Word vs Adobe RoboHelp

Your next launchpad for technical documentation authoring and publishing

Table of content

In a 2020 Adobe survey, we found that 56% of content professionals have used Microsoft© Word for authoring at some point in time. While Word is widely used globally, its capability is limited as compared to a specialized authoring tool like Adobe RoboHelp, when used for technical documentation. While there are some similarities between RoboHelp and Word (like word processing features, ability to generate a text or PDF output, add graphics, and create templates and styles), the commonalities end at the basics. One might think of Word as a launchpad for RoboHelp. Word is helpful for everyday content and a tool for content contributors. As a Help Authoring Tool (HAT), RoboHelp is designed to deliver help, procedures, and knowledge base content on many platforms and outlets. Over the years, as technology has advanced and the end user's need for instant information has accelerated, unique needs such as publishing to self-service content platforms, are currently being addressed by RoboHelp.

Understanding the core differences between RoboHelp and Word helps identify the use cases for both.

The beginning

Microsoft© released Word as a word processor in 1983. It is primarily used for everyday content and documents. It is a good application to quickly and easily create letters, short documents, proposals, small guides, and similar content, which can then be exported as PDF files for publishing.

Adobe RoboHelp enables authors to create advanced end-user documentation and help content, which can be published across channels, formats, and languages to address global customers. We will explore what RoboHelp can do, in detail, in the upcoming sections. Here are some of the core strengths of Adobe RoboHelp:

- End-users can consume the published content on multiple devices and screen sizes

- Allow users to curate content for their particular needs

- Empower users to interact with the content through an easy-to-use and branded web-based layout

- Deliver bite-sized answers to questions in the form of Microcontent and chatbots integrated directly into the help system

- Ensure content consistency using variables, snippets, glossary, and topic reuse

- Provide unique features such as drop-downs and expandable text, bookmarks for favorite topics, topic navigation, and browse sequences

- Facilitate role-based content personalization via Dynamic Content Filters; Enable superior navigation through predictive search and a customized index

- Accommodate large libraries by publishing to RoboHelp Server or a merged output

What can you create with Adobe RoboHelp?

Suppose you create enterprise policies and procedures, user guides, software manuals, or help systems for large or complex audiences. In that case, RoboHelp has the features and functionalities to curate content based on your end user's unique needs. Here are some examples of use cases where Adobe RoboHelp is well suited:

Call center / Customer service help

For call centers, customer service departments, or other high-volume groups, help must be highly consumable to be valuable. Correct information must be available to the agent quickly, the search must provide relevant results, and callers must receive correct answers fast. Agents are evaluated by call times (TAT – Turn Around Time), providing accurate information, and customer service. Quick access to correct answers improves the agent's performance and increases customer satisfaction.

Advanced search, Microcontent, virtual assistance (chatbots), indexes, glossaries, topic navigation, and modern layouts are features available in RoboHelp that support this use case.

Regulatory manuals

Highly regulated industries like government, finance, healthcare, and aerospace and defense may consider the integrity of the documentation to be its most important value. Are policies and procedures relating to regulations consistent and current? Are agency audits satisfactory after reviewing procedures? Can the content be delivered as a PDF to external regulators and in a web-based, user-friendly format to internal employees?

> Master Pages and Style Sheets for consistency, a well-defined glossary, a collaborative review and approval process, and omnichannel publishing are important ways RoboHelp can meet these end-user needs.

User guides

User guides created to accompany software releases over a wide distribution channel might require variations for different users. Does the content need to be translated into multiple languages? Are there geographic, legal, or other factors that require multiple versions of the help system to be delivered?

> Language translation, variables, reusable content (snippets), and dynamic content filters are examples of RoboHelp features valuable to this type of deliverable.

Customer-facing content

Help systems that are public-facing need to be visually appealing, well-branded, searchable, organized, and viewable on various devices.

> Customized skins, Frameless layouts, standardized formatting through master pages and style sheets are essential RoboHelp elements.
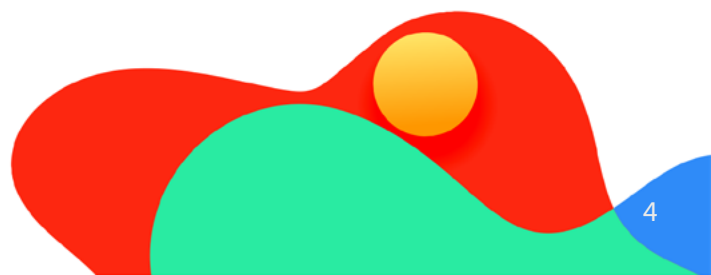
Internal employee manuals

Internal-facing content like policy and procedure manuals often serves the dual purpose of employee communications and training. Multiple authors often support content creation. The content is enriched with flowcharts and illustrations and reaches large audiences. Understanding how a large, multi-faceted audience uses the content is essential.

