

2.5 Writing Procedure Steps

This section will explain how to organize the information you gathered during your task analysis into short and readable steps. As you write your procedures, keep in mind that your reader may be someone who is hurried, stressed, or impatient. Good procedures ensure that whatever the reading conditions, the necessary tasks will be performed correctly.

1. **Check any sources you referenced in your procedure.** If your procedure uses forms or software, have these with you as you write your steps. Also, have your task analysis information. Ensure your steps are consistent with external materials. If the form has a space for "date of birth" do not write "birthday."
2. **Write steps as imperative commands.** Use a "Do this" sentence format, placing the action at the beginning of the step. A step should only have one action. If a step requires multiple actions, it is better to break it up into multiple substeps.
3. **Write steps as positive commands.** Negative commands can complicate the sentence structure and confuse the audience. An example of a positive command is "Make sure the window is open." The same positive command is confusing in the negative: "Make sure the window is not closed."
4. **Break long procedures into Modules.** If your procedure is longer than ten steps, consider breaking it down even further and placing steps into a separate module. More than ten can overwhelm the reader.
5. **Use flowcharts for non-linear procedures.** Sometimes a procedure may require the reader to repeat a previous step or to choose a course of action. A flowchart can help readers can keep track of their positions in the procedure.
6. **Provide aids for procedures that require calculations.** If your procedure requires calculations, enough space to write in guiding values and aids. Aids will decrease the number of errors.
7. **Avoid "If-Then" statements.** An example of a badly structured step would be "Press Delete to return to the empty form." A reader may see the instructions to press delete and lose all progress before reading the rest of the step. Instead structure steps so that they tell readers "If you need to return to the empty form, then press delete."