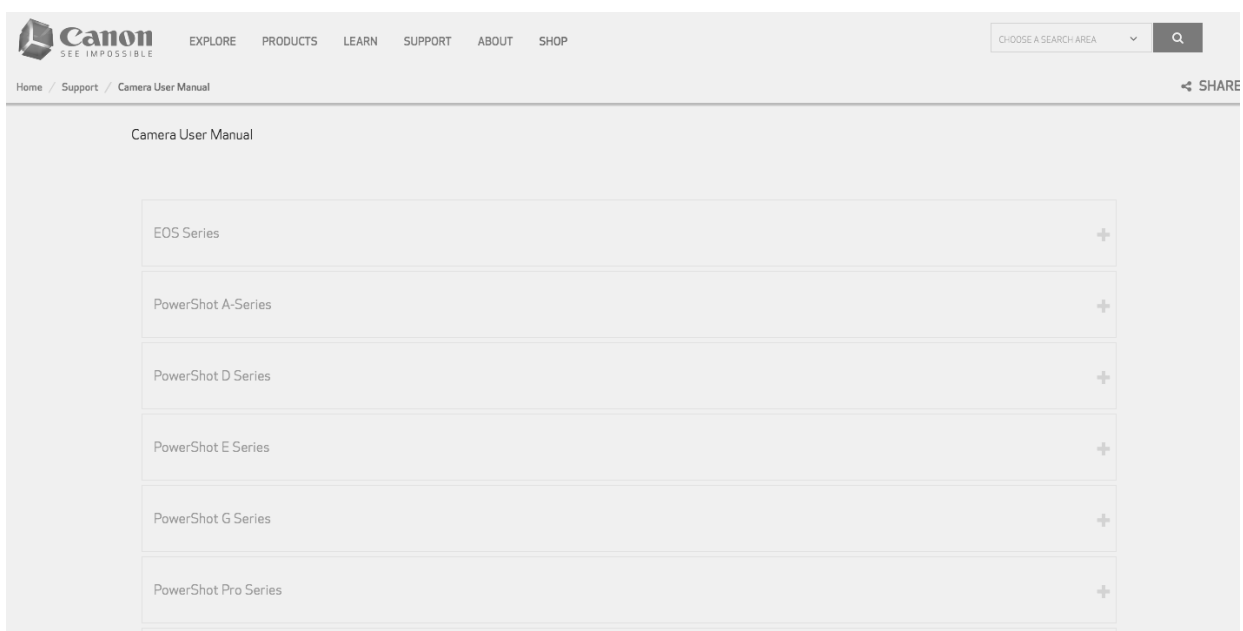
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As stated, resources also refers to platform availability for housing user manual content.

For customer manuals, many companies have a page within the company's website which houses this content. When developing content for a company, it is valuable to understand where this information will also be housed so that the content can be formatted effectively.

For internal manuals, companies have content management systems, which house internal content. As a technical writer, it is important to have an understanding of this system, as many systems require a unique formatting and style convention.

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FORMAT

User manuals utilize a variety of formats--videos, help pages, printed manuals, onesheets, eLearning modules. However, not all formats are suitable for every product. For example, an eLearning Module would not be an effective way to provide users information about a product used for camping, as access to modules may be unavailable when needed. Similarly, printed manuals would not be an effective way to provide users with information about a social media platform, such as Facebook or Instagram, as those global platforms are housed entirely on servers.

In this section, we are going to explore how audience influences the format of a user manual. Then, we are going to review best practices for the four major types of user manuals--video, print, eLearning, and help pages.

2.1 Identifying audience and purpose

The previous mentioned scenarios highlight the importance of the analysis phase in the technical writing process, as it illustrates the need to identify the audience and purpose. For example, knowing the audience and purpose would inform Facebook that printed manuals would not be effective, as user experience for the audience is optimized in such a way that F.A.Qs would be all that is necessary to serve the site's purpose.

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On the other hand, for camping items, audience knowledge of the tool may vary greatly, warranting a more robust manual. Furthermore, since the manual would be needed during camping, an online platform housing the manual may not be effective for users attempting to access the manual from various rural locations.

2.2 Resources

As stated in the previous section of this guide, resources refers to budget and technology availability.

Some formats are more expensive than others, such as maintaining an external facing, web-based manual or creating a high quality video. While other formats are less expensive and require less technology availability, such as a traditional printed manual.

Furthermore, some formats require technology availability. For example, in the previous example, Facebook can use its existing platform to house its user manual. A camping tool, on the other hand, may not have an exclusive website in which to house its user manual.

Therefore, resource availability should be considered when determining a proper format.

2.3 Structural and organizational constraints

The structural and organizational constraints will also play a role in determining which format is most effective.

For example, as stated previously, Facebook offers an effective UX, requiring little need for a detailed user manual; therefore, the user manual content will be organized differently from the camping tool, which requires a lot of information.

Additionally, Facebook is a software company, constantly updating its product, so information in a manual may be organized by date updated. On the other hand, a camping tool and its features will not change, so the information will be organized by feature.

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Also, Facebook's platform may support several pieces of content, so structurally, a vast repository of content can be supported; however, financially, it may make sense for the camping manual to be short and concise in order to save money on printing and packaging costs. Therefore, the structure in which the user manual needs to fit influences the format for which it may take.

