TIP SHEET: Hardware Document
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TIP: Keep in mind that good documents always change once you put independent pieces into a whole. Save adequate time (which is always longer than you think you need) as a group near the end of your writing process to "glue" the pieces together intelligently. Write text to connect each separate piece together. Put yourself in your audience's shoes: would you want to read a document that looked like it was thrown together at the last minute, particularly a long one? Probably not. This will be an evolving document—you don't want to spend *too* much time polishing what will eventually change—but keep in mind that a little effort in these areas goes a long, long way toward your audience taking you more seriously.

TIP: There are many practical techniques that allow you to produce a final, whole document out of many pieces. Cut redundancies. Reference information instead of repeating it. Make sure that the document has one voice, one writing style instead of many different voices. Take time to read the document over and look for gaps. Edit the prose for stylistic inconsistencies—such as using contractions in one section, but not in the other.

TIP: The document design effort should also focus each team on meeting the overall project objectives. While not all sections will evolve naturally from your project work (e.g. the introduction and conclusion), most of the document will be the artifact of your current project work. At the end of the term, the final version of this document will be polished to professional quality. Until then, the two most important criteria for communication success are: How well did you address your audience? and How well did you represent the document as a well thought-out whole, despite it being produced by several groups?

TIP: If you're using MS Word, save additional time for formatting issues when you combine documents. The outline function is touchy. You may want to merge plain, unformatted documents and then use the outline function after the merge toward the end of your writing process.

TIP: Comparing options and technical variables and parameters can be difficult in prose. Whenever possible, use tables, graphs, and charts to make it easier on your readers.