Chapter 6—Process Description and Instructions

Process Descriptions

Uses the objective point-of-view to explain a process.

The process is explained using a step-by-step pattern.

Paragraph option uses appropriate transitions between sentences (e.g., "first," "second," "third").

A. Paragraph Option

Readers probably use the index more than other parts of a book, but writers often give it the least attention. Writers often begin to create an index at the end of a project when there is little time to do an adequate job. Creating an index should be planned early in a documentation project and carried through the entire writing process. First, the writer determines her audience, so she can identify the concepts and topics that the reader will look for most frequently. Second, the writer decides the number of levels the index will have. Most index entries contain two levels: the main topic and its sub-topics. Determining the index levels will help the writer determine the detail of the index at the beginning. Third, when a writer creates the index, she thinks of at least two terms that users could use to find the same information. This "cross-referencing" gives readers more than one route to find the topic they need. Finally, when the writer has finished the index, she tests it with her audience. Reader testing ensures whether the first step, the audience analysis, was adequate.

B. List Option

After a brief lead-in the steps of the process are placed in list format.

The list highlights the steps involved in the indexing process. Note how all the entries in the list are parallel.

Readers probably use the index more than other parts of a book, but writers often give it the least attention. Writers often begin to create an index at the end of a project when there is little time to do an adequate job. Creating an index should be planned early in a documentation project and carried through the entire writing process. The indexing process takes four steps:

1. Knowing the audience enough to identify the concepts and topics that the reader will look for most frequently.

2. Determining the number of levels the index will have. Most index entries contain two levels: the main topic and its sub-topics. Determining the index levels will help the writer determine the detail of the index at the beginning.

3. Creating the index, the writer thinks of at least two terms that users could use to find the same information. This "cross-referencing" gives readers more than one route to finding the topic they need.

4. Testing it on the audience. Reader testing checks whether the first step, the audience analysis, was adequate.

Sample 6-2
Two Options for Process Descriptions: (A) Paragraph Option; (B) List Option