

# The Missing Manual Authors' Guide

A Missing Manual is designed to be “the book that should have been in the box,” but not the usual deathly dry, overly careful, software-company-written kind of documentation. Instead, a Missing Manual is what you *wish* came with your software: conversational, funny, intelligent. The reader is addressed as “you,” contractions are the norm, the examples are witty, and so on.

This Authors' Guide tells you everything you need to know to write a Missing Manual. It starts out by giving you a brief introduction to the Missing Manual way of explaining things and then takes you through the nitty gritty of style guidelines, figure formatting, and so on.

## The Missing Manual Way

The single most important characteristic of every Missing Manual is the way it serves as an intelligent advisor to the reader. That may sound like a no-brainer, but if you think about it, most computer manuals don't do much more than present a dry recitation of how every feature in a program works. Missing Manuals, by contrast, act like a knowledgeable but patient friend, sitting by your side as you figure out how to use your new program. Sure, we provide coverage for every feature, command, and menu choice. But the big difference is that we let readers know what's important and what they can safely ignore.

So, Missing Manual Rule Number One: Your job is to act as the reader's guide as you take her through a tour of how the software works. In other words, keep the following point in mind with every feature you describe:

*What's it for?*

Nothing makes a reader want to hurl a book across the room more than a passage like this: “In the Implement Freen Modules dialog box, you have options that let you implement Freen modules in various ways.”

With each feature, you should never just say how it works. You should always, always, always help readers understand *why* they would want to use a feature. A sentence like “Open the Preferences window if you want to adjust your system preferences” is not only dull, it also fails to advise the reader that, for example, he can make his monitor easier to read by changing its preferences. Here are some examples of how to integrate this advice smoothly into your sentences:

- “You’d find this useful in case of, for example, a power outage.”
- “There’s pretty much only one instance when you’d want this option turned off, and that’s when...”
- “Although few people will use this setting, it’s designed to...”
- “Many PC fans don’t realize quite how powerful this checkbox can be.”
- “Microsoft’s engineers may have been overly optimistic in assessing the importance of this feature.”

Here’s where you can really make a difference, setting yourself apart from the robot authors who just catalog features. Readers *love* these assessments. Don’t just tell the readers; *advise* them.

## The Structure of a Missing Manual

The structure of each Missing Manual varies according to the subject, but there are a few constants. First, Missing Manuals cover the entire product, as much as humanly possible in 400 to 600 pages. You should touch on every feature, even if you must sometimes hand the reader off to other sources (like Web sites) for the tangential, obscure topics. Second, we always have an Introduction (before Chapter 1)—a short chapter of its own that follows a flexible formula. Finally, we tend to orient readers with brief intros to each chapter and section, explaining what we’re going to teach now.

This section describes the various parts of a Missing Manual’s structure.

### Outline

Nothing too radical here. Every book’s divided into Parts. How many parts, and chapters, is up to you. Most have about 5 parts and 20 chapters. Basic info usually comes in the early chapters; power user stuff usually winds up toward the end.

The final Part contains Appendixes. Appendix A is the very important command reference (“Windows XP Pro, Menu by Menu,” for example), which is the most manual-like thing we’ve got: a blow-by-blow description of the menu commands, with cross-refs to chapters where this info was previously discussed. Another appendix is installation and upgrading advice; a third, if you think it appropriate, is a troubleshooting guide.

### Book Introduction

Every book starts out with an introductory chapter (called, naturally enough, Introduction). Anything that’s common to all Missing Manuals you can copy from an existing book or ask us for the text. Here’s what should be in the Introduction:

- A brief, friendly **introduction** to the whole topic. See a few existing Missing Manuals to get the hang of this part.

- **What's New** in this program. Important to include if you're writing about a new version.
- **About This Book.** This is where you justify the existence of the Missing Manual, usually by pointing out that the program doesn't come with a manual, its help screens are insufficient, and so on. Again, take a look at existing Missing Manuals to set yourself on the right course.
- The **book's structure.** Briefly describe each Part; don't bother with chapter-by-chapter detail.
- **About→These→Arrows.** Explain the folder and menu notation.
- **What You Need to Know.** The very, very basics: a page of info on terms they'll need to know, like mouse, double-click, application, and so on.
- A blurb on **MissingManuals.com.**

## Keeping Readers Oriented

A big part of acting as an adviser to the reader is helping him stay oriented. One simple way to do that is to write chapter intros and section intros, both of which help readers understand what they're about to read, and more important, *why* they're about to read it.

### Chapter intros

Every chapter needs to start off with a few paragraphs that more or less follow this formula: The first paragraph states the problem that the chapter solves, or it introduces the task that's you're going to explain, in a high-level, colorful way. The next paragraph/s, or a series of bullets, announces the solution that the chapter offers, and gives a pretty clear (although not minutely detailed) overview of what the chapter is going to contain.

