

Creating Usable Information

Develop an information plan

- Identify goals for the information
 - What should it accomplish?
 - What are the business purposes behind it?
- Identify audiences—who will use it?
- Determine appropriate approaches/types of information
- Define content that meets user needs
- Include usability criteria (how will you know if it's usable?)

Understand who the users are and what they need

- How many types of users do you have?
- Consider internal as well as external users
- What are they like? (Create personas, based on real contact with users)
 - What are their goals?
 - What are they trying to do?
 - Where are they trying to do it?
 - What is their environment like?
 - How will they use your content?
 - How will they think about it? What is their terminology?
 - How much education do they have?
 - What are their learning styles?
- Which users are primary?
- Which users are secondary?
- If at all possible, observe users in their workplace

Identify content for all users (especially focus on primary users)

- The needs of novice users are different than the needs of experienced users
- For each user, identify the information needed

Identify users for all content

- Who will use the information?
- Why is it included?
- Do you have information that is not really for any user? Why is it there? (What purpose does it serve?)

For each section, identify purpose and objectives (this can be done at different levels)

- What should the user/reader know or be able to do after reading a particular section?
- Make objectives clearly measurable
- Make sure your writing addresses and supports your objectives
- Testing then adds further information to this

Use a style guide and write consistently

Involve an editor

Have clear architecture

- Identify or define types of information
- Develop clear designs for writing types of information
- Categorize and group information appropriately
- Structure and organize information appropriately

Design clear navigation

- Navigation is different for online and paper, but for either, users must be able to find information
- Consider how users will find information, move through it, and move back.
- How will they know where they are, and what related information is available?

Create a prototype or sample

Evaluate for usability

Use a user-centered approach. Consider using some of these techniques to get user responses to your prototype. You may use these at different stages of the information cycle.

- Involve users in the design
 - Interview them
 - Conduct a survey
 - Card sorts to organize and label topics
- Check scannability
- Check general readability
- Perform a usability edit
- Perform heuristic reviews
- Do cognitive walk-throughs
- Get input from customer support about problem areas and frequently asked questions
- Perform usability tests on your design/prototype
 - Can users find what they are looking for?
 - Once found, do they understand it? Does it tell them what they need? Can they use it?
 - Are instructions accurate?
 - Are examples adequate?

Revise the design and approach, based on user input and usability findings

- You can't always make all the changes you want
- Keep track of issues to be addressed in the next round.
- Plan for how to get to where you want, even if it happens in stages