

## **Bedienungs- und Gebrauchsanleitungen:**

Probleme aus Verbrauchersicht und Lösungsansätze  
zur Verbesserung technischer Anleitungen

## Impressum

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## II Summary

Technical consumer goods, especially in the field of consumer electronics, increasingly offer more and more complex features. Consumers need to be enabled to deal with the product in an appropriate way. Primarily the consumer receives information about the handling of the product with the help of instruction manuals. However, they are not always consumer-friendly either.

The study was conducted to compile recommendations for the DIN EN 62079, to determine which aspects an international norm for writing technical instructions should include to meet the needs of consumers concerning instruction manuals. The present study deals with the problems consumers encounter when using instruction manuals. Its results led to a list of aspects and criteria for well written and consumer-friendly instruction manuals.

Certainly, these results are also of great value for technical writers, executives of technical documentation departments and authors of technical instructions.

Empirical investigations about consumer demands and requests as well as usability are usually only done in-house or in a master thesis. Mostly, they include only a limited number of defined research criteria.

Because the present study includes the results of many different empirical investigations, it can show in a unique and comprehensive way, all the aspects that are important for consumers with regard to technical instructions.

And of course, the majority of the identified criteria are not only relevant for consumers, but are also important for technical staff, so that the identified criteria could be generalized and applied to different kinds of technical instructions.

The study was realized with the help of a so-called Meta-Analysis. For this the results of 13 previously conducted surveys and usability-tests about consumer problems with instruction manuals were summarized and categorized. The empirical investigations included in the study had to meet certain criteria, like being up-to-date and focusing on technical consumer goods. In addition, expert evaluations of instruction manuals from the Doku-Preis, a prize that is annually awarded by Gesellschaft für Technische Kommunikation e.V. – tekomp (tekomp) for excellent instructions, were included in the analysis of problems with technical instructions. Furthermore, to gain recommendations for the revision of the DIN

EN 62079, several experts of technical documentation were interviewed.

First of all the results refute the common belief that instruction manuals are not read by users. Quite the opposite, the analyses show without doubt the importance of instruction manuals for consumers. Amongst

others they prove that for the vast majority of consumers instruction manuals are the first source of information, for example when dealing with problems while using a product.

The aggregation of the different research results leads to a comprehensive list of consumer problems. Through it criteria for good technical instructions from a consumer's point of view were deduced. The criteria refer to the following aspects:

- Target group of the instruction manual
- Availability of the instruction manual
- Print or electronic
- Storage of the instruction manual
- Format, cover and manufacture
- Language and language version
- Quality of translation
- Legibility
- Punctuation
- Allocation to products
- Structure of content of the instruction manual
- Classification of content and the allocation of content to the chapters
- Look and layout
- Arrangement of contents of the instruction manual
- Search of content
- Directories and indices
- Titels and headings
- Short guides
- Assumptions about the prior knowledge of the target group
- Level of description and detail of the information
- Completeness of information
- Relevance of information
- Phrasing
- Conciseness and precision of information
- Terms and concepts
- Glossary
- Coherence of content
- Consistency of terms and specifications
- Comprehensibility and legibility of pictures
- Reference and sequence of charts
- Symbols and icons
- Tables
- Correctness and consistency of information
- Function and meaning of information
- Operation instruction
- Safety notes and warnings
- Listed and covered topics
- Additional criteria for creating barrier-free manuals

The recommendations to realize the criteria and to integrate them into the DIN EN 62079 show that different approaches are necessary to improve the quality of instruction manuals effectively.

First of all technical writers and authors of technical instructions need assistance with the help of checklists, which allow them to check and evaluate the quality of their instructions. However, checklists are not reasonable and helpful for all criteria. For example, to guarantee the quality of translation or a correct punctuation, quality assurance methods, which are integrated in the process, are more convenient.

Other recommendations concern defined standards for writing instructions, which should strictly adhered to in order to write consumer-friendly instructions. For example, standards are often defined in style guides for writing instructions.

Further, various aids, like glossaries, search-helps, indices, navigation structures, as well as a good content structure and layout help the consumer to cope with the instruction.

Above all, those criteria are important that depend on the special characteristics of the target group. The features of the target group determine how to write a consumer-friendly technical instruction. For example, the prior knowledge of the target group is critical for the use of technical terms. For this group of criteria neither checklists, nor quality management or implemented standards are appropriate methods to improve technical instructions. Here, the only method to find out the best way of writing the instruction for the consumer, are empirical investigations. They must be done, for example, by a survey or tests with the target group.

Last but not least good qualification and training of technical writers guarantees the excellent quality of technical instructions, thus meeting consumer needs.

Regarding the question, to which degree the existing standard DIN EN 62079 is realized in practice in the writing of technical instructions, all experts agreed that there is a great demand for further action. The DIN EN 62079 must be used much more.

Apart from several suggestions, how the use of the DIN EN 62079 could be improved, experts see quality checks for technical instructions as especially significant.