

How to Create a Software User Manual

Using Abracadabra Instant Manual

This document describes how to create a software user manual, using Abracadabra Instant Manual.

1) Starting the Manual

Tip: download *Instant Manual* and practice the steps of [how to create a software user manual...](#)

When you start Instant Manual, it will create a new, blank manual to add text and screenshots to. Click the red record button on the tool bar. Instant Manual will hide itself and appear as an icon in the task bar.

Begin performing the task you want to create a software user manual for.

2) Taking Screenshots

As you work, take a screenshot of the software at each significant point to show the user how to perform the task. The end user experience level dictates what screenshots to take. For less a less experienced user, e.g. a first-year university student, create a screenshot for each step of the task, which shows the state of the software at that point. Create instructions that focus on specific actions, e.g. “click the Save button”. For experienced users, create screenshots of each important screen, and add instructions for how to use the entire screen.

Because a user will gain experience as they use the software, you may need to create a user manual at a different level of complexity for less frequently used parts of the software.

To take a screenshot, press one of the screen capture keys - **Print Screen** to capture the entire screen, **Scroll Lock** to capture the active window, and **Pause / Break** to capture just the window beneath the mouse pointer. When in doubt, it is best to use the **Print Screen** key, as any screen shot can be trimmed once taken.

Tip: Read how to [set hot key combinations in the Online Help...](#)

The screenshot editor will appear and prompt you to enter a caption for the screenshot. This is optional, but entering instructions for this step now will help you organise your thoughts. You can check the accuracy of the caption by toggling between the task you are performing and Instant Manual.

It is worth the time to optimise the image settings for the screenshot. If the document will be posted on a website, the page will load faster by using a Jpeg image, and decreasing the quality level of the image.

If you are creating a manual for full color printing, it's best to use a bitmap format image, and the highest color setting so that no quality is lost. If the manual is for black and white printing, switch to the Jpeg format, and use the Greyscale option.

3) Formatting the document

Once you've captured all the steps of the task, you can format the document in a number of ways:

1. Delete, move, or change text.
2. Deleted or resize images.
3. Set the text color by selecting it with the mouse pointer and clicking the font color control.
4. Set the background color using the ***File | Properties*** menu.

Tip: [Read more about formatting the document in the Online Help...](#)

For online documents, you should set the page title using the ***File | Properties*** menu.

For printing the document, import it into a word processor such as Microsoft Word. Because HTML does not support the concept of pagination, Instant Manual cannot print the document. With a word processor, you can set page breaks, and add page numbering.