CSCI-471 Professional Communications

Team User Document

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1 The Assignment

This assignment will give you some experience with working on a team to prepare a document that helps people learn how to use a software product. Although your team won’t have sufficient time to write a complete document for a complex software product, this activity is representative of what such an activity typically entails.

At some point, each of us is unfamiliar with a specific software product and so we look for guidance in how to use it, what the capabilities are, etc. While today most software comes with extensive online assistance, written documents (in the form of tutorials, user guides, reference documents, and the like) are also usually provided. For this assignment, you must work with your team to write a complete, helpful, and well-organized user document for a software product. Assume your audience is a first-year student who is only a couple of weeks into their first semester at RIT. Further, assume your audience is not familiar with the software product prior to starting at RIT.

1.1 The Proposal

On or before the Topic Proposal Email due date one person on each team will be required to send me (paw@cs.rit.edu) an email with:

- The name and email ID for all members of the team.
- The software package you will be documenting.
- A one paragraph description of the products major features that you will be covering in your document.
- A one paragraph explanation why and how this product would be appropriate and useful for a first year student.
- Information about the environment needed to run the product (see below for details).

Title your email: ProComm group User Document Topic

With regard to the environment needed to run the software, you need to make sure that the software is available to every student, it must be free, and it can not require that the reviewer install software on their personal computer. You can use any software that is available in one of the CS labs computers (in the ubuntu, PC, or Mac labs). Web based applications are allowed (i.e. anything in the Google Docs set of tools).
1.2 Document Format

The document should follow a logical series of steps to get users through a set of prescribed tasks, and have appropriate visual aids (such as screen shots, etc.). Although you may be comfortable learning information directly from the “Help” guide, you must not write a Help guide. You must do much more than that!

For specific style guidelines, you may consult the IEEE 1063: “Standard for Software User Documentation” that is posted on the website for this course, but it is not necessary that you follow the IEEE recommendations for this assignment. Further, while you will have some flexibility in designing a tutorial that is appropriate to the topic, there are still some formal aspects that must be observed. The document must start with a separate title page. The title page will include only the following information:

- The document title
- The software product name and version number (if possible)
- This course name and course-section number
- The name of each member of your team
- The date of submission

In addition, for the draft document, write the word draft at the top of the title page (it may be handwritten). For the final version, do not write anything at the top of the title page. There must be a table of contents on a separate page at the beginning of the document followed by a list of figures also on a separate page. At the end of the document there must be a glossary and an index on separate pages, followed by a list of references on a separate page. Annotate (describe) each reference in your list. For example, you can give some indication of the level of difficulty of the source or identify the primary audience for the source – one source may contain the complete, unabridged reference to some technology, whereas another source may offer excellent examples, especially to those unfamiliar with the technology.

Use page numbers, set reasonable margins, and use numbered section headings. Use a heading scheme similar to that illustrated in the IEEE recommendations. This makes it easier for readers to identify topics and subtopics of interest to them. Note, by convention, normally the title page is not numbered. Pages that follow the title page but are not part of the content (such as the table of contents or an abstract) are numbered with lower case Roman numerals (i, ii, etc.). Pages of actual text are numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, etc.). Throughout your document make appropriate references to your sources. A common convention is to organize your reference list alphabetically and assign each reference a number in alphabetical order. Within the body of your document you can refer to specific sources by simply using the appropriate number. For example, “... this design pattern is widely used [1]...” or “... detailed accounts can be found in other sources [2]...” would be appropriate. The draft version of the document should be single-sided and double-spaced. The final version of your document may be single- or double-sided, and single- or double-spaced. Sections, sub-sections, and paragraphs must be separated by an appropriate amount of white-space.

1.3 Document Content

The document must include a general introduction so that readers can determine what will be covered (and what is not covered). Also, listing typical uses for the software or the kinds of tasks that one can accomplish makes your document more useful. Include a description of the intended audience and what skills they are assumed to possess, or what technology they can be presumed to be familiar with. Provide a description along with some illustrations of the stylistic conventions used throughout the document and use those conventions consistently! For example, even if you think it is obvious that items in bold represent commands typed by a user, you must state this explicitly to avoid ambiguity. You might consider using the IEEE recommendations (especially Sections 1 and 2) as a model for how to structure your own document.
A Procedures section must follow the Introduction (or the General Use section if that is included). The Procedures section will consist of a series of sub-procedure sections, labeled with a short description of the sub-procedure to follow. Make sure that you provide sufficient examples for each of the sub-procedures. It’s important to describe not only what to do, but also show how to do it and what happens in response to specific actions. Think of examples and figures as vehicles that help readers confirm their understanding of a concept. Examples and figures can also provide clues as to how a process is supposed to work.

