

Writing Tip: With Procedure Writing, Point of View is Everything

Adapted from *Writing and Polishing Effective Procedures (WPEP)* seminar

An engineer at the United States Norfolk Naval Base asked, “Why are so many procedure manuals impossible to read?”

The answer is two-fold. First, most instructions are written from the wrong point of view:

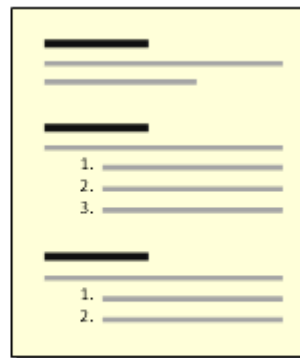
- Users want a *reading as I work* viewpoint that answers the simple question, “What do I do next?” (Think *recipe* for making bread.)
- Content experts, and their wannabes, write from a *reading for knowledge* viewpoint. This answers the complex question, “How does this system work?” (Think *explanation* for how yeast interacts with flour.)



Stan Berry



Reading for Knowledge



Reading as I Work

When writing instructions, *reading for knowledge* viewpoint is the wrong kind of information. Take this example of motorcycle safety training. Instead of instructing a rider on how to manage the risk of road hazards, the content expert explains the combustion mechanics of a Harley Davidson engine. This will explain what creates the percussion-rumbling sound, but it won't help save the rider's life.

Second, *reading for knowledge* viewpoint also lends itself into displaying procedures in a paragraph format, like what you find in a textbook. This in turn promotes:

- passive voice
- sequencing errors
- missing steps
- confusing conditions
- ambiguous doers
- verbose, technical language.

In short, this document only makes sense to other content experts who can recognize the process buried in the prose!

Reading as I work viewpoint makes the organization of the procedure visually apparent to the users. The writer chooses the appropriate format based on the whether the process is linear or non-linear and the juxtaposition of four factors: how many steps, conditions, doers, and screens/forms are interacting within the procedure.

A “reading for knowledge” viewpoint—not a good idea if you want to get things done! To learn more about writing and polishing effective procedures, go to:
<http://wgtdblog.com/procedure-writing-seminar/>



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Stu Tanquist has presented at four American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) National Leadership and TechKnowledge conferences and written two best selling ASTD Info-Lines. With over 20 years in the learning and development field, Stu's expertise has ranged from working as a professional trainer to serving as a strategic-level director for training and development. He holds three degrees including a Masters in management. Stu can be reached at Stu@BerryWritingGroup.com or 612-799-1686.



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