2.4 Summary of format analysis

Because the five analysis points affect the format of the final product, for this section of the guide, four major formats will be explored along with best practice for technical writers. This information will inform the format decision-making process.

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2.5 Print

Printed user manuals, as the name suggests, are manuals that have been distributed to customers at the time of purchase. Printed manuals are available in a variety of colors, sizes, and organizational structures depending on the intended audience.

While many business leaders argue that printed user manuals are dated and will eventually be phased out by digital manuals, this is not the case. There are a variety of instances in which the printed format makes sense.

Hardware. Printed manuals are usually used for large hardware, such as refrigerators, washing machines, and television sets. This is best practice because hardware--with a few exceptions--is a static product. A static product is a product with unchanging functionality. Since functionality does not change, the user manual does not need to be updated after its creation. Therefore, it is best practice to use printed manuals for hardware products.

Automobiles. While several car companies are creating online user manuals for new products, printed manuals are and will continue to be used for automobiles as well. The majority of features available on an automobile have static functionality, and automobile owners need to be able to access user manuals regardless of internet accessibility. Therefore, it is best practice to include a printed manual for automobiles.

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Small-scale physical products. Small-scale physical products refers to products created by companies with over 10 distinct products. For example, IKEA sells over a hundred distinct products, so organizing UI/IX for an online help center is much more challenging from a customer and business perspective. However, a printed manual included with a purchase offers a streamlined user experience.

Internet availability. An important factor to consider is internet availability. Internet access is not consistently or continuously available on airplanes, so user manuals should be printed. Further, internet connectivity products--cell phones, televisions, wifi routers, computers-- should also have printed manuals for installation purposes.

2.6 Video

User manuals may come in the form of one or a series of videos. Some videos are high quality and expensive to create, such as the Virgin America safety video. Some videos, on the other hand, are of a lower quality and only require a simple video editing software. For example, Adobe offers training videos for its products.
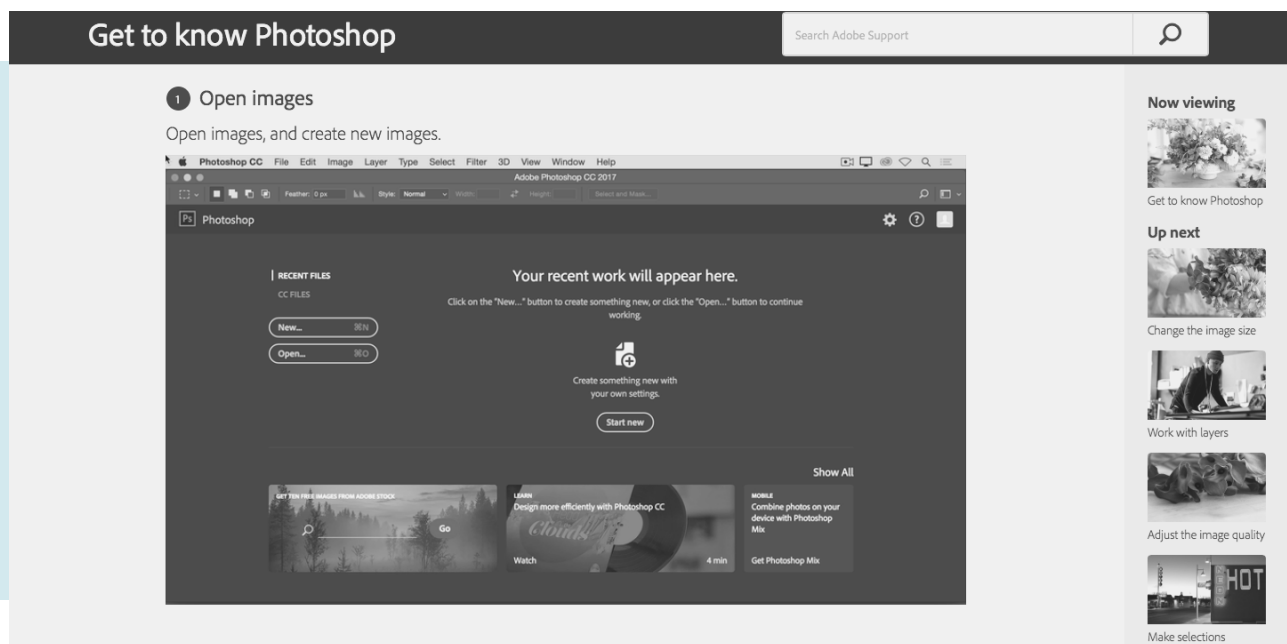
While videos are usually not a stand alone form of product functionality training, videos are used extensively on help pages and eLearning modules.

Robust processes. Videos are often used to illustrate robust processes that require multiple steps all while working with complex features. For example, as stated, Adobe Creative Suite uses videos to illustrate the features available on its multiple platforms, such as InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator.

Because all three software have a variety of features, videos help content developers illustrate the available features and their functions.

Younger audiences. Videos are often used for younger audiences. It is perceived that younger audiences will not have the same attention span and level of reading comprehension to understand written manuals. Therefore, products geared for a younger audience are usually videos.