Giving readers the ability to view or hide ancillary information with drop-downs and expanding text is crucial. Adobe RoboHelp Server provides the authoring team with analytics, usage statistics, project merging, and the ability to define access groups. Utilizing the collaborative review feature enables updates to be made more quickly and edits centralized.

# Transitioning from Word to RoboHelp

Signs that it might be time to change

If you are currently authoring large manuals in Word, here are some signs that may prompt you to consider changing software platforms:

- Your documents have many pages making updates cumbersome

- You need to generate numerous variants of your documents to accommodate multiple audiences and multiple purposes

- Tracking comments and approvals of multiple reviewers have become a challenge

- Content is viewed on multiple devices but is not responding appropriately to 'automagically' adjust to the different screen sizes

- End-user navigation is limited

- Search is not delivering the best results

- Customers are requesting features that are not available in Word

Migrating Word documents to RoboHelp

Adobe RoboHelp makes it easy to migrate even long and complex Word documents. You can fine-tune the import process, map styles, create new topics based on headings, and more. Once the content is in RoboHelp, improve the user experience by organizing smaller topics and adding content navigation. Easily customize the web layout to match your corporate design with an intuitive WYSIWYG skin designer. And, if needed, output the refined content from RoboHelp back into a Word document. RoboHelp guides you through the process of converting legacy content through easy-to-follow import settings.
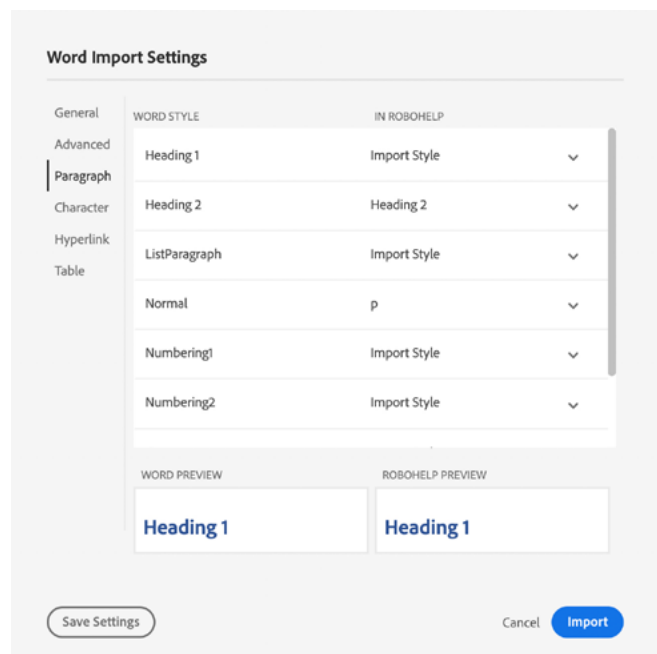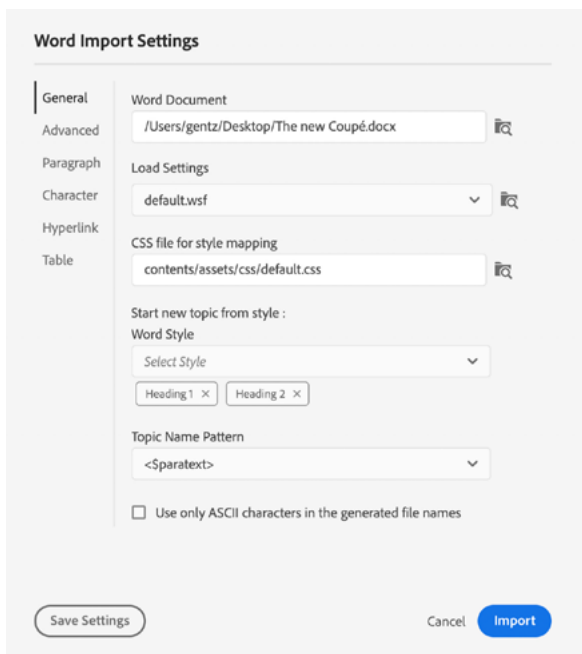
Feature comparison

