Introducing topics

▶ **Focus on what the reader does, not on parts of the system.**

▶ **Provide context—say why and when before elaborating on how and where.**

▶ **Relate the first sentence to the heading, but don't echo the heading.**

You can get your readers' attention and best make your point by focusing on what they can do with the computer, not on what a command or panel does. Address readers at the beginning of the discussion, and say what they most want to know—what they can do, why, and *then* how. For example:

Instead of   The Print command opens the Print panel. This panel has options for selecting a printer, a range of pages, and the number of copies to print.

Try this   When you're ready to print a file, you select a printer, the pages you want to print, and the number of copies. You make these choices with the Print panel.

When you do discuss the graphical interface, be direct, not obscure. Instead of describing what something is or what it looks like, just say what it does and why the reader should care.

Instead of   The main way to tell an application what to do is to choose a *command* from a *menu*. A command is an item in a menu that describes an action the application can take. Sometimes it names a panel or another menu, called a *submenu*, that the application can open.

Try this   You use *commands* to tell an application what to do. Commands appear in *menus*. Sometimes commands perform actions directly. Sometimes they open a panel or a *submenu*.

If you're describing a concept, tell readers how the concept relates to them. Under the heading *The File System*, for example:

Instead of   The file system is divided into files and folders. Files contain information such as documents, and folders contain other files.

Try this   Your computer keeps information in files and folders. A file might be an article you write or an illustration. A folder can contain other files. The files and folders make up the computer's file system.

Make sure that the first sentence under a heading has an obvious connection with the heading. Don't write an introduction that defers bringing up the subject in the heading until the second paragraph.

Nor should you echo the heading in the first sentence of a topic. For example, don't begin with, *This chapter describes the steps for installing the source product* under the heading, *Installing the Source Product*. Add information, such as when or how you install the product.

You can include command and button descriptions in a Reference section at the end of your book. For information, see Chapter 7, "Preparing Front and Back Matter."