

Introduction

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are written instructions that a worker follows to perform a given task consistently and effectively. These documents communicate who will perform the task, what materials are necessary, where and when the task must be performed, and how the worker will execute the task. Well-written SOPs are a cornerstone of quality system documentation, and they contribute to the scalability of a company.

It takes skill, training, and practice for individuals to become proficient in technical writing; however, technical documentation managers can add value to the SOP development process by giving Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) the tools to effectively contribute.

Source: <http://www.novatek.com.com/blog/bid/401531/10-basic-technical-writing-practices-for-subject-matter-experts>

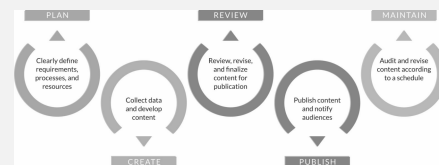
10 Basic Technical Writing Best Practices

- 1. Consider the reader as you write.** People differ in age, education, knowledge, skills, and experience. Work cultures also differ. Determine the writing style and level of detail that makes the most sense for those performing the process or task. Consider why the reader needs the information and how they will use it. You can even take notes to remember the points you want to cover.
- 2. Focus on the writing process, not the output.** Create a first draft with your audience in mind. At this point, don't worry about quantity of your output. You can edit your work later to shorten it.
- 3. Use correct English.** Just like engineering, written language has rules that should be followed to remove ambiguity. Familiarize yourself with grammar books and Style Guides as applicable.
- 4. Be concise.** Keep your sentences short and to the point. If the SOP is longer than 10 steps, consider breaking it up with visuals.
- 5. Use visuals to support your text.** Use flowcharts, tables, and graphics where appropriate and necessary for clarification, and make sure that any text included is large enough to read.
- 6. Be consistent with word choice.** Don't use different words to mean the same thing, especially for technical terms. Add a glossary if needed.
- 7. Keep it singular.** Use the singular rather than the plural when describing relationships to minimize confusion.
- 8. Use parallel structure.** Order your text so that the reader can easily see how related concepts are different and how they are similar. (See examples here.)
- 9. Review your draft.** Edit out any information that your reader does not need to know or that might confuse the reader.

10 Basic Technical Writing Best Practices (cont)

10. Don't be afraid to outsource technical writing. An engineer adds value to a company by conceiving, designing, and producing systems and products for a recognized need. If basic technical writing skills don't come easy or are taking up too much of the engineer's valuable time, use a technical writer that specializes in your industry for some or all of the SOP writing process

Technical Writing



6 Tips Create Meaningful Product Documentation

- 1. Identify your audience before you start writing.** And write how they will be using your product documentation.
- 2. Choose a delivery method that best meets the needs of the end user.** Present documentation in a way that is easy to use, enhances the user's product experience, and reduces the need for service calls.
- 3. Use a visually-appealing format.** Well designed, easy-to-use learning and reference materials will make your product and company stand out. When designing text, include informative headings to draw the user's attention to specific topics. Break up the information into short segments for easy understanding. Use graphics and tables to support the text.
- 4. Write the way you speak, and use personal pronouns.** When users feel that you are talking to them, they tend to learn quicker.
- 5. Keep sentences short and to the point.** Cover only one subject in each paragraph. Keep paragraphs under 12 lines with an average sentence length of 20 words.
- 6. Test your documentation.** As part of the review and approval process, make sure all product documentation adheres to relevant regulations and standards.

Source: <http://www.novatek.com.com/blog/bid/379708/6-tips-for-creating-product-documentation-that-talks-to-your-customer>