Authoring experience

The following are overall features that distinguish RoboHelp and Word from an authoring perspective. We will dive deeper into editing and publishing functions in subsequent comparisons.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
User Interface	Work intuitively with a modern, task-oriented user interface that gives contextual access to features via three panels — Authoring, Review and Output. Features related to a specific task, such as topic authoring, graphic editing, or spell check, appear as needed, reducing clutter.	Functions are accessible via a traditional ribbon interface that has some level of customizability.
Workflow	Author with an easy workflow designed to follow a natural left-to-right progression for all tasks.	Authoring in Word is more free form, with features made accessible either via the top ribbon or by right-clicking.
Reporting	Track all aspects of a project with over 20 reports, publishable to Excel and PDF.	Track all aspects of a project with over 20 reports, publishable to Excel and PDF.
Collaboration between authors	Enable seamless collaboration and version control for teams through built-in connectors for SharePoint Online, Azure DevOps, and Git.	Authors can share documents through the cloud, but version control is not available.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Migration of existing Word documents	Import Word documents into RoboHelp and retain existing formatting by mapping styles using an easy-to-use conversion tool.	Not applicable.
Importing other files	Add files created in other applications, such as Adobe FrameMaker, Microsoft© PowerPoint, Excel, and PDF to a RoboHelp project.	Some files can be utilized within Word, such as images or online videos, but functionality is limited.
Linking to and from Word or FrameMaker files	Link Word or FrameMaker documents to a RoboHelp project for seamless syncing when changes are made to them. Use it in situations where content is managed by another entity, but relevant to the RoboHelp project.	No comparable feature
Collaborative Review	Use the Review feature to generate an online link of the document to be reviewed and share them with team members for collaborative feedback.	Word documents can be shared, and reviewers can use track changes to red-line and comment on documents.
Layout customization	Customize layouts as per the needs of the brand with a powerful Skin Editor that provides hundreds of options to achieve the expected result.	Customization is limited to fonts, colors, and themes under the Design tab.

Topic editing

The author's experience when editing content is similar in Word and RoboHelp. However, there are also some unique differences as described in this section.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Topic authoring	Access all functions related to topic authoring in a single area.	Tasks for page authoring are in various places in the top toolbar, including Home, Insert, Layout, and others.
Topic information	See all information regarding a topic (general information, topic information, metadata, styles) in an embedded panel as you edit.	Information is available at the document level through File>Info, or from the Home tab for styles, or other tabs for layout and design.
Styles	Define styles with industry-standard Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), including headings, table styles, lists, hyperlinks, and other styles related to RoboHelp authoring (glossary text, drop-downs, expanding text, breadcrumbs, topic TOCs). Add embellishments such as pseudo styles and twisties to enhance the user's interaction and understanding of the content.	Styles are available from the Home tab and focus primarily on paragraph, heading, lists, and table styles. Templates can be created based on styles and saved in a .dot file to be used for other documents.
Inline styles	See inline style options in the General tab. Add attributes and apply styling to a specific element (image, text, video, table, header, link) by simply selecting it to see the options available.	Styles such as bold, italic, underline, shading, colors, fonts can be applied from the Home tab from the top ribbon.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
		Inline styling is applied in general to an item that is selected (primarily text styling). Table design and styling is done through the Table Tools tab. Other styles can be applied through a right-click.
Topic status	Customize and apply status labels to topics (draft, in review, approved). Generate topic status reports to facilitate reviews and manage content.	No comparable functionality.
Table styles	Define table styles in the style sheet. Create table templates for consistent use. Define table formatting for the entire table, heading row, and odd/even rows and columns. Apply specific styles to cells, fonts, alignment, shading, and other features. Customize cell padding, alignment, borders, layout, positioning, and more.	Table styles can be created through the Styles tab. Table properties, shading, font, paragraph styles, etc. can be applied in general.
Inline table styles	Apply inline styles to tables from the General tab after selecting it. Modify the table width, columns, rows, captions, and apply templates as desired.	Word provides table formatting through the Table Tools tab (design and layout). Templates are provided, and customization in terms of borders, shading, and fonts can be applied from the toolbar.
Drop-down and expanding text	Place ancillary information as drop-down text or expandable text that can be collapsed and expanded by the user (as an alternative to footnotes).	No comparable functionality.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Spell check and find and replace	Apply spell check and find and replace to the current topic, all topics, or all project files. This includes master pages and other files.	Spell check is limited to the open document.
Drag and drop	Utilize the drag and drop method for hyperlinks, reusable text, glossary terms, condition tags, TOC, index and See Also links, thus reducing authoring time.	Links are manually added. Drag and drop functionality is not applicable to Word authoring.