That first paragraph often starts out with some kind of real-world example or reference that helps the reader understand why she needs to learn the information covered in the chapter. You can pretty much pick up any Missing Manual and see how this works. Here's one quick example from a chapter (on Cascading Style Sheets) in *Dreamweaver: The Missing Manual*. Here's the chapter's opening paragraph:

When you compare the formatting options discussed in Chapter 3 with the text styling in a magazine or book, the Web looks like the ugly duckling of the media world. The handful of options available in HTML—font face, size, and color—don't hold a candle to the typographic and layout control you get when creating a document in even the most basic word processing program.

See how that first graf gets the problem across clearly? The world needs CSS because HTML does a lousy job when it comes to layout (although note that CSS isn't even mentioned in the opening graf itself).

The next segment (either a paragraph or three, or some bullets) discusses the ways the program solves the problem that you've introduced in the first graf, and then gives the reader a sense of what he's going to read throughout the chapter. Again, in the Dreamweaver book, the second graf offers a good example:

But not anymore. A technology called Cascading Style Sheets addresses many of these shortcomings of HTML. Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

allow much greater control over the layout and design of Web pages. Using them, you can add margins to paragraphs (just as in a word processor), colorful and stylish borders to images, and even dynamic rollover effects to text links. Best of all, Dreamweaver's streamlined approach lets you combine many of these formats into powerful style sheets with just a few mouse clicks.

The reader now knows what the chapter's going to be about, and she's ready for the detailed info you're going to give her in the main body of the chapter. She also knows whether she can safely skip this chapter if it contains info she's not interested in or that doesn't apply to her situation.

### Section intros

Section intros work similarly to chapter intros, except they serve to set up and introduce H1 and H2 sections (H1 = Heading 1; H2 = Heading 2).

The important questions that you need to answer in any section intro are: What problem does the section solve/what service does the tool provide; and, roughly, how does the process work?

For example, here's a nice H1 section intro from *Google: The Missing Manual* (the H1 header is "Searching by Language and Country"):

Google's Language Tools are a collection of features that let you futz with the language or location of your search. For example, you can limit an individual search to pages written in a particular language or pages from a country you specify. You can also translate text you type in or Web pages you specify. And you can try out a new interface language or run a search from a Google site in another country.

To find these features, click Language Tools on Google's homepage or any results page, or point your browser to [www.google.com/language\\_tools](http://www.google.com/language_tools). Here're the tools and what you can do with them:

Again, see how that passage quickly lets readers know what they're about to get? (What follows the quoted passage is a bullet list of Google's language tools.)

Section intros are usually much shorter than chapter-intros. You should follow every H1 and H2 header with a section intro. For H3s and H4s, use your judgment. If you feel like a quick line will help get people oriented then write it in; but it's not always essential.

## The Page Elements of a Missing Manual

To help you hit on everything in a program, we have some cool page elements you can—and should—use. The body text itself offers everything an advanced-beginner needs to master the program or topic at hand. Then, as a kind of supplemental commentary, most pages provide jumping-off points: a tip, a sidebar, or a graphic-holding box, all of which offer tangential commentary on the main topic.

As you write, you'll always want to consider whether or not a particular discussion would merit snipping off into one of these subsidiary boxes. There are three advantages to doing so: First, each page offers multiple entry points for somebody just browsing; second, the

page *looks* more interesting; and third, you can keep your Ol' Man River of primary discussion uncluttered by peripheral topics.

No two Missing Manuals are identical, but you'll find some consistent features throughout the series. This section tells you about what you'll find in all Missing Manuals.

## Sidebars

Sidebars are a great way to deliver info that's not central to the main flow of your chapter. You've got several canned *kinds* of sidebars at your disposal. Each one is identified *both* by its sidebar type (in the example here, "Power Users' Clinic") *and* by a title of its own, like this:

### POWER USERS' CLINIC

## Opening Programs without the Mouse

Launching the Start→Programs→Microsoft Office→Word 2000 command is all well and good if you don't mind making that 20-mile journey with the mouse. Fortunately for speed freaks, you can perform exactly the same stunt without ever taking your hands off the keyboard. To do so, begin by blah blah blah...

Here are some of the most common sidebar types; these appear in pretty much all Missing Manuals:

- **Power Users' Clinic.** Reserve the advanced stuff for this sidebar type.
- **Up to Speed.** Remedial stuff for the beginner who may not have grasped the terminology or concept you've just used, taking it for granted, in the body text.
- **Workaround Workshop.** It's fine to acknowledge bugs and stupid features. Use this sidebar type to show a way out.
- **Frequently Asked Question.** A frequently asked question. Oh, yeah, and the answer.
- **Troubleshooting Moment.** You guessed it.
- **Gem in the Rough.** A feature that nobody ever uses right, gets the point of, or uses nearly enough. Alternatively, a feature that shows great potential, but the software company needs to work on it.
- **Don't Panic or Nostalgia Corner.** Unique to the Mac OS X and Windows XP books something for old-time users who've discovered that some beloved feature isn't where they expect it to be.