Safety material. User manuals, while helpful, are not very engaging content, and if the user does not see the value or purpose in the manual, then they are likely to disengaged with the learning. Videos can solve this issue and are especially necessary for safety videos. This is why Virgin America's safety video features dancers, music, and a catchy tune. The audience is engaged with the video; therefore, they are more likely to retain the information.

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2.7 Help pages

Help pages are landing pages for customer facing training content. Unlike traditional user manuals, help pages are usually organized by frequently asked questions (F.A.Qs). For example, HomeAway's help page is organized by category, then by question.

Find Help by Category

Find a Property

Book a Property

Your Stay

Your Review

Your Account

Our Partners

Stay Neighborly

Help Home /Your Stay

How do I cancel a reservation and receive a refund?

Depending on the type of property you book, you can either cancel or request cancel a confirmed reservation. If the property owner or manager has not acce booking request instead.

Cancellations and refunds are issued in accordance with the terms and conditi

- If you cancel a reservation with a cancellation policy that allows for a ful includes the service fee paid to HomeAway.
- If you cancel a reservation that is eligible for a partial refund, you will ne under **Requesting a cancellation from your account**. Once the proper rental amount paid to them is refunded. For example, if the refund polic However, any fees, such as the service fee to HomeAway, will not be ref

Refunds typically post to your bank account within 5-7 business days. However received your refund within 14 business days, please contact Customer Suppor

If you are canceling a trip for which you have purchased Property Damage Prot Travel Protection directly regarding a refund of this plan. Contact information

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eCommerce. eCommerce refers to commercial transactions conducted online via the internet. In order words, the company is virtual. Some examples include the following: social media sites, video and photo editing software, vacation rental platforms, website building sites, merchandising sites, and so on.

Because consumers are not always purchasing a tangible item, it does not make sense to send a paper user manual. Furthermore, because the software is constantly updating, training content should be dynamic. The traditional model for a user manual is static, so it is ineffective. Additionally, because the company already has a website, it makes sense to expand the website for a Help Portal. Customers will be able to intuitively locate the information they need without leaving the website.

2.8 eLearning

Robust products. Robust products refers to complex products that require some level of expertise to utilize all of the available features. For example, Articulate 360 allows users to create eLearning. In addition to a traditional help page, Articulate 360 offers its customers eLearning that helps customers develop a deeper understanding of the software's features.

2 4

ORGANIZATION

3.1 Basic structure

User manuals usually follow the following basic structure. While this structure is typical of printed user manuals, the structure is altered slightly for online user manuals.

2 5

Example Manual Organization

1   **Introduction**
Provides a basic overview of the product.

1.1   **Purpose and Scope.** This section should state the purpose of the user manual and the scope of information it will cover. Remember, the user manual may not cover everything.

1.2   **Organization.** The organization/table of contents should outline all of the headings and subheadings in your manual. Be as specific as possible with your headings so that users are able to locate the information they need with ease.

For example, take a look at the table of contents for the Mercedes Benz. Notice that under the **Operating instructions** title, the writer has listed the subtitles for this section. This act will help customers quickly located the operating function applicable to their individual situations.

Furthermore, notice that the titles and subtitles are clear and specific. For example, under the subtitle **wheels**, the writer only writes one word describing the different actions a customer would need information about. In this scenario, there is no question where to look to find information about how to balance a wheel on a Mercedes Benz.
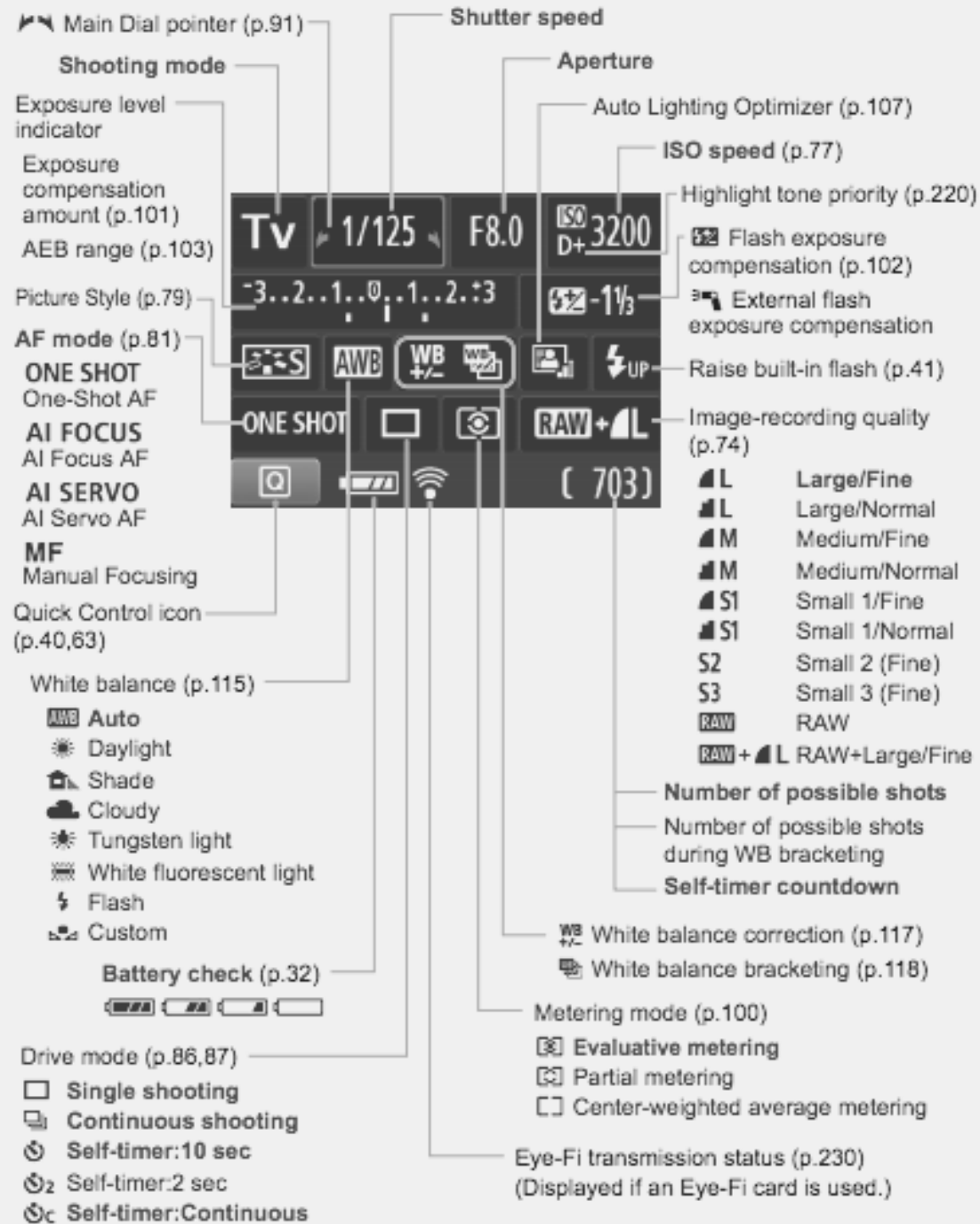
Table of Contents

