How-to

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A how-to is an informal, often short, description of how to accomplish a specific task. A how-to is usually meant to help non-experts, may leave out details that are only important to experts, and may also be greatly simplified from an overall discussion of the topic.

One of the earliest how-to books was published in 1569 by Thomas Wight and entitled, *A booke ohrijf the arte and maner, how to plant and graffe all sortes of trees: With divers other new practise, by one of the Abbey of Saint Vincent in Fraunce* by Leonard Mascall.

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Modern examples

In the modern era How-to can range from brief directions that aid in performing a task with which one is unfamiliar to full-length books, generally intended to assist or inspire life-changing methods and attitudes. They occur in the "self-help" genre, business books, and the hobby industry.

Perhaps the best known full-length book in the genre is *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, written by Dale Carnegie in 1936.
A similar concept can be seen in many of the [topic] *For Dummies* series of tutorials and also in many other introductory surveys entitled with the suffix "101" (based on academic numberings of entry-level courses).

**History**

How-to manuals have existed in some form for as long as people have spoken to each other. Before writing, they took the form of instruction in oral tradition. The older generation taught the younger through proverbs and parables, and when languages became written, these were written down.

When writing was invented and people learned to read, people began writing down their oral teaching traditions. This was the birth of the how-to manual. Eventually, the genre broadened to include instructions for more than just common life skills. Authors like Plato developed books like *The Republic*, which is, arguably, a how-to manual about forming the perfect society. Later, Ovid wrote the "Ars Amatoria," which describes in a mock-didactic form how to seduce women. The Renaissance, with the rise of individualism and the advent of printed books, saw texts like Machiavelli's *The Prince* that could be considered "how-to" books of a kind. Eventually, how-to manuals broadened to the form that we see commonly today: texts giving instructions for various pursuits, like drawing, painting, swimming, and other hobbies. Now, these manuals are both printed and on the internet, and are easily accessed by everyone.

**Usage in the world of computers**

It is common practice to write the phrase as "HOWTO" in the open-source community.[1] This is consistent with the traditional naming scheme for technical documentation, such as FAQ and README. Another possible reason is that this makes it easier to find a how-to in search engines like Google as searching with the words "to" and "how" does not necessarily deliver relevant search results.[2]
How-tos have a long history as a way of sharing knowledge on the Internet, but are less successful than FAQs, manuals, recipes and guides.[3]

In the beginning, most how-tos on the Internet were the result of a complex process in which an author wrote a how-to for potential readers. After 2001, user added content played a more and more important role on the internet in a trend that is widely referred to as Web 2.0. This had a profound impact on the way in which how-tos are generated on the internet, as the readers and users were able to add to and improve the on-line content.

See also

- Documentation
- FAQ
- Imperative mood
- Knowledge base
- Methods of obtaining knowledge
- Procedural knowledge, a discussion of what sort of knowledge is imparted, and how far it can be imparted, in how-tos.
- Tutorial
- User guide
- Walkthrough (disambiguation)
- WikiHow
- Do it yourself

[4]

References

1. List of Linux HowTos (http://tldp.org/HOWTO/HOWTO-INDEX/howtos.html), tldp.org
2. As of 2009 A Google search for "How To" results in a comprehensive list of HowTo sites. It seems this has changed throughout the years. In the 1990s and early years of 2000, it was common for search engines to ignore these words, and

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How-to
even to notify the user that these words are too common for giving a comprehensive result. Currently, the Google features web page (https://www.google.com/help/features.html) says: Google ignores common words and characters such as where, the, how, and other digits and letters that slow down your search without improving the results. If a common word is essential to getting the results you want, you can make sure we pay attention to it by putting a "+" sign in front of it.

3. A search on Google for "howto faq" or for "faq howto" results in FAQs with HowTo instructions in them, but never to a single HowTo page. This is probably because FAQ pages are usually broader in scope, and therefore more commonly used.

4. Learn How To Do Everyhting (http://www.howtodoanything.org)


Categories: How-to | Procedural knowledge | Technical communication | Skills | DIY culture | Do it yourself

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