Here are some less common sidebars that you're welcome to use, too:

- **Alternate Realities.** Used in the iTunes book for a sidebar about using a Mac iPod with a Windows PC.
- **Buyers' Guide.** Shopping advice.
- **Design Time.** Great for design/layout/cosmetic suggestions. These sidebars sometimes focus on a program's design tools (e.g. Word's Font dialog box); sometimes they branch out to broader topics that are not program-specific (e.g. advising readers that sometimes too much formatting is overkill).

- **Don't Panic.** Often, but not only, used in a Switching book or a revision, to explain where a seemingly missing feature has gone to.
- **DV Ethics.** Used in the iMovie book for sidebars about editing and continuity issues.
- **Easter Egg Hunt.** For telling readers where to find hidden, undocumented software features.
- **Extension Alert.** Used primarily for Dreamweaver extensions in that book.
- **In the Field.** Great for photo, video, and audio topics where you want to provide advice about what to do when you're out shooting/recording (e.g. tips on how to shoot a wedding video, or how to prevent squirrels from getting in your camera bag).
- **Laptop Life.** Advice, tips, and tricks aimed exclusively at laptop owners.
- **Memory Lane.** A flashback to previous software version.
- **Note from the Lawyers.** Used in the iTunes book, about copyright issues.
- **Organization Station.** How to organize the files you accumulate when shooting video and pictures, or recording audio. These sidebars are great for advice about tagging and labeling.
- **Paranoid's Corner.** Used in the iMovie book for a sidebar about extra backups.
- **Software Update.** When a feature has changed from one version to the next.
- **The Other White Meat.** Used only once; had to do with an alternate software option.
- **Word to the Wise.** Good old fashioned advice.

If none of these meets your needs, you can also come up with sidebar types of your own.

### Figures in Sidebars

Don't place figures in sidebars. An easy workaround is to place the figure in the main body text and then add a reference to the figure.

### Tips, Notes, and Warnings

The Word template includes a style called *Note*. Use this style for Notes, Tips, and Warnings. It looks like this:

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*Tip: Please add the **word** Tip: or Note: yourself, but don't bother formatting it; we'll embolden and italicize it during layout.*

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The vast majority of what we include in these boxes are Tips and Notes. Tips are quick time-saving shortcuts and reminders; notes are the Missing Manual equivalent of footnotes or authorial asides: helpful information that's slightly tangential to the point at hand. Use Warnings with restraint: only, for example, if the reader's in danger of really damaging his system. Finally, never use the word "Caution:" at the beginning of one of these boxes.

## Numbered Steps

Because Missing Manuals aim to teach readers how to do things, the numbered steps—where you walk readers through a procedure—are part of the core of your book. The format for them is as follows:

1. For the number, you want a sentence or two that tells the reader what to do.

Underneath, you want at least a sentence—but you can have several paragraphs—telling the reader what the software does (always in present tense, not future) and/or giving the reader more detail on what she should or can do.

You might find it helpful to think about the difference between the numbered steps and the paragraphs that follow in this way: In the numbered steps, you’re providing action-oriented information so that readers can quickly glean what they’re supposed to do. For the stuff that comes underneath the numbered steps, you’re providing commentary and advice about how the program is behaving and what kind of choices the reader might want to make.

2. Then you go on to the next number and give the next step.

We rarely, if ever, have a step that says simply, “Click OK.”

## Cross-references

It’s a pet peeve of ours when a computer book says, “See Chapter 23 for details.” Fine, but *where?* Why should the thousands of readers waste their time flipping for something, when the publisher could have taken an extra day to put in page-number references?

As you’re writing, then, please put placeholders for the xreferences, like this: *If the blivet tool doesn’t work, try flooping it (page xx).*

## The Inside Back Cover: The Missing CD

The books don’t come with a CD-ROM. Instead, on the inside back cover of each book is a life-size, realistic drawing (or photo) of a CD-ROM envelope—titled “Mac OS X (or whatever): the Missing CD-ROM.” The graphic then points readers to the page on our Web site where they can find links and downloads to all the programs and other goodies you discuss in the book.

What this means is that, as you write, you can go nuts mentioning useful shareware, freeware, scripts, add-ons, practice files, and so on. Every time you do so, simply refer people to [www.missingmanuals.com](http://www.missingmanuals.com) so they can get the downloads.

When your book is in production, we’ll set up a special Web page for your Missing Manual, with each piece of software neatly listed by chapter, exactly as it occurs in your book. Keep in mind that we’ll ask you for all the URLs and/or downloads you’ve mentioned, so you please keep a list as you go.

## Missing Manual Figures

We’ve put a lot of thought into the way graphics look in the Missing Manual series, and a little setup on your part is critical.

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Note: In the final book, a *figure* consists of a picture or two or three and a caption. The pictures themselves are almost always screenshots, but they can also be photos or drawings. Important takeaway: in our world, figures and screenshots are different things. In other words, the figure is the overall box; the screenshot/photo/drawing is the image that's inside the box.

