Dear Author,

Hello! My name is Scott MacDonald, and I'm the developmental editor assigned to your manual. I'd like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to go hands-on with your manual. I haven't read or even looked at many repair manuals, so this is a unique experience for me. I've enjoyed my time with your manual; however, and it's far less intimidating than most repair manuals.

I'll be the first to admit that I'm not good with my hands. I'm not a fix-it kind of guy, so I'm definitely part of your intended audience. I now know more about pipe fitting, plumbing, and pest control than I ever thought possible. Your manual is a comprehensive look at just about everything a homeowner needs.

I decided to edit a few chapters instead of the entire manual because of the structure itself. As a manual, all the sections are presented in the same format. I edited the introduction, the first page of the table of contents, and chapters one, two, and sixteen. This will give you a solid overview of the problems I noted and ways to fix them in every chapter.

Note on this Note

My editorial note is broken down into categories with observations and examples. I'll give an overall impression of the work and an overview of my comments. My goal is to clearly identify problems and successes in your manual. I'll conclude with a list of suggested revision steps, which you can use to help guide you through the process.

Editorial notes can be intimidating, but don't despair. This is not a literary critique or a review; it's a note designed to point out the strengths and weaknesses of your manual. Each category is designed to make you reconsider and evaluate the choices you've made in presenting this information. And please remember—I'm here to help you make your manual the best that it can be. You are not alone during this process.

Overall Impressions

My edit consists of observations and changes to the manual's layout, formatting, and content. That might sound like the entire manual is flawed, but let me assure you that isn't the case at all. We'll look at what works as frequently as we look at what doesn't work.

The manual's strengths are in its scope, tone, and illustrations. You've compiled an exhaustive repair manual with a friendly and engaging tone, all of which is bolstered by detailed illustrations. The manual's weaknesses lie in its formatting and layout. There are also a few content quirks that we'll address during this process.

With these strengths and weaknesses in mind, let's take a look at the manual's formatting.

Formatting

The issues with formatting are related to your treatment of important words and the table of contents.

Bold & Italics

Part of what makes writing a repair manual difficult is developing a particular style for how words and sentences are treated. You want to draw the reader's attention to new or important words and to content that is especially important to their understanding of the material. It's through the best of intentions that you bolded and italicized like you did.

Unfortunately, bolding and italicizing as much as you have actually creates an obstacle for the reader. Bolded and italicized words naturally attract the reader's eye, but bolding and/or italicizing every new or important word or sentence creates confusion. The reader's eye is drawn to all of them, which makes for difficult reading.

I undid the majority of the bolded and italicized words to make your content easier to read and to improve accessibility. I know you're concerned about drawing attention to specific

words and sentences for clarity, but you've already solved most of that problem. For example, in the section titled "The House Main Shut Off Valve," the title makes it clear you're about to discuss the aforementioned valve, so there's no reason to bold the next instance of that phrase in the following paragraph. The reader already knows the section is about that valve and that the valve is important.

Similarly, your illustrations draw attention to specific words through their very existence. Any labeled part is discussed in the next paragraph, so these labels don't need to be bolded in that paragraph. Your sections are also generally short, so these important words and phrases aren't getting lost in the rest of the text.

When it comes to bolding and italicizing, less is absolutely more. If you find yourself concerned about a particular word, consider how you've written the passage and formatted the section headings and illustrations. It's likely you've already done enough to address your concerns. One exception to this rule is in the introduction in the section titled "Who The Manual is For." In the sentence, "Insect and animal pests don't care who owns the place: they think *they* do," emphasis on the second "they" visually clarifies the sentence's meaning; however, It's only necessary because of the word's repetition.

Table of Contents

The bolding and italicizing problem also appears in the table of contents. I understand your reasoning here: the bolded and italicized entries draw attention to the serious issues that readers might face. In the event of an emergency, readers can skim the bolded sections to find what they need.

