The Task:
Technical writer assigned to create user guide & in-context help for new software application

Learn basics about product:
- What is it?
- Why is it needed?
- What does it do?
- Who is the audience?

Decisions to make:
Format for delivery - just electronic, just print, or both
Size
Software tools to use for: guide, in-context help, screen captures, graphics

Learn more about product and take notes:
How does it work?
What makes it break?
Hack away at the alpha version of product!

Sources of information:
- People:
  - Developers
  - Product designers
  - Marketing
- Documents:
  - Product specs or
  - Design documents
- Research about product & users
- Prototypes, if available

Get input from:
- Users
- Developers
- Product designers
- Anyone who finds errors!

Other People providing input:
- Developers
- Product designers
- Marketing

When application is close to ready for release and distribution:
- Upload electronic guide to accompany product
- Upload in-context help

Start list of corrections and enhancement ideas in prep for next release and any needed errata notices

Begin planning for next release

Get input from:
- Developers
- Product designers
- Marketing

Start list of corrections and enhancement ideas in prep for next release and any needed errata notices

Outside input sources

Repeat or return to as needed

May need help from developers

Sources of information:
- Interviews, walkthrus from developers
- Get access to alpha versions of software ASAP

Documents:
- Product specs or
- Design documents
- General research on industry served, needs, skills,
Create a draft outline for the documents (subject to change!)

Develop consistent, clearly-defined conventions for items such as keystrokes, user input, menus

Sources of information:
Continue to use previous sources and get product updates as frequently as possible

Write documents
Create and enhance screenshots and graphics to help user visualization
Create a glossary of terms users won’t know

Use a graphic illustrator as needed
Get access to "typical" users to find out what they know/don’t know, how they will use product
Continue getting product updates

Offer input to developers to improve user interface
(Good tech writers always find ways to improve the user interface!)

Other people to deal with:
- printer
- shipping
- marketing

Sources of information:
- written reviews
- review meetings, if held
- changes to product as it is being finalized

Make corrections and enhancement to drafts

Complete drafts.
Send section or complete document drafts to developers, designers, tech support, marketing people to review
Whenever possible, get "real users" to try out and review.

If creating a printed guide:
- get it ready to send to the printer
- Monitor printing, binding process, get and correct proofs
- Arrange where to send printed guides when complete

Other people to deal with:

NOTE: THIS FLOW CHART ASSUMES ONE WRITER. IN THE CASE OF A MAJOR PRODUCT THE "WRITER" MIGHT BE MULTIPLE WRITERS.

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6-25-13