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The first thing to know is *when* to add a figure. Here's the rule of thumb: add them early and often. We like a lot of figures in the Missing Manuals because they add visual interest to our pages, but more important, because they help readers understand what we're talking about in the text. And we include beefy captions with each screenshot—which gives us a good opportunity to explain a point in detail.

Whenever you refer to something a reader can see onscreen—be it a window, a dialog box, an icon, a funky cursor, or something else altogether—ask yourself if readers could more easily find the item themselves (or learn how to use it) if you showed them a picture (and gave an explanation). Similarly, when you're talking about hardware, consider photos for all the components you discuss.

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Tip: For more ideas on when to add figures, see existing Missing Manuals.

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Here's another guideline for figures: If you've written two pages and you haven't added a screenshot, you need one. In general, we look for approximately two figures for every three pages of Word text.

One final word: whenever possible, please include only one screenshot per figure. If you've got a figure that would *really* benefit from multiple screenshots (e.g. a side-by-side comparison), that's fine. But only include multiple screenshots if breaking them up into different figures would be a serious drag on the reader.

The rest of this section explains how the final figures should look and how to go about capturing screenshots to get the right effects. At the end is a subsection that pulls it all together and explains how to insert a figure in a chapter, give our production crew directions for working with the figure file, and add a caption.

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Note: Unless you and your editor work out a different arrangement, we expect to receive the figures as you turn in the text for each chapter. Please save all the figures for a chapter in one folder.

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## Cropping and Fading

If a screenshot shows a *whole* window or dialog box, you don't need to do anything else. (Veteran Missing Manual authors will note that we *used* to add drop shadows; no more.)

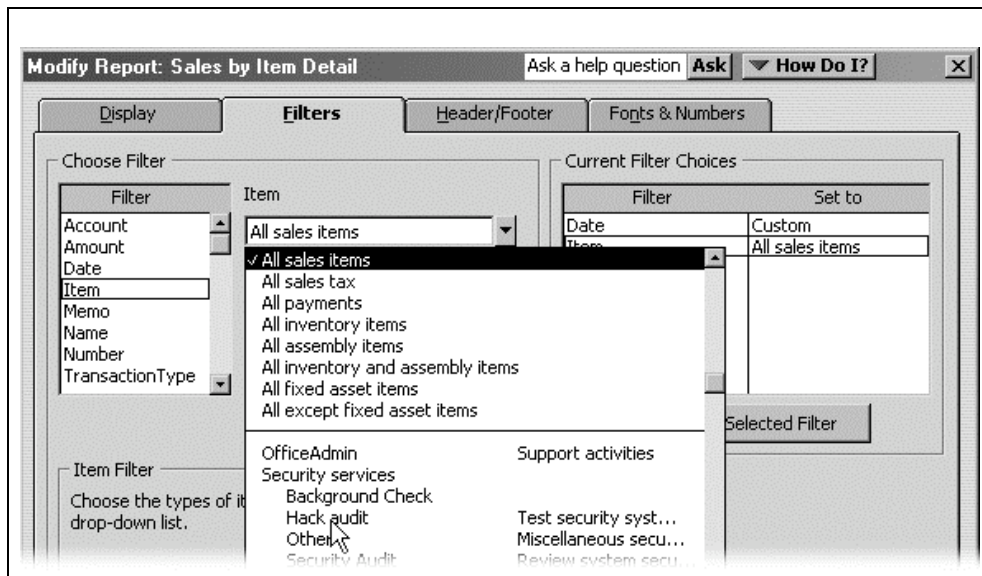
If, on the other hand, you've *cropped* a screenshot—that is, if you've cut away superfluous parts of the object you're shooting—the screenshot needs fades along the cropped edge or edges, as shown in Figure 2.

Why would you crop a screenshot? **This is important:** Screenshots of a large area (like a whole browser window) generally don't reproduce well, because we have to shrink them so much to fit in the book. But cropped screenshots work really well. So

if a screenshot is really about a *portion* of a window, you should crop it to focus on the important stuff.

For example, if the figure is all about a desktop icon, show enough of the desktop so readers can see where the icon lives. If you show the icon alone readers won't know where to find it, and if you show the whole desktop, the icon will be lost in the figure. Similarly, if you're dealing with a menu that's really tall, and all we care about is the top part, crop away the bottom. Looks really nice in print.

*Almost always* when you crop a screenshot, you need to leave in at least one edge of the original window—often the top edge, though that can vary. Without a window edge to guide them, readers will probably have a hard time understanding right away what it is you're showing them.



