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04.06: Special Notes

David McMurrey
hcxres@io.com

Tamara Powell
Kennesaw State University, tpowel25@kennesaw.edu

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Special Notices

David McMurrey and Tamara Powell

Chapter Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, readers will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the four most common types of special notices.
2. Explain and apply the appropriate use for each type of special notice.
3. Explain and apply standard format guidelines for each type of special notice.

Special Notices

Special notices are an important feature of professional technical writing: they highlight special information readers need to know to understand what they are reading, to accomplish what they want to do, to prevent damage to equipment, and to keep from hurting themselves or others.

Your task in this section is to learn the different types of special notices, their uses, and formats.

"Notices alert readers to the possibility of error, damage, or injury. They can also provide extra emphasis."

Guidelines for Specific Types of Notices

In this section, and in this course, you use a specific style of notices. If you want to use a different style, get with your instructor. Otherwise, follow these guidelines in planning and designing special notices—they are your "specs"!

1. Use special notices to emphasize key points or warn or caution readers about damage or injury.
2. Be careful to use the types of special notices precisely for their defined purposes. Use the four types of special notices in the following ways:
 - Note**—To emphasize points or remind readers of something, or to indicate minor problems in the outcome of what they are doing.
 - Warning**—To warn readers about the possibility of minor injury to themselves or others.
 - Caution**—To warn readers about possible damage to equipment or data or about potential problems in the outcome of what they are doing.
 - Danger**—To warn readers about the possibility of serious or fatal injury to themselves or others.

Deciding on which type of notice to use is not an exact science. Don't use a danger notice when a warning is more appropriate (the same as "crying wolf"). Also, use notices in a consistent way throughout a report. Do *not* create your own notices, such as putting "Important" in place of "Warning."

3. Place special notices at the point in text where they are needed. For example, place a caution or danger notice before discussing a step in which readers might hurt themselves.
4. Avoid having too many special notices at any one point in the text. Otherwise, the effectiveness of their special format will be lost. (If you have too many, combine them.)
5. Explain the consequences of not paying attention to the notice. State what will happen if the reader does not heed the notice.
6. Avoid all-caps for the text of any special notice. The examples in this section use bold or italics.

Note: Take a look around your garage or kitchen, and look at the special notices you see on products. You will see some variation, but these are likely to be dependent on specific industry standards.



Activity

Take pictures of the special notices around you and share them on the Padlet, below. Please remember that everything you share on the Padlet is public.

Access the Padlet

Format for Special Notices

Use the following for specific details on the capitalization, typography (bold, underlining, different fonts, different types sizes), and spacing for each type of special notice.

Note

Use the following format for simple notes:

1. Type the word "Note" followed by a colon. (Although the following examples use bold, consider using italics instead to prevent visual confusion with headings.)
2. Begin typing the text of the note one space after the colon. (But don't put the text of the note in bold or italics.)
3. Single space within the text of the note; skip one line above and below the note.
4. Start run-over lines on the regular left margin.
5. Align the note with the text to which it refers (as illustrated in the second example).

Testing the Drive

To test your new drive by reading a data CD:

1. Open the drive tray and place a CD on the tray.
2. Close the drive and wait a moment for the drive and CD to spin.
3. Click **My Computer** on your Windows desktop to view the available drives. You should see your new drive and drive letter.
4. Click the new drive to access the files on the CD.

Note: The drive letter you see as your new drive may vary depending on the number of hard drives installed on your system.

Notice that an infinitive phrase is used as a lead-in to the list (legal!).

Since this note pertains to the entire task, it is not indented the way the note in the next example is.

SEO Note Settings

To make general settings before you start working with SEO Note:

1. Open **Settings > Settings** from the menu. The General tab opens.
2. Define the standard format for your new notes: HTML, text, or RTF (Rich Text Format).

Note: Because most word processors are able to read and write RTF documents, select **RTF** as standard note format. It allows you to insert html formatted text, web links and plain text.

3. Enable the three Auto save options. Your notes will automatically be saved when you switch to another application, minimize the window, or exit the application.
4. Enable **Start with Windows** if you want SEO Note to always start with Windows.

Notice that an infinitive phrase is used as a lead-in to the list (legal!).

Notice that this note is indented to the text of the parent item (a numbered-list item).

Notes

Use the following format for multiple notes:

1. Use this format when you have so many notes that they would be distracting to present individually.
2. Type the word "Notes" followed by a colon. Italicize the word "Notes," if possible.
3. Use a numbered list for the individual notes; in it, follow the rules for numbered lists. (Do not use bold or italics for the individual notes.)
4. Align the notes with the text to which they refer; skip the equivalent of one line above and below the notes.

5. Place the stage monitors center stage and facing the violinist.

6. Set up your microphones and microphone stands in front of the monitors where the vocalists will be standing.

Notes:

1. Avoid problems with the feedback by ensuring the vocalist is not placed in front of the speakers.
2. Consider the length of your microphone cables and the location of your electrical outlets in the room.

