Formating

Use the following guidelines when writing technical instructions:
- No IEEE style necessary
- Use only two fonts, one for headings and one for text (12pt Times New Roman)
- Keep your pages visually uncluttered—try to maintain at least 20% white space
- *Sparingly* utilize bold and italic fonts to catch the reader's attention
- Be sure to include graphics as well as explanatory text

Structure

Different manuals need different sections, depending on complexity and type of instructions, but a basic manual probably ought to include:

1. *Introduction:* Tell your audience what topic you will be discussing, and the purpose of the manual. Be sure to use your summarizing skills here.

2. *Equipment Required:* Provide a description of the machinery or other tools being used. This will probably involve a bulleted list and/or a graphic illustration. *Remember: all items in a list must follow the same grammatical construction!*

3. *Warnings:* Depending on the project, you might need to include hazard or safety information. Be sure that such information is highly visible, via the use of bold fonts, asterisks, or boxes. If warnings are needed in more than one place, consider placing multiple boxes at each point where the reader most needs that information.

4. *Instructions:* Outline the steps in the process chronologically, beginning with a verb. *(Example: Plug in the machine and turn it on.)* Be as detailed and thorough as possible. The reader must be able to perform the same steps with the same outcome that you have already achieved. Try numbering your steps to help your reader follow them visually. Be sure not to include too much information in each step—you should separate steps into one-sentence items. If any terms need defining, you should do so on the first use of the term. Use simple words and phrases, as well as simple sentence construction. When writing commands, do not use full sentences (as in this sentence, where there is no subject, only a verb).

5. *Conclusion:* As with any report, you must write a short conclusion. This might include: description of desired results; reiteration of the most important steps of the process; suggestions for troubleshooting; and/or comments on other applications of this product.

Other Resources

See Finkelstein, Ch. 4 ("Description of a Mechanism") and Ch. 5 ("Descriptions of a Process").