*Figure #-1. The author cropped this window on the bottom to draw readers' focus to the menu she was discussing—rather than distract them with all the other gunk below it. Because she cropped the screenshot along the bottom edge, we faded that edge to show readers that they're seeing only a partial window.*

## Taking the Screenshots

If you're capturing on the Macintosh, you should use Snapz Pro X (for Mac OS X) ([www.ambrosiasw.com](http://www.ambrosiasw.com)). With a single click, it can capture virtually anything and save it into any format you like, automatically converting to grays in the process. For Windows, the equivalent is SnagIt ([www.techsmith.com](http://www.techsmith.com)).

Here are the actual specs for the screenshots:

- Please shoot **fictional documents** (*not* documents about yourself or your projects; humor is always good).
- We need **grayscale TIFFs**, with a resolution of **72 dpi** (*not* the Windows standard 96 dpi; ask if you need help with the conversion).

- Also, please make sure the **cursor** is showing whenever the screenshot shows a menu pulled down or a button being clicked. If you're not showing any action, please make sure the cursor doesn't appear in your figure (both Snapz and SnagIt let you turn off the cursor).
- Please **crop** the shots to the right size and shape as discussed above.
- When you take a cropped screenshot, **be sure to leave us enough margin** around the key area, so we have some material to fade out.

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Note: If you're a Photoshop fanatic, and you want to doctor your own screenshots with appropriate fades, let us know and we'll give you the specs. Otherwise, we'll work with your raw screenshots and add that stuff ourselves.

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## Naming the Screenshots

Please name—rather than number—your screenshots, and don't use spaces in the filenames. Underscores work (*open\_here.tif*) as do camel caps (*OpenHere.tif*). If we move the figs around or insert new ones, as we often do in editing, it's easier if the figure files themselves have names rather than numbers. Then the text numbering and the figure numbering don't get off kilter, which can be confusing. Another benefit is that if we ask you to reshoot something, you can call it, say, *dialog\_box2* to keep things clear.

## Callouts

If you want to have *callouts*—circles, arrows, or any other markings—on a screenshot, our production crew can handle this for you. But they need the original screenshot and they need to know exactly what you want. The best bet is to either draw callouts by hand on a printout and then mail or fax that to our production team, or use a graphics program to add the callouts to a second copy of the image and then include that in your figure folder (you might want to save this second copy as a JPEG so it's not as beefy as the TIFF we'll use for printing). In addition, you need to add a note to your FigureHolder box telling production to add the callouts; “Inserting Figures and Captions in Word” tells you how.

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Note: If you're fancy, you can add callouts yourself in Freehand or Illustrator. (The font for labels within a diagram is Formata Light, 8 point; lines are .5 points. we can provide a template that's preset to the maximum width, with the fonts and line thicknesses pre-selected.) Save these as an EPS file, and turn it in alongside the TIFF that it's based on.

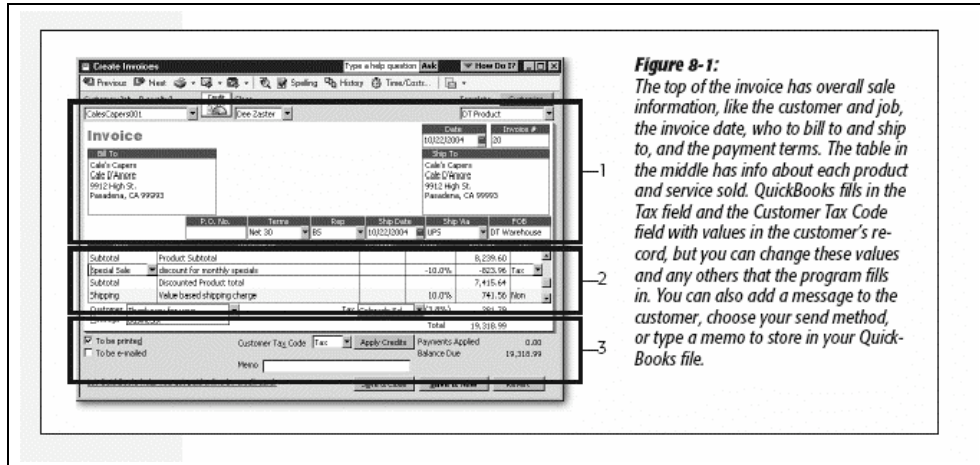
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Figure 3 shows you an example of callouts.

## Captions

We're doing kind of a cool thing with captions. Because the interior design of the book gives you space next to the screenshots, we have room to make the captions longer than the usual one-sentence blurb. As a result, a caption can (and should) be a tiny topic unto itself, like a note or tip. In most cases, it should be two or three sentences long—about the size of the screenshots in the book. Figure 3 shows you how it works.

Captions are a great way to cram more info into an otherwise underutilized space; whenever you can say, in the body, “This technique is shown in Figure 5-12,” you should squirm delightedly in your desk chair at your achievement. If you can avoid writing captions that restate what the body already said, in other words, you’ve done it right.