However, this treatment creates the same issue it did in the sections and text: it's actually more difficult to find what you want because so much of the text is bolded and italicized. There's no natural route for the reader's eye to follow. Skimming the table of contents, the reader can see that sections that begin with "if" are more important than other sections because

every "if" is an action. For example, the first three instances of "if" in chapter two all pertain to leaks. If that weren't enough, your content already follows a natural progression from information to problems to solutions. It's actually quite easy to find what you need without the bolding. Compare the unbolded and unitalicized first page of the table of contents with the others.

Layout

The problems with the layout relate to the manual's diagramming, table of contents, and references.

Diagramming

In addition to paragraphs, your manual presents information through the use of bullet points, numbers, and letters. The use of each has to remain constant throughout the manual to ensure consistency and clarity. Based on your usage so far, it seems like you had the following use in mind for each:

- Bullets are used to present lists of related information. Most of the repair guidelines and chapter introductions use bullets.
- Numbers are used to indicate the order in which the reader should perform a set of actions. They most commonly appear in the "what to do" sections and anything that requires multiple steps.
- Letters are used to diagram each part in an illustration and correspond to a description of that item.

There are several instances in which the usage of all three gets a bit muddled. For example, the repair guidelines in chapter one are numbered, but they are bulleted in the other chapters I read. The illustration under the subhead titled "How Water Comes In" uses numbers instead of letters, but the other illustrations generally use numbers for this purpose.

The illustrations for disassembling faucets mixes letters and numbers. You use letters for the outer parts and numbers for the inner parts. It's not too confusing if both illustrations are on the same page, but that's difficult to guarantee. For example, under "Repair of Swivel-Ball Single-Lever Faucets," the paragraph below the disassembly illustration doesn't actually include those numbers. You don't reference them until the following "Where is the Leak on a Swivel-Ball Faucet" section.

There are several possible solutions to this problem. You might consider swapping the order in this chapter; put the "where is the leak" sections before the disassembly instructions. That way, the lettered illustration, which will be familiar to readers at that point, comes before the numbered illustration, which shows the parts inside. This creates the following order: outside parts are lettered (like the other sections) and inside parts are numbered. It would also more naturally line up with your content because you always list the outside part first. For example, "(B) A drip from the spigot is caused by a worn or disintegrating rubber washer (3)." You could also consider using lowercase letters in place of numbers.

Table of Contents

In addition to unbolding the table of contents, it would also be useful to remove the "What to do…" format. It clashes with the format of the table of contents and contributes to the visual confusion. I initially thought it was used specifically for emergencies, but it's actually for all the potential problems discussed in the book. The table of contents already serves its purpose well, and the repetition of "if" can be a visual indicator that those entries are for actions, not information.

If you're still concerned about readers quickly finding the solutions, there are a few things you can try. Given your wonderful artistic talents, there might be a visual solution. It's cliche, but something like an emergency sign (like the exclamation point in the triangle) at the end of an entry might be one option. It's less obtrusive at the end of each item instead of at the

beginning. Another solution could be to create a separate table of contents specifically for emergencies. This table of contents could be dedicated to the most severe emergencies; for example, smelling gas, finding water around appliances, and what to do in case of a fire. I wouldn't remove these entries from the traditional table of contents, but it could be a useful design specifically for serious emergencies.

References

By references, I mean your page references. Much like your original use of bolding and italicizing, your decision to frequently provide page references for relevant information before and after certain steps comes from the best of intentions. I know you're dedicated to ensuring that readers are able to find what they need as quickly as possible. After all, a repair manual isn't doing its job if the reader can't find what they need.

However, adding a page reference to every other step or diagram turns your sections into mazes. For example, in "Where is the Leak on a Two-Handle Faucet", each item in the list has a page reference. If I follow the page reference for the compression valve, that section has a page reference for rust. It's easy to see how this design can quickly become overwhelming. All the page references distract the reader from the content.

