

More on Writing Effective Instructions

Our July issue of *KB CommEntary* offered tips for writing effective instructions. These included using commas and acronyms appropriately as well as employing active or direct voice. We've come up with a few more suggestions for making procedural material easier to follow and understand.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Formatting and revising manufacturing standard operating procedures, work instructions, forms, logbooks, and batch records for a pharmaceutical company
- Managing workload for document formatting, quality check, and upload to a document management system for a pharmaceutical company
- Creating content-rich model documents for CMC modules for a pharmaceutical company
- Drafting CMC modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of a pharmaceutical company
- Reviewing and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of pharmaceutical companies

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

Did You Read the Manual?

In July, we offered some suggestions for writing clear, understandable instructions. Here are a few more tips for making instructions easier to follow and use.

Be focused. Include only the information required to complete the task, and include it only once. Remember that old maxim from Composition 101: *Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them?* Forget that when you're writing instructions. Research has demonstrated that this approach confuses people who are trying to accomplish a task. Just tell them the purpose of the instructions (e.g., *Complete the following steps to tie your shoes*) and then describe each step in as few words as possible. Format the steps in an ordered, numbered list. Unless additional information is essential for understanding how to complete the task, leave it out.

Be organized. When presenting multiple sets of instructions in documents such as user manuals, organize your content so that the information flows from the simple to the complex and the general to the specific, like an inverted pyramid. Each section is its own pyramid. Within each section, try to keep to only three levels of headings. Fewer levels might not provide enough specificity for the reader; more than three can indicate that better organization is needed.

Be distinctive. The human eye recognizes patterns before the mind processes words' meanings. This is why each heading level needs to be typographically distinct and different from those above and below it in your document's organizational hierarchy. This is easily done by varying font size, style (e.g., capitalization, bold, and italic), and layout (i.e., indentation). Once you've decided on the visual hierarchy for your headings, use it consistently throughout the document.

Keep it focused. Keep it organized. Keep it distinct.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger

KB COMM

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