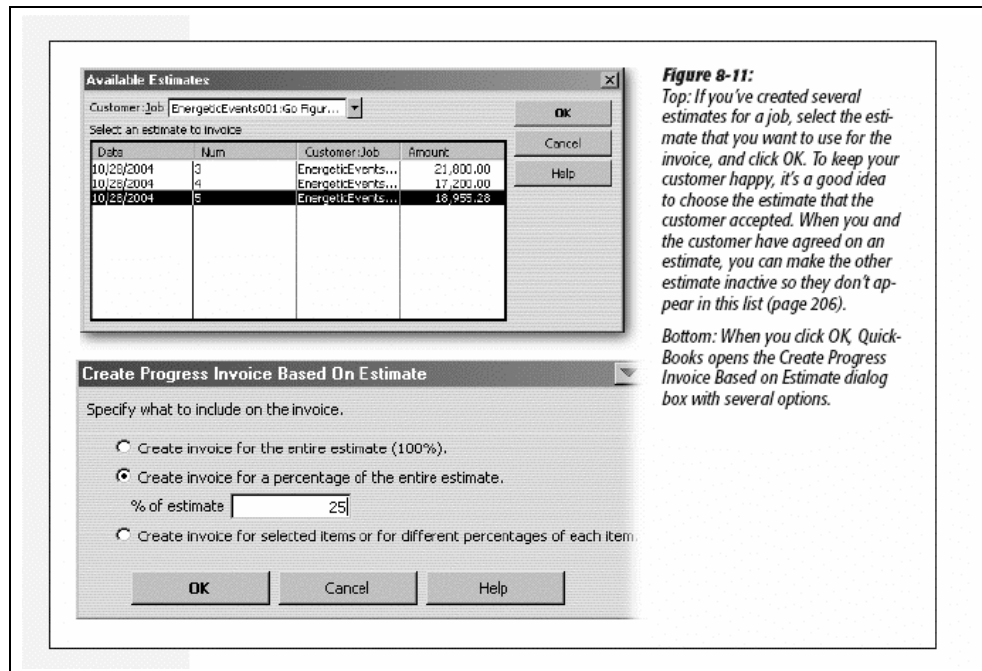


*Figure #-2. Here, you can see the way captions fit next to screenshots (you can also see one way you can have callouts appear). If your screenshot is pretty small—say, just a short toolbar—you want a short caption to fit in the figure box. For taller screenshots, you have a little more room to play with.*

## Handling Two or More Screenshots in a Figure

Before-and-after shots can tell a lot, so we do let you put more than one screenshot in a figure box, as in Figure 3. (As mentioned previously though, use multiple screenshots in a fig only when truly necessary.) Send the screenshots as separate TIFFs, but let production know that they should set these files together in one figure (see “Inserting Figure Holders and Captions in Word,” below, to learn how to tell production what you want).

Of course, multiple shots in one figure can take up a lot of room. So if you can tell beforehand that the screenshots will look best (and will fit) side by side, please ask production to set them left/right. Otherwise, specify top/bottom. If you can’t tell, make a guess, and if it looks awful, we’ll correct the placement during layout.



*Figure #-3. For a figure with more than one screenshot, you need a multipart caption. “Inserting Figures and Captions in Word,” below, tells you how to set this up.*

## Introducing the Figure in the Text

We always introduce figures with a cross-reference in the text *before* the figure. So make sure that if you've got a figure, you've mentioned it somewhere in the text before the figure.

## Inserting Figures and Captions in Word

On Planet Missing Manual, we don't put the screenshots *themselves* in the Word files. Instead, we put in a placeholder—called a FigureHolder box (which is the name of the Word style we use)—to tell our production team the name of the file, plus instructions for any effects or callouts to add. We put the caption in right after the placeholder. Here's the procedure to follow:

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**Note:** In the final book, your figures will appear *close* to the spots you place them in your chapters, but they won't always be in the exact spots.

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1. At the point where you want the figure to appear, make sure you're at a new paragraph and then add a FigureHolder box.

You can add a FigureHolder box two ways.

If you've already captured the screenshot, or if you want to browse your folders to get the exact figure name (which is what you need), head to the Missing Manual toolbar and then choose Figure w/Caption (if you don't see the MM toolbar, choose

View → Toolbars → Missing Manual). Word opens the Insert Picture dialog box, which lets you navigate through your folders to the figure file. When you double-click the file, Word inserts a FigureHolder box with the name of your figure file and then places a numbered caption immediately below it.

If you haven't already captured the screenshot, or if you know the exact figure name and you don't like navigating through folder windows, you can add a FigureHolder box manually and then type in the file name. Just head to the ORAStyles menu and choose Figures → FigureHolder (if you don't see the ORAStyles menu, choose View → Toolbars → ORAMenus). You can also head to Word's drop-down list of styles (which includes the O'Reilly styles when you're using our template) and choose FigureHolder (if you don't see a toolbar with the list of styles, choose View → Toolbars → Formatting). Whichever toolbar you use, when you choose FigureHolder, Word adds a blank FigureHolder box to your chapter. Type in the figure name.