Fortunately, there are a few ways to address this problem, and you've already solved most of it. Like I mentioned with the table of contents in the Formatting section, your layout already creates an easy to follow path through the manual: information to problems to solutions. This layout and the table of contents makes it very easy to navigate the book, so even if the reader doesn't know the exact page for what they need, they can use both to find it. They can also use the index.

Any page reference that refers to the repair guidelines for that section can be removed. I removed some of them in my edit as an example. You don't need these references because the design of the manual makes it clear that readers should frequently refer to these guidelines.

They generally appear near the beginning of each chapter, so they're always easy to find. You can also omit a reference to content that appears in the next page or so because none of the sections are particularly long. Readers will easily find such content without the reference. An example of this is in the Spigot section. You wrote "A diverter slides into its socket if the faucet has a side sprayer (section to follow)." That section is a short paragraph away from the reference.

If you're still concerned about readers being able to find what they need, there is another option to consider. Instead of using a specific page number for each item in a list, for example, you could just reference the chapter for that entire section. That would significantly reduce the number of references on each page. Err on the side of caution even with this design, though; it's very easy to go overboard with page references. This is even true of references to other chapters. Another potential solution is to create a mini table of contents for each chapter.

Content

There are few actual problems in the content itself. I have a few suggestions about the presentation of some kinds of content, but let's look at all the strengths first.

Strengths

The manual's strongest aspect is undeniably the scope and depth of the content. You've done a remarkable job assembling an incredible amount of content into one package. I haven't found any glaring omissions or missteps. I left a few comments in the edit to clarify a few points, but these are minor issues. You should feel proud of the work you've done in writing and compiling all this information. It's no small feat.

Another strength is your tone and confidence. You quickly create a sense of trust through your casual and laid-back tone. Your introduction is friendly and inviting, which is an interesting preface to a repair manual. It's also clear that you're an expert and what you say can

be trusted. Even though the overall content is serious, you keep things clear and relaxed. I also enjoyed the addition of your little quips and factoids. That sort of device is helpful in making your repair manual unique.

The last major strength is your illustrations: they are a resounding success. Your illustrations are easily as effective as a photo or a complex digital illustration, but the minimalist presentation is straightforward and unique. It's another aspect that makes your manual stand out from other repair manuals. I even found a few places that I thought could benefit from more illustrations. I've called these out in the in-line edits.

Repetitive Content

Like in most repair manuals, some content is repeated because it's applicable to multiple situations. It's an unfortunate reality, but it can also be overkill, especially for simple problems. One example is in chapter 16, Pest Control: Mammals and Birds. The advice for dealing with animal bites and scratches appears at the chapter's beginning and is repeated in the rat and bat sections. Consider removing the repeated warning in the bat and rat sections. The health warning is the first entry in the table of contents for this section as well.

Another example occurs in the faucets section. The comment about the aerator and its potential leaks is repeated for each faucet. The sentence "the aerator could be cracked or more likely its washer has failed" is repeated nine times. Would it be possible to remove these repeated lines and put them in a "Common Leaks" section near the chapter's beginning? Keep an eye out for other instances in which content can be condensed like this. You might have to rework the content in these sections to accomplish this task.

The Plumbing Demon

I love the idea behind the plumbing demon. It plays into the fear that homeowners aren't in control of what happens in their homes. If the plumbing goes awry, all those groans, leaks,

and malfunctions must be from some terrifying otherworldly entity. It's like we all live in a horror movie.

Unfortunately, it's not an effective device for the manual because it's exclusive to plumbing. Readers will only see it for a few sections of the book. The execution itself is also a little too cutesy. It just doesn't fit with the overall tone of the manual. It's also a little problematic because of the Murphy's Law connection. Yes, Murphy's Law does essentially state that if something bad can happen, it will happen, but that isn't exclusive to the plumbing demon's locations. Something can go wrong literally anywhere during a repair for any number of reasons.