This list and the multiple notes occur at the end of a section entitled "Building the Stage."

This multiple note uses numbered-list format, which for many goes against the rule about using numbered lists. Some prefer to use bullets.

Always make sure your lists are parallel.

Warning

Use the following format for warnings:

1. Type the word "Warning," italicize it, and follow it with a colon.
2. Either tab to beginning of the text of the warning, or use the hanging-indent format (which is much better). Try for 0.25 to 0.5 inches of space between the end of the warning label and the beginning of the text.
3. Use regular body font for the text of the warning notice (no bold, no italics, no all-caps, no color).
4. Align the warning notice with the text it refers to.
5. Skip the equivalent of one line above and below the warning notice.

Prepare for New Brake Shoes. To prepare the rear wheel assembly for the new brake shoes, perform the following tasks:

Warning: Wear a dust mask when cleaning brake components. Brake dust may contain hazardous materials and should not be inhaled.

1. Clean dirt and brake dust from backing plate and brake parts with aerosol brake cleaner.
2. Apply grease to the six flat friction points where the brake shoes touch the backing plate.

Pay attention to these formatting details:

- The notice only italicizes the word "Warning."
- The notice uses the "hanging head" style.
- The notice is indented to the text of the preceding text.

Caution

Use the following format for caution notices:

1. Type the word "Caution," follow it with a colon, and bold both the label and the colon.
2. Skip one line and begin the text of the caution aligned with the start of the caution label.
3. Singlespace the text of the caution; skip one line above and below the notice.
4. Align the caution notice with the text it refers to (in the preceding, the warning notice occurs within a numbered list and is indented accordingly).

1. Pump the brake pedal until firm.
2. Check that the brake fluid level is between the maximum and minimum lines on the reservoir. Add or remove fluid accordingly.

Caution:

Keep brake fluid from getting on painted surfaces as it can cause damage to the paint.

3. Perform test drive.

Caution notice: Alerts people to problems with the procedure or damage to equipment

Format: notice the following:

- Only the word "Caution" is bold and is displayed on a line separate from the text of the notice.
- The notice is indented to the text of the preceding step.

Danger

Use the following format for danger notices:

1. Type the word "DANGER" in all-caps. (Underline it, or use bold.)
2. Align the danger notice with the text it refers to.
3. Singlespace the text of the danger notice; skip one line above and below the danger notice.
4. Use bold on the text of the danger notice if you have it (but never all-caps).
5. If you have graphics capability, draw a box around the danger notice (including the label).

Lower the Vehicle. To lower the vehicle, perform the following:

1. Jack up rear of car with a hydraulic jack on a solid part of frame, remove the jack stands, and lower the car to ground.

DANGER: Never work underneath a car that is only supported by a jack. Failure to support vehicle may result in death or severe injury if the vehicle falls from the jack.

2. Pump the brake pedal until firm.
3. Check that the brake fluid level is between the maximum and minimum lines on the reservoir. Add or remove fluid accordingly.

Danger notice: Some standards require that this type of notice *precede* the step in which the danger occurs.

Format: notice the following:

- The danger notice is enclosed within a box
- Only the word "DANGER" is all-caps. All-caps for the entire notice would decrease readability.
- The notice is indented to the *text* of the preceding step.

Other Formatting Issues

Here are some additional points to consider concerning special notices:

Special alignment. Special notices must align to the text to which they refer. For example, if you have a note that adds some special detail to something in a bulleted list item, you must align that note to the *text* of the bulleted item. Of course, if the note follows a bulleted list but refers to the whole list, then you can use the regular left margin.

Single spaced text. All of the examples and discussion in this unit are based on double spaced text. For single spaced text, use your document-design "eye" to decide on spacing. Leave either one blank lines between running text and special notices—depending on what looks best to you. (And of course both running text and the text of the special notices would be singlespaced.)

Placement of special notices. The standard rule is to place special notices *before* the point at which they are relevant. For example, you warn readers to back up all data *before* you tell them to reformat their hard drive. However, in practice this applies to serious special notices where great harm to data, equipment, or people is likely to ensue.

One technique used by very cautious writers (maybe those who have been burned) is to place all serious notices (warnings, cautions, and dangers) somewhere at the beginning of the document, and then repeat them individually where they apply.

Multiple special notices. You run into situations where you have three or four special notices, all jammed together in the same part of the text, each one following another. This is a problem because the whole point of the special formatting of the notices is lost: something is special because it is different from the surrounding. The solution to this problem is to create one identifying heading (for example, "Notes and Warnings"), and then list the notices (either bulleted or numbered) below it.

Other important things to remember. In any list, make sure your list is parallel. If you use bullets or numbers, make sure you have more than one bullet or number. That is, if you only need one bullet or one number in a bulleted or numbered list, you don't actually need a bulleted or numbered list.