Content reuse

RoboHelp allows you to reuse topics or parts of a topic. Authors do not need to create reusable content from scratch thereby save authoring time and translation costs; something that Word cannot offer.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Snippets	Create content as a snippet (reusable text) and place it in multiple topics, eliminating the need to retype the same content. Automatically update all instances where the snippet is used when the source snippet is edited.	No comparable feature – content would need to be replicated in all instances.
Variables	Curate content for different audiences and uses using variables. Use variables to interchange terminology for unique outputs. For example, use a variable to create state-specific versions of your content to swap the state name depending on the audience. Instead of creating duplicate content for a specific audience, repurpose the same content using variables.	No comparable feature – duplicate sets of content would need to be created or Find / Replace-generated.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Glossary	Use glossaries to define terms and acronyms, and their definitions can be expanded within the topic content. Publish a global glossary with the output. The glossary keeps terminology consistent and definitions available when needed.	Glossaries are often built as separate stand-alone documents or as an appendix to a document. The glossary is referred to, but not integrated into, the output.
Topic reuse	Single-source and reuse topics instead of duplicating, in more than one instance. For example, using the same topic by linking it in multiple places for reuse.	No comparable feature. Information can be duplicated through copy / paste, but not duplicated single-sourced.
Condition expressions	Tag content within a topic or at the topic or chapter/folder level. E.g., Authors can create a conditional expression to exclude content from publishing (Do Not Publish) or make content interest-based filterable for the end-user.	No comparable feature. Information would need to be customized in different documents.
Multiple TOCs and glossaries	Add multiple TOCs and glossaries to a project in RoboHelp. E.g., deliver a policy and procedure manual as a training workbook with exercises by using a separate and unique TOC. Once the TOC is created, the shared topics are in sync and can be organized accordingly. The author can simply select the applicable TOC when generating the output. The same workflow applies to glossaries.	No comparable feature. The information would need to be rebuild in different documents.
Microcontent	Create Microcontent to deliver small information units to end-users. Deliver Microcontent in a frameless layout. e.g., in the form of FAQs and MicroHelp. The author creates an intent (a question) and a corresponding response to the intent, which is added by selecting relevant text within a topic.	No comparable feature.

Navigation

End-users prefer Help content to be precise, easily searchable, and quickly findable during the need of the hour. RoboHelp offers easy options to navigate across your help content, unlike Word.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Table of Contents	Create unique tables of contents for their output. TOC pages do not have to be the same as the topic names, and they are not generated at the style level (see Topic TOC). Add bookmarked content within a topic, URLs, and other files to a TOC, making it a rich navigational tool.	TOCs can be auto-generated from the References tab. TOC incorporates heading references from the document as established by the author. TOCs cannot include external references.
Topic TOC	Authors can add and stylize a Topic TOC (also known as mini-TOC) into master pages or topics to assist a user in navigating through topics with several sections. The heading styles are automatically added to the Topic TOC. The TOC automatically updates if headings change.	This feature is part and parcel of the overall TOC in Word. Headings are added to the document TOC at the level defined by the author. Manual hyperlinks can be added to the beginning of a Word document.
Index	Develop author-defined indexes by creating keywords and associating topics with the keywords. Create cross-references in the same manner. Review keywords through a report or the topic properties. The index is used globally in the help system in the same manner as the TOC and glossary.	Indexes can be created from the References tab by marking entries in text and then inserting an index. The index is specific to the document.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Search	Enhance the user's ability to obtain relevant results with Frameless and Responsive outputs that utilize predictive search. Add search keywords and search synonyms to help the user even when the exact search term they enter is not in the help system. Add stop words to remove irrelevant results.	A Word document can be searched through the "Find" function or, if published as a PDF, through the Find Text tool.
Browse sequences	Add a browse sequence to a collective group of topics that the end-user should navigate in a certain order or workflow. A browse sequence provides an extra navigational utility in the web-based output.	No comparable feature.
Favorites	Generate a Frameless or Responsive layout so the end-user can add topics to their Favorites tab, thus helping them quickly refer to frequently visited content.	Bookmarks can be added in PDF outputs which can assist the user in tagging content they would like to revisit, but it is more limited than adding favorites to a favorites drop-down.
Content filters	Develop content filters using condition tags to isolate content for different users or purposes (geographic region, position, product, department). In the published output, the end-user can filter the content for relevant information using Dynamic Content Filters.	No comparable feature.
Landing / Home Pages	Create portal-like, customizable Home Pages with Frameless and Responsive skins. Home pages act as the "entry point" for the help system. End-users access MicroHelp and search through the help portal from the Home Page.	Word documents may have title or introductory pages to help a user understand the larger document, with manual links to specific pages.