Finally, seize opportunities to help your audience. Readers often raise questions when they first read a passage. They might not quite understand your directions or they simply may be curious and want to know what would happen if they did things slightly differently (for example, if they skipped a step or did things in a different order). Anticipating such questions and offering answers serves the needs of a variety of potential readers. As a side note, the IEEE recommendations refer to an instructional mode or a reference mode for documentation content. There may be elements of both modes in the document you write for this assignment, but the instructional mode is clearly more appropriate here.

1.4 The Draft and Peer Review

Each team should plan to produce two versions of the document. The first version is considered a draft and will be reviewed by members of another team. **Plan to make three (3) copies of the draft, so that each member of the other team can independently read your team’s document.**

The purpose of the review is to give constructive criticism before the final version is submitted. Hopefully, this will result in a more effective and professional document. You should follow a strategy for developing the draft that makes the best use of your team’s time and allows for effective feedback. For example, some teams may prefer to work on an overview of the entire document together, and produce the draft in outline form. Other teams might prefer to have each team member work on one section alone, and then have each member send their draft to the other members for polishing and reworking. A hybrid approach is also acceptable. Some teams do not worry too much about grammar or typos in the draft and other teams prefer perfection every step of the way. The objective is to take advantage of the strengths of your team.

Reviewers should consider the “usual” matters (format, general appearance, grammar, etc.) and also consider how complete and how helpful the document is. It’s very common for people who know how to use a software tool well to have a great deal of difficulty describing it to beginners, or anticipating the kinds of mistakes or misunderstandings made by beginners. It is also important that the final document is error-free. Reviewers should write comments, concerns, and suggestions directly on the draft under review. In addition, each reviewer must complete a User Document Review Form and return the annotated draft and the review form to the authors on the In Class Review due date specified above. Reviewers will be given a chance during the In Class Review to discuss their criticism and give suggestions directly to the authors.

2 Review of the Reviewers

Each group will get a chance to comment on the quality of reviews done by the members of the other group. You group should work together to fill out one User Document Peer Evaluation Form for each of your reviewers.

3 What to Submit

For the final version, hand in the following items, in the order and manner listed below. Each item in this list is considered a separate document. If you have a multi-page item, it must be stapled. Place all documents together using one paper clip in the upper left corner. Consider having one member of your team review your submission to be sure your team has all of the required documents, and that they are in the correct order.
1. The final User Document (on the top)
2. A single copy of your draft of the User Document
3. The User Document Review Form from the 3 reviewers
4. The User Document Peer Evaluation Form for the 3 reviewers (on the bottom)

4 Grading

Your grade will be based both on your adherence to the process and on your draft and final documents. The process consists primarily of your preparation for and participation in the review activity, your reaction to suggestions made by your reviewers, and on the preparation of the final package you submit. Your final documents will be judged on grammatical style, logical organization, and on how well your documents meet the needs of the intended audience. The draft material will be graded more generously, but you are still expected to produce viable, correct documents at that stage. Part of the grade assigned to your final material is based on how well you took advantage of your reviewer’s comments.

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your draft User Document</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups' and my assessment of your review</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your final User Document</td>
<td>50 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting assignment specifications</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual aspects</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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Each group member must complete and submit a Group Evaluation Form after completing the document. Information from this evaluation form as well as instructor observation will be used to assign the Individual aspects grade and adjust the group grade for each individual, if needed. The group evaluations are due by the Group evaluation due date, and no late evaluations will be accepted after this date.

5 A Few Tips

(1) Your document should contain between 10-15 pages of content. This should not include the cover page table of contents/figures, the index, glossary, or references.

(2) Your team must design and write this document yourselves. Note this does not allow you to cut and paste sections of material from sources without giving proper credit to the source. Your team may model your document on another work, but the source should be acknowledged and the extent to which you utilized the source should be clearly communicated.

(3) Be sure that each section begins with an introduction to the topic covered in the section. Do not just list a sequence of operations to be performed without any context.

(4) Consider “little touches” that will enhance your user manual. Color, either to highlight elements or for figures, is often useful. Consider carefully font style and size. Be consistent in your use of spacing (single spacing vs. double spacing, how you set off sections, etc.).

(5) Figures should not only have captions, but should also be described in detail in the text. You must refer to all figures directly in the body of the text, even if the figure occurs in close proximity.

(6) Figures should be numbered and captioned below the figure (centered) and tables should be numbered and captioned above the table (left-justified).

(7) Initially test your document by having one team member (or possibly a friend) sit down in front of the computer and follow each step to see if the information is complete and correct.