

User Document: Creating an Instructional or Support Resource

 tracigardner.github.io/TechComm/assignments/user-doc/user-doc-assignment.html

User Document

Creating an Instructional or Support Resource

Your Task

Worth 10% of your course grade

Prepare a **user-facing document** that explains, guides, or supports action related to the subject of your informational report. Your assignment **must be connected to the topic of your Informational Report for Non-Expert Readers**.

Your User Document should demonstrate **clear, usable communication** tailored to a specific audience of non-expert readers and a specific situation. You'll need to define the goal of your document clearly and ensure its structure, tone, and design are suitable for a **real-world non-expert audience**.

Your user document may take one of several forms, depending on your topic and audience. Choose your type of user document after you've reviewed the **Topic Selection Guidelines** below.

Review [Document Samples](#) and the [Deliverable Checklist](#) as you work.

Assignment Learning Objectives

▼ Hide the Learning Objectives

By completing this assignment, you will develop your ability to:

- Explain specialized or technical information in plain, simple language that supports real-world action or decision-making by a non-expert audience.
- Design a usable, accessible document that meets the needs of a specific audience by applying strong visual communication strategies and effective document design (CRAP: contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity).
- Choose the most appropriate user-facing document type (e.g., instructions, flowchart, learning aid, troubleshooting guide) based on your topic, the needs of your audience, and the social value or community issue connected to your report subject.
- Demonstrate audience awareness by tailoring your tone, structure, and content to support users in understanding, navigating, or acting on a complex subject with ease and confidence.

- Incorporate and explain visuals (such as diagrams, screenshots, or icons) to increase the clarity, accessibility, and effectiveness of your user document.
- Reflect on your design and communication decisions by writing a clear, well-structured memo that explains how your document supports users and connects to your informational report topic.

Your Audience

Write your project for **non-expert users**—such as new users, community members, caregivers, students, or volunteers.

They should be able to use the document to better understand, use, decide about, or troubleshoot the subject you've been researching.

Topic Selection Guidelines

The user document must connect **directly** to your report subject. Make sure the topic you choose for your User Document addresses a real user need and aligns with the ***Ut Prosim*** spirit of serving others.

Here are **SIX options** for your User Document Project that show how they connect a report topic to the user document choice.

▼ Hide the Step-by-Step Instructions Option

Step-by-Step Instructions for Using or Interacting with the Subject

- **Report Subject:** Water Conservation in Drought-Prone Areas
- **User Doc Subject:** Setting Up a Rain Barrel System for Water Conservation
- **Audience:** Homeowners in drought-prone communities
- **Document Example:**

“How to Install a Rain Barrel to Reduce Water Waste”

A step-by-step guide with photos and clear instructions that walks users through selecting a barrel, attaching it to a downspout, installing a mesh screen to prevent mosquito breeding, and connecting a hose for garden use.

▼ Hide the Decision Guide or Flowchart Option

Decision Guide or Flowchart to Help Users Determine When and How to Take Action

- **Report Subject:** Accessible Web Design for Small Organizations Serving Diverse Communities
- **User Doc Subject:** Choosing an Accessible Web Design Tool
- **Audience:** Small nonprofits designing their own websites

- **Document Example:**

“Which Accessible Web Builder Should You Use?”

A decision tree that helps users evaluate their needs (budget, tech skill level, features) and guides them toward tools like Wix, WordPress, or SquareSpace based on built-in accessibility, ease of use, and customization options.

▼ **Hide the Learning Aid Option**

A Learning Aid that Explains Key Terms,
Concepts, or Steps to Newcomers

- **Report Subject:** Community Broadband as a Solution to Rural Internet Inequity
- **User Doc Subject:** Understanding Community Broadband Networks
- **Audience:** Rural residents exploring internet access options
- **Document Example:**

“Community Broadband 101: Key Terms and Concepts”

A visual glossary with plain-language definitions of terms like “fiber-optic,” “ISP,” “mesh network,” and “municipal broadband,” along with short explanations of how these networks work and benefit underserved communities.

▼ **Hide the Troubleshooting Guide Option**

A Troubleshooting Guide to Help Users
Address Common Problems

- **Report Subject:** Low-Cost Air Quality Monitoring for Environmental Justice in Polluted Neighborhoods
- **User Doc Subject:** Using Low-Cost Air Quality Monitors at Home
- **Audience:** Residents in areas with high pollution or wildfire smoke
- **Document Example:**

“Troubleshooting Your Home Air Quality Monitor”

A table-based guide that lists common problems (e.g., no data, inaccurate readings, poor Wi-Fi signal) with possible causes and quick fixes for each. Includes screenshots of error codes and sensor maintenance tips.

