AGCJ 404: Communicating Agricultural Information to the Public

Week #7: Communication Products

Objectives

- Identify types of communication products.
- Examine the common components in agricultural communication products.
- Prepare communication products according to their specified requirements.
- Assist other students with writing tasks.

Most Common Types

- Specifications
- Brief Instructions
- Procedures
- Documentation and Manuals
- Technical Marketing Materials
- All types of communication products require an audience and purpose analysis before creating the product.

Specifications

- Particular exacting type of description (specs)
  - Size
  - Shape
  - Safety
- Needed when precision is mandated
  - Bridges
  - Buildings (your own house)
  - Other examples?

Specifications – Components

- Brief introduction or description (overview)
- List of component parts/materials needed
- References to other documents/specs
- Usability:
  - Customer use of spec sheet
  - Same terms for steps/parts throughout
  - Clear ToC
  - Standard formats
  - Simplistic
  - Always use active voice

Brief Instructions

- Information to assemble, connect, or use a product
- Usually limited to one page
- Includes lots of graphics (step specific)
- Types:
  - Quick reference brochures/cards
  - Assembly instructions
  - Wordless instructions (global audiences)
Brief Instructions – Components

- Titles
- Quick overview of tasks required
- Step-by-step instructions
- Follow-up information
- Usability:
  - Define users’ tasks needed to perform
  - Determine size of final document
  - Use same terms throughout
  - Test your instructions
  - Use imperative voice/action verbs (Pull the chord)
  - Keep it simple

Procedures

- Information, steps, and guidelines
- Longer than brief instructions
- Legal requirements and safety codes
- Types:
  - Standard operating procedures (SOPs)
  - Instructions

Procedures – Components

- Title and Overview
- List of steps
- Warnings, cautions
- Procedure number and revision dates
- Usability:
  - Users’ physical location
  - Know document’s purpose and tasks
  - Technical expertise of audiences
  - Test the document
  - Use active voice
  - Organize content chronologically

Documentation and Manuals

- Provides supporting information
- Describes processes and product background
- Most common product documentation now occurs online
  - Easier to search for specific terms
  - Quick links to related tasks, steps, or procedures

Manuals – Components

- Includes an overview (brief roadmap)
- Access points
- Chapters
- Reference information
- Usability:
  - Determine appropriate medium (paper/Web)
  - Important audience information
  - Physical location of users
  - Write from user’s point of view
  - Include diagrams, screen shots, illustrations, etc.

Technical Marketing Materials

- Persuade audience to buy product
- Presents product in “best light”
- Provides specific technical information
- Types:
  - Brochures
  - Web pages
  - Letters
  - Large color documents
Tech Marketing Material – Components

- Product name
- Product type, category, or service
- Features
- Technical specs
- Visuals and FAQs
- Usability:
  - Learn decision maker's background
  - Use upbeat, dynamic language
  - Lots of visuals and color
  - Emphasize special appeal of product/service

Application

- Research Brief
- Fact Sheet
- Future communication products

Evaluation

- Major projects
- Final examination