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IEEE Standard for Software User Documentation

IEEE Computer Society

Sponsored by the
Software Engineering Standards Committee



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IEEE Standard for Software User Documentation

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Abstract: Minimum requirements for the structure, information content, and format of user documentation, including both printed and electronic documents used in the work environment by users of systems containing software, are provided in this standard.

Keywords: online help, software user documentation, user manual

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.
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Introduction

(This introduction is not part of IEEE Std 1063-2001, IEEE Standard for Software User Documentation.)

Two factors motivated the original development of this standard in 1987: the concern of the software user communities over the poor quality of much user documentation, and a need for requirements expressed by producers of documentation. Since its adoption, IEEE Std 1063-1987 has seen wide use in the preparation of printed user manuals and has contributed to improvements in documentation quality.

Because of the prevalence of online help and user documentation in electronic formats, the standard has been completely revised to address both printed and electronic user documentation.

User documentation that conforms to this standard will also conform with the requirements of a user documentation description as prescribed by IEEE/EIA 12207.1-1997. In particular, the requirements of sub-clauses 5.1 and 6.30 of that standard would be satisfied.

At the start of documentation planning, the software, its user interfaces, and the tasks that users perform with the software should be identified. Successful user documentation is the result of proper audience identification, thoughtful software and document design, and good writing style, in addition to the structure, content, and format requirements addressed by this standard. The ultimate test of software user documentation is that it is easily usable by its intended audience for its intended purpose.

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IEEE Standard for Software User Documentation

1. Overview

This clause presents the scope, purpose, organization, and candidate uses of this standard.

1.1 Scope

This standard provides minimum requirements for the structure, information content, and format of user documentation, including both printed and electronic documents used in the work environment by users of systems containing software. This standard is limited to the software documentation product and does not include the processes of developing or managing software user documentation; it applies to printed user manuals, online help, and user reference documentation. It does not apply to specialized course materials intended primarily for use in formal training programs.

This standard is intended neither to encourage nor discourage the use of either printed or electronic (online) media for documentation, or of any particular documentation development or management tools or methodologies. Users of this standard may want to develop a style manual for use within their own organizations to complement the guidance provided in the standard, or to adopt an industry-recognized style guide. Users of this standard may also want to perform usability testing on the software user documentation. The works listed in the bibliography provide guidance on the processes of managing, preparing, and testing user documentation (see Annex A).

1.2 Purpose

This revision provides requirements for the structure, information content, and format of both printed and electronic documentation. It addresses the interests of software acquirers, producers, and users in standards for consistent, complete, accurate, and usable documentation.

1.3 Organization of the standard

After Clause 2, this standard is organized according to the different aspects of user documentation: structure (Clause 3), information content (Clause 4), and format (Clause 5). In each clause, the requirements are media-independent, as far as possible. Requirements specific to either print or electronic media are identified as such, particularly in Clause 5. The order of clauses in this standard does not imply that the software user documentation should be developed in this order or presented to the user in this order.