Additional Tips & Information

Following up on the last section, you already present additional information, tips, and warnings. You typically call these out with "Note" or "Warning." Note that I removed the "demon" part from the warning label. Some of these are serious and others are humorous, but they're always useful.

One example is in the Plumbing Repair Guidelines, "If a hard metal tool and a fragile ceramic sink get into a fight, the tool always wins." This is a great addition because it's a useful tip, but it's also funny. I called it out as a "Tip," but it could be labeled as a "Note" or "Warning," too. It doesn't quite belong in the guidelines because it's not a step to follow, but it's not something I want to remove either.

An example of additional information is "Some homes may not have a main shut-off valve; the water has to be turned off at the meter" in the "House Main Shut-off Valve" section. This is an important fact for readers, and I'd consider calling it out as a note or a tip. It was originally italicized, and this would serve that same purpose but work even better. Another example is "Copper is lighter than steel, easier to cut and install, and does not rust" in the Trunk and Branch Lines section. This is additional because it's not something readers necessarily need to know.

There are a few ways you could go about presenting this information, but consistency is key. You could use "warning" for important warnings and "note" for anything additional. Do like you've already done with the formatting (label: content), but put it in its own box or sidebar by itself. I'd also consider designing some kind of symbol to help draw attention to these instances. You could use a different symbol for each kind of topic in the manual. For example, a broken pipe for plumbing, a lightning bolt for electricity, and a rat for pests. You can probably come up with something more creative than that in this regard, but this is a fun and engaging way to present this kind of content. I encourage you to experiment with it.

Of course, make sure you don't go overboard with this. You won't want more than one tip per page and you definitely won't want one every page. There are also certain kinds of content that aren't appropriate for this device. For example, in the pest control chapters, you include the official names for groups of animals, which is interesting because I'm sure most readers haven't heard of them. You wouldn't want to call this info out because you include it for each animal; it would quickly get overwhelming. This content is fine as part of the text.

Suggested Revision Steps

This step-by-step list is essentially an itemized summary of the previous observations. It's intended to help keep you on track should you feel overwhelmed. These are the major steps, so refer back to each section for additional guidance. There are many ways to address revisions, and this list is here merely as a suggestion in how to go about making your revisions. You can also reread my note and create your own checklist based on how you engage with your manual and the editing process.

1. Accept all line-level edits in the manual and respond to commentary as necessary.

2. Remove the majority of the bolding and italicizing from your content and the table of contents.

3. Ensure consistent formatting for bullets, letters, and numbers.

4. Remove the "What to do…" format from the table of contents.

5. Experiment with visual elements for the table of contents.

6. Consider whether or not a table of contents for emergencies would be useful for your purposes.

7. Alter page references for clarity.

8. Look for instances of repeated content and condense if at all possible.

9. Remove visual and textual references to the plumbing demon.

10. Experiment with visual solutions in presenting additional information and tips.

11. When you've completed all your edits, let the manual rest for a few days and do something else. The point is to let it rest and to give yourself a short break. Distance can give you perspective.

12. Reexamine your edits. I wouldn't recommend reading the entire manual again unless you actually edited every chapter. Mostly focus on the changes you've implemented.

13. Resubmit the manual.

The Next Step

The most important issue to address is the formatting and layout problems. Fixing these issues will significantly improve the readability and accessibility of your manual. Your content is already in great shape, so let's make sure readers can quickly and easily experience it. After that, experiment with visual solutions to presenting specific kinds of content. If you're not confident about a visual solution, feel free to send it over before implementing it throughout the manual.

I know I've given you a ton of observations to consider. If you're feeling overwhelmed, refer to my list of revision steps to help keep you on track. It's easier to manage these changes

when you can see what still needs to be addressed. I'm also happy to answer any questions you might have, so please feel free to reach out as needed.

Please let me know if you need anything at all, and thank you once again for sharing your manual with me.

Sincerely,

Scott MacDonald