



Top 10 Tips to Increase Usability of User Documentation

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Usability

- Definition: The extent to which a product can be used by *specified* users to achieve *specified* goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a *specified* context of use. -Human Factors International
- Effectiveness
- Ease of learning
- Efficiency of use
- Memorability
- Error prevention
- Satisfaction
- Think **PINC**



1. Start at the Top: Know the Business Goals

- Usability goals vs business goals
- Is everyone on the same page?
- Prioritize accordingly
- Measure your end results according to the business goals.



2. Create a Persona

- **Persona:** A concrete characterization of a single user group through a synthesis of the user, task, and environment profiles of that group. It provides a detailed example of the potential end user that represents a specific target audience type. Personas help you think in terms of users by providing insight into how they might use the product.
- **User, Task, and Environment Profiles**
- Paula Grey, Professional Staff Member, Senate Agriculture Committee, 42 years old, Divorced, 1 child, Law degree, Very comfortable using a computer, intermediate internet user, with high-speed connection at work and DSL at home for daughter. Uses application extensively.



3. Match Documentation to the User's World

- *Schema*: Essentially a packet of information in the human memory based on knowledge and experience.
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- Use real world conventions and put things in a natural, logical order.
 - Speak the user's language.



4. Understand the Programmer's vs. User's Point of View

- The developer can explain the screens and how they interact. The user brings to the program a conceptual schema of how it works. These must be in sync.
- Don't just document how the program should work in a perfect world. Figure out the obstacles users face and the strategies they use to accomplish the goal.



5. Think BIGGER: What is the User's Question?

- What is the more complex problem?

- Users rarely ask, “How do I use this menu option?” Instead, they ask, “ How do I move this block of stuff over there?”
- Start with the real questions and work from there.



6. Expect Errors

- Provide troubleshooting and special cases assistance.
- When analyzing tasks, don't approach it from an error-free (developer's) perspective. Focus on where errors are most likely to occur. Incorporate this information within the process where it occurs.
- Use examples. The best ones include special cases in addition to the normal issues.



7. Consistent Consistency

- Terminology should be consistent on the interface, labels on entry fields, error messages, guides, help, all documentation.

- Ideally, match the user persona's vocabulary or go with the commonly accepted standard.



8. Choose the Appropriate Media and Optimize

- Use your environment profile to determine the best final format.
- Print vs. Online: Valuable screen real estate may cause a preference for printed guides.



9. Do a Usability Test

- Human Help
 - Index
 - Summary
 - Procedural
 - Discovery
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10. Measure the Results Against the Business Goals

- Collect measurable results.
- Engineer the content for your audience. If the executive is interested in financial benefits, use a return on investment calculation to report how training and time spent on support calls was saved. If conversion and satisfaction is important, report usage and satisfaction results.



We are Information Developers

- We are not documenting simple procedures. We are assisting in complex problem solving.
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- It helps if people know about FI.



The End!

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THANK YOU

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