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Note: If your figure includes more than one screenshot, you need to type in the additional file names. See the second FigureHolder below for an example of what this arrangement would look like.

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2. In the FigureHolder box, after the file name, type any instructions to production.

If you need fades (because you've cropped a figure), indicated which edges need fading, like "fade left and top."

If you've got more than one screenshot in a figure, give directions for both. And please tell production which figure should be top and bottom or left and right.

For a single screenshot, your FigureHolder should look something like this:

formatting\_toolbar.tif (fade bottom and right)

For a figure with more than one screenshot, your FigureHolder should look something like this:

Top: open\_dialog.tif. Bottom: save\_dialog.tif (fade right)

Or:

Left: open\_dialog.tif. Right: save\_dialog.tif

If you have callouts, please give directions that include the original file name and where production can find your mockup, like this:

Save\_as.tif; callouts shown in save\_as\_callouts.tif

Or:

Save\_as; please add callouts like those on faxed document, called "save\_as\_callouts"

3. Add the caption style.

If you added a FigureHolder box *with* a blank caption, you can just start typing over where it says "Figure Caption Text Goes Here." If you added a FigureHolder box without a caption, now's the time to add the caption style. When you're done typing

in the Figure Holder box, press Return, and then head to the MM toolbar and choose Insert Caption → Figure Caption (if you don't see the MM toolbar, choose View → Toolbars → Missing Manual).

Word adds a properly styled caption paragraph, beginning with the label *Figure 1-1* and automatically numbered thereafter.

4. Type your caption text.

As explained above, the caption should cover something not already described in the body text—think of it as a note, tip, or further explanation. In addition, it should more or less fit next to the figure. In most cases, that means it should be somewhere in the neighborhood of three sentences.

If your figure has more than one screenshot, then your caption needs more than one paragraph, as you can see in Figure 3. Most of the time the caption format should go like this:

*Top: Here's some info about the top figure.*

*Bottom: Here's some info about the bottom figure.*

To create a second paragraph within a caption, at the end of your first graf, add a hard return (press Enter, *not* Shift+Enter), which puts you at the body text level. To style the next graf in the caption style but without a new fig number, just head to the drop-down list of ORAStyles and then choose Figures → FigureTitle (Alt+F,T on a PC). Or you can choose the same style from the native toolbar list of styles.

Voila. A caption-styled graf with no new number.

## Style Guidelines

We've got copy editors to make sure every Missing Manual conforms to our house conventions (see the "Pogue Press Style Guide" for a complete list). But we do expect you to adhere to a few points. There are two reasons we ask you to do these things:

- **Good writing.** Certain of our stylistic conventions, like active voice rather than passive, promote better writing. Of course, some of our style guidelines are subjective and reflect our collective editorial taste. But our guiding principle is to make the reader feel like she's being counseled by a technically inclined friend and not a marketing-brainwashed, computer-programmed machine.

Not to get sanctimonious or anything, but we actually believe that there's an ethical dimension to clear writing: it helps people, in this age of techno-everything, figure out how to use all the programs and gadgets in their life.

We also think good writing helps sell books, because it means we're doing the hard work of clearly explaining things rather than forcing the reader to sort out what we're saying. We really take seriously the obligation of providing good, clear writing.

And that means we feel really passionately about things like writing in the active voice, providing clear antecedents, and a host of other good writing practices described below.

- **Timing.** When a book comes in needing a heavy copy edit, it takes us longer to get through the material, and it takes a copy editor longer to get through it, both

of which can *substantially* affect the time it takes to get your book to market—where it can start earning money.

To help meet our expectations for good writing and to avoid the wrath of copy editors, follow these key style guidelines:

- **Don't use first person.** Missing Manuals use second-person voice, referring constantly to the reader. Resist the urge to say, “I recommend using bcc when blasting the boss,” or “We’ve found that opening 2,542 documents at once is a mistake; 2,541 is the limit.” Instead, try “It’s a good idea to use bcc when blasting the boss because…” or “Word limits you to 2,541 open documents, and unfortunately, there’s no workaround.”
- **Do use active voice.** The passive voice is for lazy writers and government officials who want to avoid blame (“Mistakes were made.”). Use the active voice to help your readers clearly understand who’s doing what: “Excel gives you three quick ways to import graphics into your spreadsheet.”
- **Set software actions in the present tense.** We want Missing Manuals to read as if you’re standing over the reader’s shoulder, guiding her through a series of steps. Software actions thus happen as you go. So instead of “The icon will blink,” try “The icon blinks.” Save future tense for things that will happen later.
- **Write as precisely as possible.** Avoid sentences that start “There are” as in, “There are four separate areas that make up…” Instead, try something like “Four separate areas make up a Keynote screen.” Or “Keynote has four separate areas that make up its screen.” You get the idea.
- **Show clear cause and effect.** When you want to explain how a program will respond to an action on the reader’s part, avoid: “Click OK and Word reformats the document.” Instead go for: “If you click the OK, then Word reformats the document.” Or “When you click OK, Word reformats the document.” Also, when you have a list of actions within a sentence, use “and then” to introduce your final step. If you have just “and,” readers might wonder whether they should be performing two actions simultaneously. But if you have just “then,” you’ve committed a grammo because series of actions needs a conjunction to link the last one to the rest of the sentence, and “then” is not a conjunction.
- **Show readers the right order of events.** When explaining how to do something, tell readers *where* they should be before telling them *what* they should do. For example: “In the Open dialog box, select the file…” (Not, “Select the file in the Open dialog box.”)
- **Put “only” in its place.** Most of the time, “only” should appear *after* the verb—later than you probably think—for clarity. The idea here is that you want “only” to modify the right thing, which is usually the subject or object of a sentence, but not the verb. When you place “only” before the verb, it modifies the verb. For example, “It only works sometimes” could also mean “Sometimes, it plays.” Better to say, “It works only sometimes.”
- **Avoid the mystery antecedent.** Please refrain from using “this” and “these” without specifying this or these *what*. Pronouns that lack antecedents require readers to work extra-hard to figure out what you’re referring to. Thus, “This is boring” should be “This sentence is boring.”
- **Fear jargon.** Terms like “functionality” and “price point” are verbose and often vague. We’re trying to write in a conversational style and most people (save for