Not responsible for errors. Subject to modification without notice!

1.3   **Points of Contact.** This section should list the customer service representatives' contact information in case the user needs additional assistance.

1.4   **Glossary.** This section should outline any terms the audience may be unfamiliar with.

2   **System Capabilities.**
Just as the title indicates. This section provides an overview of the system and its capabilities.

2.1   **Purpose.** This section outlines the purpose of the capabilities.

2.2   **General Description.** This section elaborates on the capabilities you listed in the previous section. This section should be broken into smaller subsections for each capability.

Use graphs, pictures and charts to illustrate more complex capabilities.

For example, the picture below provides an example of the display capabilities on a Canon Rebel T3 EOS 1100D. The user manual uses a chart to point out the capabilities of each icon on the display page.

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Nomenclature

Shooting Settings Display (in Creative Zone modes, p.22)

Main Dial pointer (p.91)

Shooting mode

Exposure level indicator

Exposure compensation amount (p.101)

AEB range (p.103)

Picture Style (p.79)

AF mode (p.81)

ONE SHOT
One-Shot AF

AI FOCUS
AI Focus AF

AI SERVO
AI Servo AF

MF
Manual Focusing

Quick Control icon (p.40,63)

White balance (p.115)

- Auto
- Daylight
- Shade
- Cloudy
- Tungsten light
- White fluorescent light
- Flash
- Custom

Battery check (p.32)

Drive mode (p.86,87)

- Single shooting
- Continuous shooting
- Self-timer:10 sec
- Self-timer:2 sec
- Self-timer:Continuous

Shutter speed

Aperture

Auto Lighting Optimizer (p.107)

ISO speed (p.77)

Highlight tone priority (p.220)

Flash exposure compensation (p.102)

External flash exposure compensation

Raise built-in flash (p.41)

Image-recording quality (p.74)

L	Large/Fine
L	Large/Normal
M	Medium/Fine
M	Medium/Normal
S1	Small 1/Fine
S1	Small 1/Normal
S2	Small 2 (Fine)
S3	Small 3 (Fine)
RAW	RAW
RAW+L	RAW+Large/Fine

Number of possible shots

Number of possible shots during WB bracketing

Self-timer countdown

White balance correction (p.117)

White balance bracketing (p.118)

Metering mode (p.100)

- Evaluative metering
- Partial metering
- Center-weighted average metering

Eye-Fi transmission status (p.230) (Displayed if an Eye-Fi card is used.)

The display will show only the settings currently applied.

3   **Description of System Functions.**
This section describes each specific function of the system. Make sure to separate each function into its own subsection. In each subsection, you should state the function title, describe the function, and explain how to use the function.

The following example is from the Canon Rebel T3 EOS 1100D user manual. On the function page, the writer states: (1) the function title--Shutter Button (2) a description of the function--change the shutter speed (3) how to use the function--the pictures and steps illustrate how to enable the shutter button.

DEVELOPING A USER MANUAL

3 0

Shutter Button

The shutter button has two steps. You can press the shutter button halfway. Then you can further press the shutter button completely.
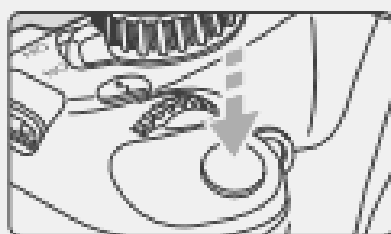
Pressing halfway

This activates autofocusing and the automatic exposure system that sets the shutter speed and aperture.
The exposure setting (shutter speed and aperture) is displayed in the viewfinder (⏱4).
While you press the shutter button halfway, the LCD monitor will turn off (p.166).

