

Product documentation checklist

Creating solid product documentation takes time, but it's worth it. After all, if your docs are high-quality and informative, not only will your customers be happy, but you can also attract more to adopt your product.

This checklist will help you keep track of all your tasks so you always know where you're at in the process – and so you never forget any key elements of product documentation.

1. Pre-writing stage

Write a style guide

If your product documentation has several contributors, creating a style guide can help everyone stay consistent. The guide is a resource that shows them how to create the documentation, the tone of voice used, whether or not things like emojis are acceptable, the type of language used (formal, chatty, conversational, etc.), the use of visuals, the branding used, and more.

You can provide a few paragraphs that act as an example of what you're looking for or list several bullet points that showcase how the doc should be written. You decide how it's done!

A style guide makes it easier and faster to write the doc, ensures nothing's left to chance, and saves you editing time.

Decide on one place to store all the information you have about the product

Customers will find it frustrating if they have to search high and low for something, especially if they've already combed through the product doc and can't find what they're looking for.

Some examples of platforms where you can write and store your docs include [Document360](#) and [ProProfs](#).

Think about the end user of the doc

Whether your doc's audience has a lot of technical skills or not will inform the way you write the product doc – and where you host it. So, write for the reader and think about what they're getting from the document. What do they need from it?

Keep the doc's goal in mind at all times

In the same vein, ensure that what your documentation is trying to do (explain a product's features, provide a how-to guide, etc.) is obvious at a glance. People will want to know immediately what your doc does and why it exists, so don't skip this step.

Choose a type of documentation

Do you think your audience will resonate better with a tutorial-style doc? Will the information be clearer and more organized (and, therefore, easier to follow) as a how-to guide? This is a choice you'll have to make before writing your first word, so you won't have to backtrack later!

Pick a format

Not only is your documentation type important, but you should also choose the right format. Will PDF work best or do you want to create online documentation, for example?

Consider what to include ahead of time

Your product documentation will differ from someone else's because your product will also be different. So, the elements to include in the doc will vary – decide before writing what you plan on including, from your product's features and answers to frequently asked questions to the system requirements and use cases (and everything else in-between).

Set up your doc's hierarchy

Because it's vital that your product doc has a logical flow, and is organized and clear to end users, you'll want to create the table of contents (or a simple list of headings) before you start writing. This way, you're making it easier for yourself to keep track of what you'll be writing and ensure you don't forget important details.

2. Writing the product doc

Outline your doc with a README file

This file's not only vital to show people how they install and/or use your product, but it can also help you to create an outline of your documentation, which can work as a table of contents.

Depending on the doc's purpose, your README file can look very different, but it should always have the information your audience needs.

Make sure your language is clear and to-the-point

Because you're writing for the end user of the product, you want to make sure your documentation reflects that in the tone of voice and language you choose.

Some best practices when writing your documentation include writing in second person (i.e., using 'you' as the pronoun of choice), not mixing more than one topic per paragraph, avoiding passive voice, and opting for snappier sentences.

Add descriptions to your sections

This might be extra work but it's likely to pay off – if you add a summary of what the section is about and ensure that customers can quickly find what they're looking for in your documentation, they'll be a lot happier!

When creating a table of contents, keep accessibility in mind

Again, you want people to be able to easily and quickly find what they need in your product documentation, so your table of contents should have all the info necessary. It should also be clear and organized, flow logically, and provide hyperlinks to the different sections of the doc.

Include media and graphics

Visuals are incredibly important to break up the text in your doc and provide additional context. A video or a graph, a GIF or an audio clip – it's up to you! Just remember that the visuals you add should complement the text, whether it's offering instructions, showing a step-by-step guide of a process, etc.

3. Post-writing stage**Proofread your documentation**

After spending such a long time creating your doc, the last thing you want is for it to go live with mistakes that should have been caught beforehand! Read it out loud to catch the most obvious issues and re-read it several times to make sure – however, the final check should be done by someone else (or by more than one person), as it's easy to miss mistakes in your own writing!

Add your company and copyright info

An unmissable step is to show to readers who owns the product documentation, so you should always add the copyright. The footer of your doc should also include information like your company name and website.

4. Review and tweak

Review your documentation regularly

Products change, systems change, tech changes... for this reason, you want to make sure your product doc is always up-to-date. Make it a point to review and/or tweak it as needed on a regular basis, to ensure end users are always getting the best information.

Provide the date of any updates you make

End users should also be able to tell when your documentation was last updated or revised, so they know they have the most recent version. If not, then you might end up in a situation where you release a new feature but your documentation has a months-old date or, worse, hasn't been reviewed.
