

## Re: Help!

**Source:** <http://linux.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/Debian/2005-09/1223.html>

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**From:** Paul E Condon ([pecondon\\_at\\_mesanetworks.net](mailto:pecondon_at_mesanetworks.net))

**Date:** 09/11/05

Date: Sat, 10 Sep 2005 18:23:25 -0600

To: [debian-user@lists.debian.org](mailto:debian-user@lists.debian.org)

On Sat, Sep 10, 2005 at 05:56:32PM -0400, C Shore wrote:

> On Sat, Sep 10, 2005 at 10:28:52AM -0700, David E. Fox wrote:

>> On Thu, 8 Sep 2005 10:52:50 -0600

>> Paul E Condon <[pecondon@mesanetworks.net](mailto:pecondon@mesanetworks.net)> wrote:

The stuff below is not what I wrote. What I wrote has been snipped in its entirety

>> A C compiler is perhaps more relevant to this discussion, and it  
>> permits me to interject a point. When the average user wants to compile  
>> "Hello World", for instance, doing it by reading "man gcc" often does  
>> not prove useful. Why? Because "man gcc" (as many other man pages for  
>> Unix systems) lists all possible ways to use "gcc". In practice, most  
>> users will not use nearly all those options, and somewhere, buried in  
>> the man page, there exist instructions on how to compile a simple

Man pages are one form of documentation. Other forms are Tutorial, Administrator's Guide, User's Guide, comments in the source code, etc. Documentation comes in many levels, and should come in many levels. Man pages are one of them. For the C++ compiler, the book by B. Stroustrup is some of the documentation.

>> program:

>>

>> `$ cc -O -o hello hello.c` (or even simpler, remove the `-O`)

>>

>> Man pages (generally) don't progress from simple usages to more complex

>> ones - they present in toto everything all at once. I saw that early on

>> by reading "man bash".

There is a strict format for man pages. This format is inappropriate for some programs, but I believe that there are good reasons for sticking to the strict format even when it is inappropriate. And, especially when that format is inappropriate, there should be other documentation. Hopefully, the developers of the software include a person who is capable of writing natural language and this person is assigned the task of documenting the software at all appropriate levels, and writing a format standard compliant

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man page.

In reality this is often difficult for computer geeks, more difficult than producing an intuitive GUI. But it should be done as best they can.

- >
- > *Which is of course they the GNU people prefer info pages :-P*
- >
- > *Seriously, the standard man page format wasn't designed for mass usage,*
- > *it was for the sysadmin who needed a reference to remind them of some*

It was, I think, designed at Bell Labs by the originators of UNIX. In those days, everyone who was allowed to touch the console was ipso facto a sysadmin, and they designed it for themselves. (The term sysadmin had not yet been invented, I believe.)

- > *obscure (or not) feature they had forgotten, not to teach the usage of*
- > *the command. Of course some commands (like bash) are really not*
- > *amenable to the man format (I hate trying to find anything on really*
- > *long man pages like the bash one) because they do too much (to be*
- > *explain in a single reasonably sized page). It'd be*
- > *like trying to explain everything about 'how to use' gcc in a man page.*
- > *The gcc man page recognizes that and simply lists the options available with*
- > *a minimum of comment; the bash man page is an abomination.*
- >
- > *Of course now everyone tells newbies 'read the man page' which is of*

I don't think so. Mostly I see 'RTFM', not 'RTFMP'. Telling anyone, 'RTFM' is never appropriate. An explicit reference to a But that isn't the issue that prompted all this heated discussion. The issue was the claim that a newbie should not have to read `_any_` documentation in order to use the software. I think you will find that opinion in the archive of this thread. That opinion is, IMHO, silly. It is also silly to suppose that the man page is the only documentation that is necessary.

- > *course just silly. Assuming a package is actually documented they*
- > *should be told to go to /usr/share/doc/package-doc{/html/index.html}*
- > *where presumably it actually has useful information on using the package*
- > *for people who haven't used the program before.*
- >
- > *Some man pages have basic beginning instructions, but that depends on*
- > *the philosophy of the document writer wrt what a man page should be.*
- >

See comments, above, about strict format of man page. Mostly, I see the writers being more or less capable of sticking to that format. Think of writing man pages as an English language geeky variant of writing haiku. Its not easy for everyone.

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