

2.2 Writing for Task-Oriented Procedures

Writing for Task-Oriented Procedures is a two-part module; the module includes guidelines for using effective language and style for procedures. The language and style techniques in this module will help you write your procedures for task orientation.

2.2.1 Using Effective Language

The language you use influences the usability and readability of the document. The most basic rule of procedure writing is to keep the language clear, simple, and to the point. Procedure writing should not contain big words or an overly formal tone. Additional guidelines are provided below.

1. **Keep your writing simple.** Write sentences that are as short and simple as possible without losing meaning or clarity.
2. **Use correct grammar and punctuation.** This will increase the readability and credibility of your document.
3. **Use the active voice, rather than the passive voice.** Active voice allows you to speak directly to the audience. Passive voice loses the subject of the sentence, which can be confusing (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Active and Passive Voices

Active Voice	Passive Voice
The department classifies student employees into two groups.	The students are classified into two groups.

4. **Build parallel structures.** Including parallel headings and steps will establish a comfortable pattern and consistency throughout the document. Here are examples of parallel structures (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of Three Grammatically Parallel Lists

List One	List Two	List Three
Writing Steps	Write Steps	To Write Steps
Writing Introductions	Write Introductions	To Write Introductions
Using Correct Language	Use Correct Language	To Use Correct Language
Using Correct Style	Use Correct Style	To Use Correct Style

5. **Use consistent vocabulary.** To avoid confusion, use the same terms throughout the document. Avoid using synonyms for terms.
6. **Provide the audience with a consistent level of detail.** The necessary level of detail will change depending on the type of procedure, as well as the intended

audience. Test your procedures with the intended audience to ensure that your procedures have the right amount of information, no more, no less.

7. **Format numbers and dates consistently.** This rule applies to any numbers in your document. Use a style guide to format the numbers and dates consistently. A typical guideline is to write numbers ten and below (e.g., one) as words and write numbers above ten as Arabic numerals (e.g., 11).
8. **Include units of measurement for quantities.** Including units with measurements allows your reader to understand quantities easily. Instructions such as “Fill in the first three.” can be misunderstood. Instead write instructions such as “Fill in the first three blanks on the form.”

2.2.2 Using an Effective Writing Style

Stylistic errors can also reduce the understandability of your procedures. Please use the following guidelines to avoid making common stylistic mistakes in your writing that can confuse and/or discomfort the audience.

1. **Minimize the use of acronyms and abbreviations.** If you do use acronyms and abbreviations, follow the first instance with a short explanation for the audience.
2. **Shorten long paragraphs and sentences.** If paragraphs are longer than three sentences, break them into chunks. Shorten sentences that are longer than 1.5 lines.
3. **Avoid an overly formal tone.** Speak directly to the audience and use less formal language, such as contractions. Maintaining a less formal tone, without being too presuming or familiar, will help the audience feel comfortable with using your instructions.
4. **Avoid ambiguous task names.** Write task names as short sentences that try to predict the actions of the audience, such as “Filling out Forms for Student Employees.”
5. **Do not omit articles.** Do not leave out articles such as “an” and “the” to shorten the steps or sentences.