Pressing completely

This releases the shutter and takes the picture.

Preventing Camera Shake
Hand-held camera movement during the moment of exposure is called camera shake. It can cause blurred pictures. To prevent camera shake, note the following:

- Hold and steady the camera as shown on the previous page.
- Press the shutter button halfway to autofocus, then slowly press the shutter button completely.

- If you press the shutter button completely without pressing it halfway first or if you press the shutter button halfway and then press it completely immediately, the camera will take a moment before it takes the picture.
- Even during the menu display, image playback, and image recording, you can instantly go back to shooting-ready by pressing the shutter button halfway.

3 1

4   **Operating Instructions.**
     This section lists step-by-step instructions so that the user can operate the
     product.

4.1   **Initiate operations.**This section should begin with start-up operating
      procedures, such as how to put a battery into a camera and set up the date
      and time. These operations need to occur before a user can use the product.

4.2   **Maintain operations.** This section should outline the process a user
      must follow in order to maintain his/her product. For example, user manuals
      for automobiles include instructions for how to change the oil in a car.

4.3   **Robust operations.** This next section should explain how to use a
      product in specific situations.

      The following example is from the Canon Rebel T3 EOS 1100D user
      manual. On the operations page, the writer explains how to operate a specific
      function available to camera users.

3 2

📷 Live View Shooting

By pressing the < 📷 > button, you can shoot while viewing the image on the camera's LCD monitor. This is called Live View shooting. For details, see page 121.

1 **Display the Live View image on the LCD monitor.**
- ● Press the < 📷 > button.
- ▶ The Live View image will appear on the LCD monitor.

2 **Focus the subject.**
- ● Aim the center AF point <□> on the subject.
- ● Press the shutter button halfway to focus.
- ▶ When focus is achieved, the AF point will turn green and the beeper will sound.
- ▶ If necessary, the built-in flash will pop-up automatically.

3 **Take the picture.**
- ● Press the shutter button completely.
- ▶ The picture will be taken and the captured image is displayed on the LCD monitor.
- ▶ After the image review ends, the camera will return to Live View shooting automatically.
- ● Press the < 📷 > button to exit Live View shooting.

3 3

5   **Error Handling.**
Every manual should include a troubleshooting section that helps user overcome common issues. To determine common problems a user will encounter, the writer should collaborate with product managers after they have run user experience tests. This practice will inform the content needed in this section.

This section can be organized by function, capability, tool, or FAQs.

3 4

Troubleshooting Guide

If a problem occurs with the camera, first refer to this Troubleshooting Guide. If this Troubleshooting Guide does not resolve the problem, contact your dealer or nearest Canon Service Center.

Power-Related Problems

The battery pack does not recharge.

- Do not recharge any battery pack other than a genuine Canon Battery Pack LP-E10.

The battery charger's lamp blinks.

- If there is a problem with the battery charger, the protective circuit will stop the charging operation and the charge lamp will blink in orange. If this happens, disconnect the charger's power plug from the power outlet and remove the battery pack. Attach the battery pack to the charger again and wait a while before connecting the charger to a power outlet again.

The camera does not operate even when the power switch is set to <ON>.

- Make sure the card/battery compartment cover is closed (p.28).
- The battery is not properly installed in the camera (p.28).
- Recharge the battery (p.26).
- Press the <DISP.> button (p.46).

The access lamp still blinks even when the power switch is set to <OFF>.

- If the power is turned off while an image is being recorded to the card, the access lamp will still continue to light/blink for a few seconds. When the image recording is completed, the power will turn off automatically.

The battery becomes exhausted quickly.

- Use a fully-charged battery pack (p.26).
- The rechargeable battery pack performance will degrade over repeated use. Purchase a new one.

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3.2 Alternatives

As alluded to at the beginning of this section, user manuals do not always follow the format outlined in the previous section; however, the typical structure is still evident: table of contents > capabilities > function > operation.

For example, online user manuals are usually housed on a Help page on the company's website and are organized by tool, application, or capability. Within each section are a series of articles related to the tool organized by operation or function. These articles are dynamic and consistency updated by internal teams responding to product updates and customer service data.

