

Writing for the IT Press

With a Focus on OS/2 Media

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Outline

- 1 General Considerations
 - Publisher
 - Target Group
 - Style
 - Introduction
 - Figures
 - Resources
- 2 Types of articles
 - Experience report
 - Review
 - HowTo
 - Report
 - Editorial/Gloss
- 3 Resources

Outline

- 1 **General Considerations**
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Publisher

Question:

Who is going to publish your article?

Determines:

- Target group and style
- Allegation/limitation as to length
- Topics of interest

Do follow the guidelines! Or else!

Target Group

Question:

Who are you going to write for?

Determines:

- Needs, areas of interest
- Knowledge that can be taken for granted
- Problems that are faced
- Way of approaching problems
- Expected writing style

Style

Question:

How to say it?

- Too much of a good thing can kill you
- Colloquial vs. formal language
- Funny vs. dry
- Polemic/subjective vs. factual
- Concise vs. digression

Don't use vulgar, abusive speech; anything potentially illegal

Introduction

Question:

What is the article about?

- Topic, outlook on content, conclusion
- Get the reader's attention
 - Short and to the point
 - **Don't** provide too much background information (And first the earth cooled...)

Figures

Question:

How to present larger amounts of data?

- Graphics
 - Worth more than a 1000 words
 - Make screenshots in the preparation phase
 - Show only relevant information
 - Mark relevant parts
 - Expensive to print
- Tables
 - Clear display of short facts
 - Ideal for comparisons

Resources

Question:

Where to obtain information on the topic?

- Short summary of relevant data
- Where did you obtain information?
- Where can the reader find further information?

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Experience report

Overview

- Describes a problem or product
- Most unrestricted and personal form, diary-style or anecdotic
 - Chronological/associative instead of factual relation
 - Hard for the reader to follow
- Not suitable for professional media. Exception: bad support, etc.

Review

Overview

- Describes your findings from a product test
- Types:
 - Review (single product): Is it good?
 - Comparative review (several products of the same type): Which is better?
 - Technology overview (overview of complex products and approaches)

Review

Preparations

- Read the documentation
 - Does it cover all features?
 - Does it describe non-existing features?
 - Is it suitable for the target group?
- Use the product with the target group in mind
 - Gradually go from simple to more complex tasks
 - Find out what it does and what it doesn't
 - How well do the features address the problem?

Review

Structure - 1

Introduction

- What is the problem the product aims to solve?
- Introduce the product as a possible solution with a short outlook
- Did you like it? Give a very short conclusion

Review

Structure - 2

Installation/Setup

- Normally not talked about
- If problems occurred or something has been solved in a very intelligent way, do mention that

Review

Structure - 3

What is it capable of and how does it work?

- What does the manufacturer claim that the product can do?
Does it hold to this promise?
- **Don't** recite the feature list. Only tell the reader about the features that are worth knowing about
- **Don't** write a user's guide. Tell the reader how good a feature works, not how to use it
- Appreciation/disapproval may be shown here and there

Review

Structure - 4

Detailed likes and dislikes

- First likes, then dislikes
- Are you missing a feature which is essential for solving the problem?
- Value usability, especially in regard to the target group
- Did you need to contact support?
- Is it better or worse than comparable products?

Review

Structure - 5

Conclusion

- Are you satisfied with this product?
- Main strong and weak points
- If you contacted support, was it any good?
- Can you give a comparison to any similar product as far as quality and general usability are concerned?
- Is it a good value? For whom?

Review

Structure - 6

Resources

- URLs with information about the device and any software used specifically with it, if any
- Suggested retail price and/or a general price range for it
- Vendor where it can be purchased

HowTo

Overview

- Explains how to solve a problem with certain applications, tools, etc.
- Usually mainly chronological structure plus preparations

HowTo

Preparations

- Restate what the problem was and what the steps and tools you used to solve it were
- If necessary, go through the process again and take notes (screenshots!)
- Try to bring the steps into a chronological order and leave out things that aren't related since they might just confuse the reader

HowTo

Structure - 1

Introduction

- Short description of the problem
- State why you think it is worth the hassle
- Short lookout on how it can be solved
- List the required tools
- Do these require any other things?
- Describe complex preparations before the problem-solving itself

HowTo

Structure - 2

- Describe any required extra-knowledge not directly related to the steps prior to the problem-solving itself
- List the steps which are required to solve the problem.
- If different approaches take longer to deal with, create a separate chapter for each one. Don't mix alternatives in one paragraph

HowTo

Structure - 3

- Be detailed, but **don't** explain basics that aren't required for the reader to be able to reproduce the steps (and understand them)
- **Don't** list information that isn't really related to a specific step in that step's chapter/paragraph
- For complex issues, troubleshooting information is desirable

Report

Overview

- Description of an event or topic
- Mostly third-person perspective
- Event:
 - Make notes and take photos
 - Get some visitor comments
- Topic:
 - Get comments from the ones concerned

Report

Structure

- Introduction: Short info about the event or topic, your main conclusion
- List facts about sessions, products at the event or details of the topic
 - Maybe add visitor and personal comments
 - **Don't** rely on second-hand information for facts
- Comment on the above facts
- Draw a conclusion

Editorial/Gloss

Overview

- Editorial: Gives your personal opinion regarding a topic, tries to persuade the reader
- Gloss: Deals with a topic in an ironic or sarcastic way
 - Fake review, report, etc.
- Use of stylistic devices, etc.

Editorial/Gloss

Structure

- Present the facts your opinion is based on and draw conclusions
 - **Don't** provide too much background information or it destroys the effect
 - Use stylistic devices for emphasis, humor, etc.
- Gloss: if faked article, follows structure of faked type
- Editorials often end with an appeal
- **Don't** let your train of thought lose track

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Resources



Esther Schindler (2000):

How to Write a Product Review.

POSSI, 2000.

URL:

http://www.possi.org/extended_attributes/2000/11/bitstream/view



Esther Schindler et. al. (1999):

The Care and Feeding of The Press.

Internet Press Guild, 1999.

URL: <http://www.netpress.org/careandfeeding.html>



VOICE Newsletter Editors (2006):

Guidelines for Submissions to the VOICE Newsletter.

Virtual International Consumer Education, 2006.

URL: http://www.os2voice.org/newsletter_submission.html