▼ **Hide the Quick-Start Reference or How-To Guide Option**

Quick-Start Reference or How-To Guide
Summarizing Key Actions

- **Report Subject:** Digital Mutual Aid Platforms for Strengthening Community Resilience
- **User Doc Subject:** Using a Local Mutual Aid Request Platform
- **Audience:** Community members needing help or offering assistance

- **Document Example:**

“How to Use the NeighborNet Mutual Aid Platform”

A one-page, illustrated reference showing how to log in, post a need, respond to requests, and set up safe exchanges. Designed for print or mobile, with QR codes linking to video tutorials.

▼ **Hide Another Type of Support Document Option**

Another Type of Support Document

that Fits the Subject and Audience

- **Report Subject:** Emergency Preparedness Tools for People with Disabilities

- **User Doc Subject:** Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities

- **Audience:** Caregivers and family members

- **Document Example:**

“Disability Emergency Readiness Checklist”

A fillable checklist that guides caregivers through preparation steps—such as storing extra medications, preparing mobility aids, registering with emergency services, and creating a support network—tailored to specific disability types.

Assignment Requirements

Basic Requirements

- **Length (according to option):**
 - **Option 1:** 2–3 pages for the user doc itself + 1 page for a brief cover memo (see below).
 - **Options 2–6:** 1 page or two, back and front, according to requirements of option + 1 page for a brief cover memo (see below).
- **Documentation:** If you use any information from outside sources (definitions, procedures, diagrams), cite them in-text and at the end of the document using your chosen documentation style.
- **Plain Language:** Use short sentences and other plain language techniques (like active voice and concrete words). Avoid jargon.
- **Tone:** Helpful, clear, and informative—avoid academic or formal language. Write as if you are standing beside the user, guiding them personally.
- **Document Design:** Follow principles of effective document design (CRAP: contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity).

User Document Requirements

Focus on usability and accessibility. Your user document should be designed for **clarity and ease of use**. It must:

- Follow the document structure guidance from [11b. Components of the User Document](#) of the course textbook, modifying the information based on the option you've chosen.
- Use **headings/subheadings, numbered/bulleted lists, and white space** for navigation.
- **Define any unfamiliar terms** for your audience.
- Include **visuals** to support understanding, such as diagrams, screenshots, flowcharts, or illustrations:
 - Use at least **4 useful and necessary visuals** (diagrams, tables, icons, or screenshots; no clip art unless it serves a purpose).
 - Give each visual a **two-part caption** (Figure 1: Description of Figure 1).
 - **Refer** directly to the visual in the text before you show it (See Figure 1, as Figure 1 notes, etc.).
- Be **well-organized and scannable**: readers should be able to find the information they need quickly.

Cover Memo Requirements

Submit a 1-page memo addressed to me (Traci) that uses the three-step neutral news message:

- **Paragraph 1:** Explains the purpose of the memo (introducing your user document)
- **Paragraphs 2 or 2+:** Explains (1) who the intended audience is, (2) what the document is designed to help them do, and (3) how the document connects to your report topic. (If your paragraph gets too long, chunk at an appropriate spot!)
- **Last Paragraph:** Close cordially and provide contact information

Formatting Requirements

- **Page size:** 8.5 x 11 (portrait)
 - **Spacing:** Single or 1.15 spacing between lines; double spacing between paragraphs (1 blank line)
 - **Paragraphs:** Do not indent
 - **Font Choices:** Arial, Calibri, Verdana, Aptos, or Helvetica—but just one! Don't mix fonts.
 - **Font Sizes:** Be consistent. Headings should be larger than the body text. Each heading level should be larger than the next lower heading (e.g., Heading 1 is larger than Heading 2; Heading 2 is larger than Heading 3, and so on).
- TIP: The default heading sizes in Word and Google Docs follow this guideline automatically.

Success Tips

- Ask a peer outside your major to read and try your document. If they get confused, revise for clarity.
- Break complex steps or explanations into short, manageable segments (chunks) so readers never face a wall of text.
- Pair each visual with just enough explanation so users don't need to guess what it means.

- Make key actions, terms, or warnings stand out at a glance using bold text, icons, or callout boxes.