For example, Google Suite organizes its help page by application.
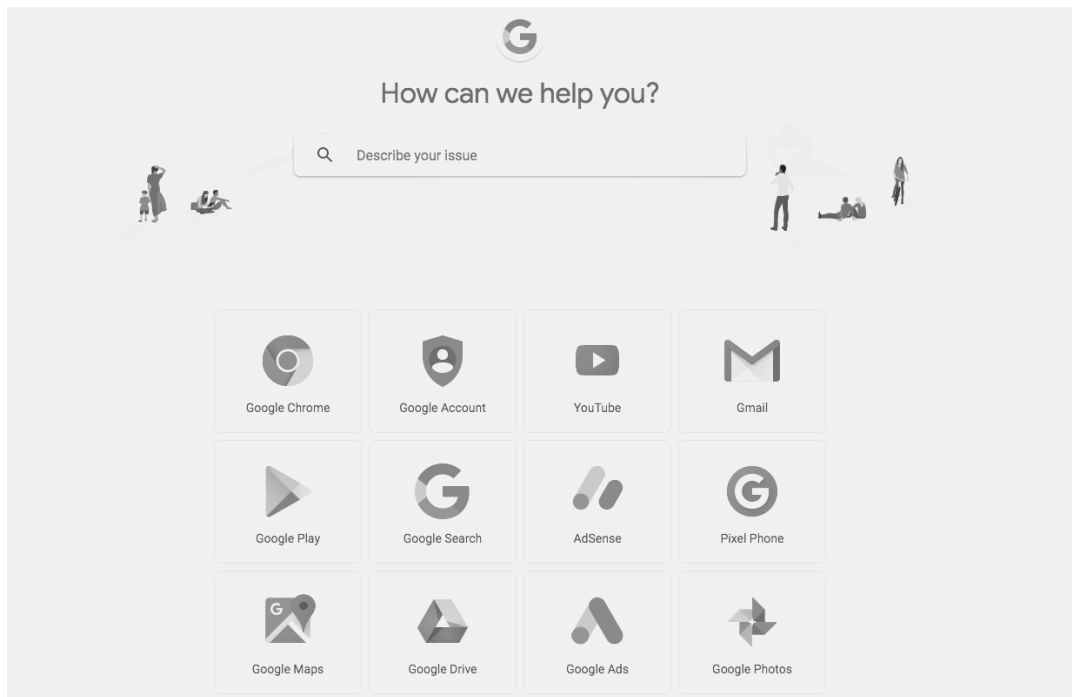
Once a user chooses an application, the user manual is organized by function and operation.
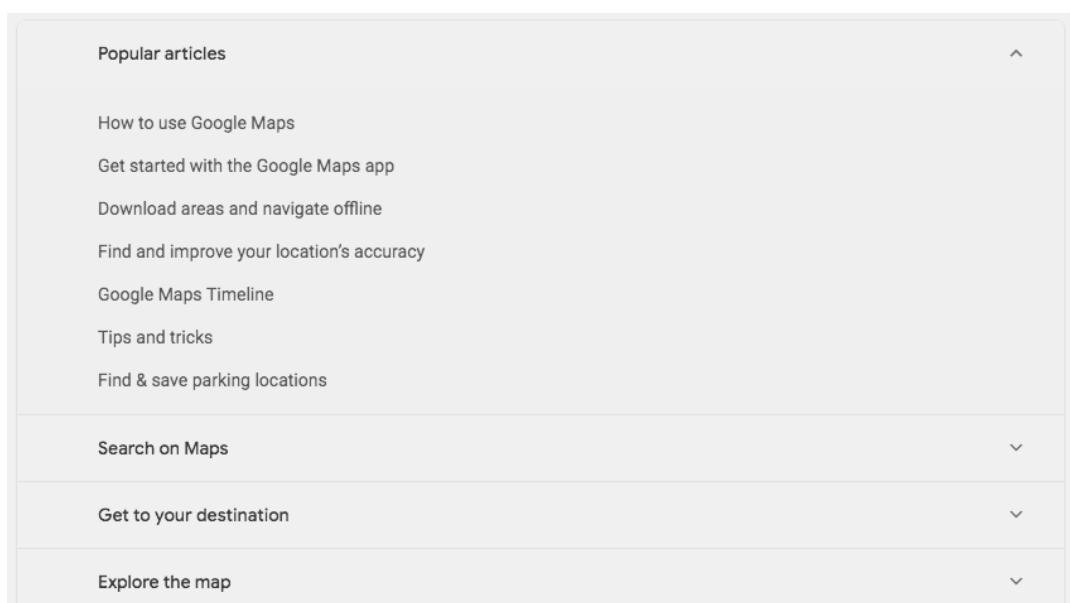
WRITING STYLE

Writing style refers to the writer's tone, diction, voice, syntax, and use of figurative language.

Key Terms

Tone- The feelings or emotions created by the words and structure of a text.

Diction- The strategic choice of words based on a word's connotative meaning.

Connotation-The feelings or emotions associated with words.

Syntax- Writers choose to use certain sentence types and structures purposefully.

Figurative Language- Figurative language refers to the use of analogies or detailed description (imagery).

3 8

4.1 Diction and tone

Every word has a denotative meaning; this refers to a word's literal meaning.

For example, the words assertive and aggressive both refer to a person with a confident, forceful personality. They have the same **denotative** meaning.

When writing a user manual, it is important to consider using words that have a neutral or professional **connotation**. **Tone** is the overall emotions expressed in a text based partially on diction, so using formal, professional words will give the writing a formal, professional **tone**.

Informal: When I put a picture on Facebook, I just click 'update status' and choose my favorite pic.

Formal: In order to add a picture to your Facebook profile, click 'update status' located at the top of your news feed.

3 9

We are gong to cover some characteristics of a formal, professional tone in the following section.

Slang and abbreviations. Avoid using slang in a user manual, as the **connotation** of slang is less formal.

Informal: When I put a picture up on Facebook, I just click 'update status' and choose my favorite pic.

Slang: just

Abbreviation: pic

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Jargon. Jargon refers to technical words associated with a certain field. The example below uses jargon (words) only those associated with the military would understand.

For example, when soldiers PCS, military spouses often seek out local FRGs for local connections.