Branded layouts

Documentation and help systems should reflect the organization's corporate design in terms of fonts, colors, logo usage, and general look and feel. This section describes the features available to enhance the branding of your help content.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Style sheets	Use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to maintain the format of the content in RoboHelp. Available in an easily identifiable Assets folder, adapt the style sheets to your company's brand. Use the built-in UI editor for style sheets to easily incorporate changes or design new ones without needing to know how to declare CSS syntaxes. Choose colors that match an organization's website using the color pick utility. Create unique topics by making multiple style sheets in a single project.	Styles are created from the Home tab. Custom colors can be created using RGB or HSL color models numbers. Additional styling can be made through the Format menu for the selected style.
Master pages	Use master pages to act as templates for content, with headers and footers that include the company's logo and other important information (such as a confidentiality clause). Also use master pages as style guides for authors to develop topic content with consistent heading labels and wording.	Word has themes that can be applied and modified under the Design tab. Watermarks, page colors and backgrounds can also be applied under this menu. Templates in Word are focused on styles.
Skins	Customize Frameless skins to reflect a brand's colors, logos, images, fonts, and other elements. Attain a comprehensive web-based layout by using customized labels, layouts, background images, themes, and other output settings.	Word design elements are based on themes applied from the Design tab which can be customized. Cover pages can be added for additional information.

Publishing, Translation, Hosting and Analytics

All content teams need to publish content irrespective of the tool they use to author. And they want to understand how their content is performing. You can publish to a range of publishing formats including Responsive HTML, PDF, Knowledge bases and more, with RoboHelp. Omnichannel publishing is something where Word takes a step back, especially when it comes to technical documentation.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
Available outputs	Publish content as Content Only (XML), eBook (Kindle), Frameless and Responsive HTML5 (web), Mobile App (phone), Microcontent, Chatbot, Microsoft© HTML help (.chm), SalesForce, ZenDesk, Zoho, ServiceNow, PDF and Word.	Provides the ability to generate .pdf, .rtf, .txt, .mhtml outputs.
Publishing	Leverage direct, single-click publishing of output to RoboHelp Server, SharePoint Online, SalesForce, ZenDesk, Zoho, ServiceNow, FTP / SFTP and / or file system.	Word, PDF, or single HTML file outputs can be published to shared drive, SharePoint, FTP / SFTP, or other specified location.
Merging projects	Merge multiple projects into a single master project, delivering a unified knowledge management experience. Merging projects allows you to effortlessly maintain smaller, manageable projects based on product family, categories, or modules. Table of contents, indexes, glossaries, dynamic content filters, and condition settings are all identified during output generation ensuring the delivery of a perfectly stable help system.	Multiple Word documents can be merged, but the process can be cumbersome, and errors can easily occur. Large, merged documents can be unstable.

Feature	RoboHelp	Word
RoboHelp Server	RoboHelp Server is a companion product of RoboHelp for hosting Responsive HTML5 and Frameless outputs. You can define user groups with varying degrees of access levels and merge content from several projects instantaneously without performing a project merge in RoboHelp. Analytics based on user consumption patterns, keywords, or mode ensures that you keep a pulse on your end-users. You are also guaranteed a quick turnaround time for amendments or modifications required.	No comparable feature
Translation	RoboHelp provides you with a handy dashboard to manage translated projects. Export content to XLIFF for manual translation. Once translated, import it into RoboHelp to create a translated version of the original project. For automated translation, translation service providers integrate with RoboHelp to translate content via APIs. When complete, automatically import back the translated content.	No comparable feature.

About Adobe RoboHelp

Create and deliver exceptional Help, policy and procedure, and knowledge base content with Adobe RoboHelp, now also on Mac. Author Microcontent to fuel chatbots, featured snippets in search results, and more. Create media-rich experiences using HTML5 and CSS3. Make collaboration seamless using web-based review capabilities. Personalize customer experiences using Dynamic Content Filters. Publish content as Frameless Responsive HTML5, PDF, mobile app, and much more to serve customers across touchpoints.

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