hard-core geeks and marketing types) never use words like these when talking about how a program works. Instead, use words like “features” and “price.” Similarly, favor “program” over “application.”

- **Fear programmer jargon.** Civilians really never say “dialog”; they say “dialog box.”
- **Use contractions whenever possible.** They’re more conversational.
- **Refer to the reader as you—never as “the user.”** Users are the clients of another industry altogether.
- **Click things.** Instead of “click on it,” simply say “click it.” The pronoun is unnecessary.
- **Drag things.** No need to say “click and drag” because dragging already requires clicking.

And here are a handful of related rules:

- **Bullets.** This list shows you our most common style for bulleted lists. The first term or sentence should be bolded and followed by a period, and then the following info is part of the same paragraph.

If you need an additional paragraph under that bullet point, use the ListBullet... style (or, on the O’Reilly SmartStyler, click the List Continue button; if you don’t see the SmartStyler, choose View → Toolbars → O’Reilly SmartStyler).

- **URLs.** Skip the *http://*, which all current Web browsers insert automatically. Exception: Sites that don’t use *www* at the beginning. In that case, put the *http* part, to let the reader know we didn’t just screw up. (So, for example: [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) and <http://slashdot.org>.) In both cases, put the URL in the template’s Hyperlink style (ORASyles→Inline Styles→Hyperlink). If you’ve got Word configured to automatically create hyperlinks when you type in a Web address (you’ll know if your URLs all turn blue) then you don’t need to bother with the Hyperlink style.
- **Colons.** Please cap the first letter after the colon *if* it begins a complete sentence. Do this for a very good reason: Our copy editor says so.
- **Serial commas.** In a list, use a comma after the second-to-last item. That would be great, convenient, and helpful.
- **No Latin stuff.** Instead of “etc.,” please use “and so on.” Instead of “e.g.,” use “for example” or “for instance.”
- **Capping.** Please capitalize words that refer to features that are specific to the program. Use lower case for generic objects that you might find anywhere on a PC. So it’s the Button bar, the Print dialog box, the Investing toolbar, and so on.
- **Onscreen elements.** Please use just caps, not quotes, italics, bold, or anything else when you’re naming an onscreen element. You might write, for example, “The Send to Back command works like this.” The exception: When the onscreen wording isn’t capitalized, which would make it hard to distinguish from your own prose. For example, say you’re writing about a button that’s labeled *Don’t select object until rendered*. What you’d do, to make clear that the entire phrase is part of the program, is use quotes, like this:

Click “Don’t select object until rendered” only if you’re over 40.

- **Menus.** Pull-down menus are the ones at the top of a screen or window (usually in Windows); pop-up menus are the ones on Web pages and in dialog boxes.
- **Heading length.** This one is a technical quirk, but when you have a level 1 header, it can't be more than about 40 characters, or our production crew goes into conniptions.

## Menu and Folder Conventions

To save space, all Missing Manual titles express submenus like this: “Choose File→New→New Folder” or “Choose File→Label→Essential.”

Please use the same kind of notation for indicating a nested folder, beginning (on the Mac) with the first folder on the root level of the hard drive or (on Windows) with My Computer. For example: “Open System Folder→Preferences→Photoshop Preferences” or “Open My Computer→C drive→Windows→Program Files.”

## The Secret to Writing Great Missing Manuals

Read Missing Manuals. We're not trying to boost our sales here (in fact, we'll send you our books if you don't already have them). But the fact is, the easiest and best way to learn how to write in the Missing Manual style is to read through one or two of them. All these guidelines can sound mighty theoretical, but once you get the style in your blood, it's amazing how quick—and fun—you'll find these books to write.

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