Jargon: PCS, FRG

Avoid using jargon, as not every audience member is going to understand the meaning of the terms used such as PCS and FRGs.

Contractions. Separate contractions in user manuals, as the practice of using contractions is associated more with everyday speech--not formal writing.

When using the manual setting, don't forget to enable the flash if you're taking photos at night.

Contractions: don't, you're

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Avoid first person point-of-view. First person point-of-view is perceived as more personal, so it is considered less formal.

Singular	Plural
I	Us
Me	We
My	Our

4.2 Active voice

When giving someone instructions, it is important to use active voice. Active voice is when the subject performs the action in a sentence.

Active: The manual setting allows the user to adjust the shutter speed.

Passive: The shutter speed is able to be adjusted by the manual setting.

A simple way to check if a sentence is active or passive is to add the phrase "by a person" at the end of the sentence. If the sentence still makes sense, then the sentence is passive. If the sentence does not make sense, then it is active voice.

Active: Amy took the trash out.

Passive: The trash was taken out.
The trash was taken out by Amy.

Using the active voice when giving instructions helps the overall clarity of the text.

4 3

4.3 Concise and precise

Two-part verbs. Two-part verbs are defined as verbs comprised of two or more words.

Taken out	Stand up
Sat up	Get into
Sit down	Catch on
Piece together	Get around
Offer up	Added up
Put out	Give up
Put into	Hand down
Get out of	Take away

Think through	Point out
Leave behind	Pass over
Bring about	Put across
Bring back	Put together
Hand over	Put through
Hand out	Read out
Carry out	Call up
Set aside	Call out

Avoid using two-part verb when writing manuals, as it makes your writing less concise, and therefore, it makes your writing more challenging to follow.

Informal: The meeting **led to** changes that **put off** some employees.

Formal: The meeting provoked change that upset some employees.

Vague language. Vague language refers to descriptors that do not have a fixed definition.

A lot	Partial
A little	A bunch
Some	A moderate amount
A few	Several

Many	From time to time	Things
Much	elsewhere	Whenever
More	Normally	Wherever
May	Like	Really

Informal: The Canon EOS Rebel T7i DSLR Camera has **a lot** of new features available.

Formal: The Canon EOS Rebel T7i offers users a 18-55mm lens, low energy bluetooth, and a 5 axis image stabilization.

4.4 Syntax

Syntax refers to sentence structure. This section will focus on when you should use the different sentence structures.

Short sentences. Short sentences should be used for emphasis. Sentences that need to be emphasized--important concepts, features, definitions--should be short sentences.

A short sentence sandwiched between longer, more complex sentences are emphasized because they stand out. When sentences are emphasized, the audience is more likely to remember the content stated in the sentence. Therefore, content writers should use short, simple sentences when conveying important information, such as the following: definitions, key steps, key safety or security precautions, and key feature functionality.

Predictable structures for sentences. The audience should understand the content of a user manual, so it is important that the audience is able to focus on the content--not the way it is presented.

Therefore, it is best to follow a predictable sentence structure.

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Simple sentences: Introduce important concepts, features, key terms, etc.

Complex or compound sentences: Provide examples or details of features, capabilities, or structures.

Predictable structures for paragraphs. As with sentence types, the paragraph structure should also be predictable. Following a predictable pattern helps the audience focus on the content.

For example, a paragraph introducing a new idea, might follow the following format:

State the new concept [**simple sentence**]. Elaborate on the definition of the new concept [**compound** or **complex sentence**]. Provide an example of the new concept [**compound** or **complex sentence**]. Restate the new concept [**simple sentence**].

4.5 FIgurative Language

Figurative language refers to the use of analogies and detailed description (imagery). Figurative language is used throughout user manuals to help readers grasp concepts.

Analogies. Analogies are comparisons between something familiar and something unfamiliar.

For example, an aneurysm is like a bulge you can get in a garden hose. The bigger the bulge, the weaker the wall and the more likely it will burst.

In this example, a garden hose (something familiar) is being compared to an aneurysm (something unfamiliar).

Analogies aid explanation of new concepts or products by illustrating connections between something known.

Imagery. Imagery refers to a detailed description of something so that an audience can picture it in their minds. Imagery in a user manual often refers to pictures, charts, and graphs; however, imagery can also take the form of a detailed description of a function or tool.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

There are four different sentence types, and they are listed below:

Key Terms

Simple sentence: A sentence that contains one independent clause. *(Joe eats pizza.)*

Compound sentence- Two complete sentences connected by a coordinating conjunction--for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. *(Joe eats pizza, but Sally eats cake.)*

Complex sentences-Two complete sentences connected by a subordinate conjunction--as, although, after, before, because, if, while, even though, provided that, where, when, whenever, wherever, while. *(While joe eats pizza, Sally eats cake.)*

Compound/Complex Sentence- A compound and a complex sentence are connected. *(While Joe eats pizza, Sally eats cake, and both of them drank a soda.)*
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Because the purpose of a user manual is to explain a product's features and how to use it, information needs to be conveyed clearly and concisely. This concept applies to the sentence structure as well. Sentences in a user manual should be clear and concise.

