

## 10 Tips for Creating Easy to Use Service Manuals

The expected contents of a standard service manual are formulaic.

- This is what it is.
- This is what it does.
- This is what it looks like.
- This is what it looks like when it's not working.
- This is how to fix it.

The better service manual encourages the user to actually read it by being complete and easy to use. If the user can find the information he needs, he is less likely to call for support. And he is more likely to be satisfied with his purchase.

The following tips can help you create a better, easy to use service manual.

### **1. Provide a deep table of contents.**

Use the tags (styles) in your word processing or book layout software to format section headings and automatically create the table of contents. Consider using three or four levels of headings in the table of contents. Make the logical organization of the manual obvious to the reader.

### **2. Include a section that describes changes to the manual since the last revision.**

If the manual is being re-issued, include a section called "Changes to this manual." Help the reader understand what has been added, deleted, or changed in this revision. No one wants to hunt for information that is no longer there. Consider adding a reference to the page(s) containing the new material. Provide a phone number or email address for the reader to suggest improvements to the service manual only if you plan to actually include their suggestions.

### **3. Include a section that describes changes to the product/device since the last manual revision.**

Help the reader quickly discover what is new and improved in this model version of the product/device. If the power distribution boards have been redesigned, also mention the new schematics and part numbers. If a subassembly is now available as individual parts, let the reader know he can order the components as needed.

### **4. Use a conversational tone. Talk to the reader as a person.**

Keep things as simple as possible. Use the active voice, the present tense, and the second person. Don't say: "Note that the leakage current tester must be properly disconnected from the power source." Instead say: "Unplug the leakage current tester at the power source."

### **5. Anticipate questions. Use sidebars or references to other topics and pages.**

If you have a technical support phone line, ask the technicians to keep track of the questions they get. Include that "missing" information in the next revision of the manual. Make sure the graphics and photos are current and well labeled. Use cross-references, such as "For more information, see page 106." Add "hints" about easier or quicker ways to take apart components to replace parts.

### **6. Follow a common layout in all related publications.**

Use appropriate branding and logos in your manuals. Refer to product/devices by their correct "corporate" name. Organize all your service manuals to include the same sections, in the same order. The sameness of your manuals will foster a sense of familiarity to your readers.

### **7. Provide line drawings or graphics to support the written instructions.**

There is a trend toward minimal words and maximum graphics. But users need and appreciate step-by-step instructions and assembly drawings when working with complex devices. Label the

components and parts in the graphic or drawing to correspond to those called out in your instructions.

**8. Use a style sheet to ensure consistent terminology and grammar.**

Create a style sheets to list conventions for units of measure, product names and accepted short names, when to spell out numbers, how to format telephone and FAX numbers, and which format styles to use for various document components. Give examples of icons and when to use them. Describe the page numbering convention to use. Include information on how to format appendices. Explain what should be included in front and back matter.

- Title
- Publisher Name and Address
- Copyright information
- ISBN
- Library of Congress number, if used
- Edition Notice or version number
- Date of publication
- Disclaimers
- Notes, Cautions, Warnings
- Warranties
- Safety Notices
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures / Illustrations

**9. Provide a glossary and explanation of abbreviations.**

Even if you gave the full name and abbreviation of a company, product, agency, or publication in the text, include all abbreviations in the glossary for quick reference. Provide a simple definition of all technical terms used in the manual, even if they are industry standards.

**10. Include an index.**

Some indexes are nothing more than the table of contents rearranged alphabetically. Look carefully through the text for items within paragraphs. Does the section on power management make reference to fuses? Make an index entry for Fuses. Think about information you had to research more carefully. If you had questions, your readers will have the same questions. Include index entries for different aspects of the same feature, such as safety, emergency, battery backup, loss of power, backup power.