# INSTRUCTIONS

*A How To Guide*

# AUDIENCE, AUDIENCE,AUDIENCE

*Who is this person?*

# AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

- You have to first understand who your audience is by thinking of the average person who would use your instructional manual. Ask yourself,

- Who is this person?

- What kind of background does this person have?

- What kind of education does this person have?

- What is the skill level?

- What kind of experience does this person have?

- Why would they be using your instructions?

There are a host of other questions to ask, but these should get you started on how to analyze your audience.

# THE TASK

- What is the reader hoping to achieve?  What is their goal? What are they trying to accomplish? To assemble a chair? To build a laptop?  To create a digital application?

- What is the best possible way of describing to them of how to complete the process?
  - The number of steps and their difficulty will depend on the audience
  - The wording used will depend on the audience (because you will have to know how they understand information).  For example, explaining how to construct a building out of a lego parts will differ between a five-year-old and a twenty-five year old.
  - What is necessary for them to know and what can be left out?  This depends on the audience.

# COMMON TASKS DISCUSSION

- In a *task approach* (also known as task orientation) to instructions on using a phone-answering service, you'd have these sections:

- recording your greeting

- playing back your messages

- saving your messages

- forwarding your messages

- deleting your messages, and so on

These are tasks—the typical things we'd want to do with the machine.

- On the other hand, in a *tools approach* to instructions on using a photocopier, there would be these unlikely sections:

- copy button

- cancel button

- enlarge/reduce button

- collate/staple button

- copy-size button, and so on

If you designed a set of instructions on this plan, you'd write steps for using each button or feature of the photocopier. Instructions using this tools approach are hard to make work. Sometimes, the name of the button doesn't quite match the task it is associated with; sometimes you have to use more than just the one button to accomplish the task.

Found at:
https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/instrux.html

# DISCUSSION OF THE STEPS

- *Structure and format.* Normally, we imagine a set of instructions as being formatted as vertical numbered lists. And most are in fact. Normally, you format your actual step-by-step instructions this way. There are some variations, however, as well as some other considerations:

- *Fixed-order steps* are steps that must be performed in the order presented. For example, if you are changing the oil in a car, draining the oil is a step that *must* come before putting the new oil. These are numbered lists (usually, vertical numbered lists).

- *Variable-order steps* are steps that can be performed in practically any order. Good examples are those troubleshooting guides that tell you to check this, check that where you are trying to fix something. You can do these kinds of steps in practically any order. With this type, the bulleted list is the appropriate format.

- *Alternate steps* are those in which two or more ways to accomplish the same thing are presented. Alternate steps are also used when various conditions might exist. Use bulleted lists with this type, with OR inserted between the alternatives, or the lead-in indicating that alternatives are about to be presented.

- *Nested steps.* In some cases, individual steps within a procedure can be rather complex in their own right and need to be broken down into substeps. In this case, you indent further and sequence the substeps as a, b, c, and so on.

- *"Stepless" instructions.* And finally there exist instructions that really cannot use numbered vertical list and that do little if any straightforward instructional-style directing of the reader. Some situations must be so generalized or so variable that steps cannot be stated.

- Found at https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/instrux.html

# HEADINGS, VISUALS, AND YOU

- Make good use of headings in your instructions. Normally, you'd want headings for any background section you might have, the equipment and supplies section, a general heading for the actual instructions section, and subheadings for the individual tasks or phases within that section.

- Make good use of visuals. Sometimes, words simply cannot explain the step. Illustrations are often critical to readers' ability to visualize what they are supposed to do.

- It's okay to use "you". You want to get in your reader's face, get her or his full attention. For that reason, instruction-style sentences sound like these: "Now, press the Pause button on the front panel to stop the display temporarily" and "You should be careful not to …"