To meet this criteria, writers should avoid using too many compound/complex sentences, as this type of sentence tends to be difficult to follow. Furthermore, writers should use a variety of sentences throughout every paragraph of a user manual. This means that, in most paragraphs, there should be at least one simple, one compound, and one complex sentence. Sentence variety makes text easier to read, thus easier to understand.

5.2 Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases are phrases that contain a preposition and a noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause.

Prepositions:

In	Between	Stand on
On	On top of	Under
Out of	Underneath	Over
Into	Beside	In front of
On top of	Next to	Inside

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In order to make writing more clear, avoid placing more than one prepositional phrase right next to one another in a sentence.

Don't: Time should be logged **in** Workday located **in** the resources folder.

Do: Within the resource folder, employees will be able to access Workday to log time.

Prepositions place right next to one another make the writing confusing.

5.3 Pronouns

Pronouns are words that replace a noun. Here is a list of pronouns that you want to avoid in your writing:

They	This	That
Their	These	It
There	Those	Its
Them		

Pronouns should be avoided in technical writing because it can be difficult for the audience to track to whom/what the pronoun is referring.

Don't: **This** will require some maintenance.

Do: The engine will require maintenance.

5.4 Lists

The general rule for punctuating a list is as follows:

Sentence [item], [item], and [item].

For example, the 30-day warranty will cover the lens, the battery, and the touch screen.

In order to ensure the information is clear, writers should also follow the rules outlined in this section.

Parallel structure. Parallel structure refers to the grammatical pattern of words.

For example,

The 30-day warranty will cover the lens, the battery, and the touch screen.
Notice that every item in the list says [the + noun].

Another example,

The Canon EF 85mm f/1.8USM medium Telephoto Lens allows users to zoom, to focus, and to increase background blur.
Again, notice the pattern of the items in the list [to + verb].

Don't: Refunds will be accepted for the lens, battery, and the touch screen.

Do: Refunds will be accepted for the lens, the battery, and the touch screen.

Lists with commas. Lists that already have commas in the list, such as a list of [city, state]s, semicolons should be used to separate the items on the list.

For example,

The recall affected Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; and Queens, New York.

Lists followed by information. Best practice is to avoid putting lists at the beginning or middle of a sentence because it can confuse the audience.

Don't: Customers will need to purchase AA batteries, a lens cloth, and a camera strap before proceeding from this step.

Don't: AA batteries, a lens cloth, and a camera strap should be purchased before proceeding from this step.

Do: Before proceeding from this step, users should purchase AA batteries, a lens cloth, and a camera strap.

However, if you feel it is necessary to place the list in the middle of the sentence, it should be separated from the rest of the sentence by dashes or parentheses.

Don't: Customers will need to purchase AA batteries, a lens cloth, and a camera strap before proceeding from this step

Do: Customers will need to purchase some items--AA batteries, a lens cloth, and a camera strap--before proceeding fromt this step.

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Lists containing multiple words. Given this information, best practice for lists that contain multiple words for each item should be placed at the end of a sentence.

Lists containing more than five items. Lists containing more than five items should use a colon so that the items in the list are clear. A colon can ONLY be used if one of these words is in the sentence: 'these', 'the following', and 'as follows'.

Don't: The additional container includes 3 screws, 4 nails, 3 plugs, 3 cable ties, and 1 hook.

Do: The additional container includes **the following**: 3 screws, 4 nails, 3 plugs, 3 cable ties, and 1 hook.

Lists in complex and compound sentences. Lists in sentences that already contain commas should be separated from the rest of the list using dashes or parentheses for clarification.

Don't: The flash will automatically function in low light settings if the camera is in Auto, Portrait, or Landscape mode, but this is only true in these modes.

Do: The flash will automatically function in low light settings if the camera in in one of the following modes: Auto, Portrait, or Landscape.

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5.5 Comma alternatives

When writing a user manual, it is important that content is concise and clear. Sentences that contain too many clauses or phrases can be difficult to follow when learning new concepts and processes. Therefore, it is important to cut down on the overuse of commas by following these three guidelines:

- Avoid appositive words and phrases
- Use comma alternatives when necessary
- Break up sentences with too many clauses and/or phrases

Avoid appositive words and phrases. Appositive words and phrases define nouns or verbs in a sentence.

Don't: The feature, **the lighting brush**, is available on the toolbar.

Do: The lighting brush feature is available on the toolbar.

When too many phrases and clauses are included in a sentence or a paragraph, the reader may become confused by the persistent sentence pauses. An alternative may be to break up the sentences.

Use comma alternatives when necessary. Dashes and parentheses can act as comma substitutes.

For example, parenthesis can be used to separate phrases.

Don't: Bit.ly tracks the clicks made by users interacting with the material on a website.

Do: Bit.ly tracks the clicks made by users interacting (with the material) on a website.

For example, dashes can be used to separate appositives.

Don't: Camtasia, a video editing software, allows users to record their screen and voice.

Do: Camtasia--a video editing software--allows users to record their screen and voice.

For example, parenthesis, dashes, and colons can be used for lists.

Don't: Camtasia allows users to edit, annotate, and add special effects to videos.

Do: Camtasia's features--editing, annotating, and adding special effects--are available for uploaded videos.

HELP

For further information on creating content for user manuals, visit the following sites:

Manual Writing Sotware

Help Manual

Dr. Explain

Manual writing reference material

User Manual Template