

# Writing Clear, Effective Policies and Procedures

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TERRA L. FLETCHER

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# Seminar Overview

Writing Clear,  
Effective  
Policies and  
Procedures

1. Management Writing Overview
2. Purpose, Audience, and Tone
3. Policies and Procedures Defined
4. Why Policies and Procedures Fail
5. A Closer Look at Policies
6. A Closer Look at Procedures
7. Focus: Writing SOPs
8. Peer Group Activity

# Management Writing Overview

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IDENTIFYING THE PURPOSE OF POLICIES AND  
PROCEDURES WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

# Management Writing

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To be productive, an organization needs a vision regarding what it wants to be as well as clear strategies for achieving that vision.

Management writing helps an organization articulate and communicate this vision and the accompanying strategies both internally and externally.

# Management Writing

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Organizations use management writing, such as mission statements, to clarify what the company is and what it wants to do.

Then, based on broad concepts in its mission statement, the organization creates other forms of management writing like policies and procedures to explain how employees should address a specific issue or complete a necessary action.

# Example

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Organization and Mission: A social-service agency that treats clients respectfully.

Based on broad concepts in its mission statement, the organization writes a management document such as a confidentiality policy to explain how employees should address protecting a client's confidential information.

*\*mission and vision handouts*

# Management Writing

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Policies and Procedures should be recognized as the “application documents” of a company’s broader mission statement.

Therefore, policies and procedures are constrained by the missions and goals set forth by the company and must, as a result, directly reflect this mission and subsequent goals.

# Management Writing

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## Policies and Procedures should

- Support the company's mission and goals
- Solve Problems
- Regulate Operations and/or Research (SOPs)
- Sustain a Positive and Supportive Work Climate
- Develop Employees' Skills and Competencies
- Answer Questions
- Address Discrimination and Promote Equality
- Address All Necessary Legal Requirements



# Management Writing: Help!

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Follow Practices That Help You Work Efficiently. You don't have to do it alone.

- Engage in brainstorming ideas and editing documents.
- Attend workshops or bring in specialists.
- Use templates for often-used documents.
- Arrange your workspace so that you have easy access to writing tools and supplies. Efficiency = Effectiveness
- Select software that helps you produce and share writing.

# Purpose, Audience, and Tone

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THE RHETORICAL SITUATION:  
WHAT WE SAY, WHO WE SAY IT TO, AND HOW  
WE SAY IT.

# Understanding the Writing Situation

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“Every instance of writing occurs for a specific reason and is intended for a particular individual or group...Although this may seem obvious, awareness of purpose, audience, and tone is the single most crucial factor in determining whether your communication will succeed.”

- George Searles

# A Note about Ethics

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As a communicator it is your responsibility to be:

- Honest
- Clear
- Accurate
- Comprehensive
- Accessible

*\*All Marketers page 20*

# Understanding Purpose

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Purpose is the overall design that governs what writers do in their writing. It is why a writer even sits down to write a policy or procedure.

Many times, purpose is determined by someone higher up in the organization. This can be internally, such as a manager, or externally, such as a larger governing agency.

# Understanding Purpose

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Purpose becomes the specific subject the writer selects and the strategies the writer uses to communicate the subject matter most efficiently and effectively.

Purpose should direct and control all the decisions a writer makes.

# Audience Analysis

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“Thoughtful and effective communication requires a sensitive understanding of a project’s audience since the knowledge level and expectations of those who need information can vary widely.”

- Nell Ann Pickett

# Questions to Consider

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1. Who will read what I have to write? Is this one person or more and one person?
2. What are the ages, gender, race, and class of that audience?
3. What does the audience already know about the subject?



# Questions to Consider

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4. What cultural or regional experiences may have an influence on your intended audience?
5. Why does the audience need the information and what do I expect them to do with it?
6. How will the audience locate, learn, and apply the information I am giving them?

# Types of Audience

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Category of Audience	Characteristics
Experts	Advanced knowledge and skills. Handle theory and practical application with ease.
Technicians	Understand technical information. Handle practical application with ease.
Professionals	Are educated to read and understand information. May not have any practical application experience.
Lay	No specialized education. Not motivated to read information in its entirety. Simply wants to accomplish a desired task.

# Workplace Communication Levels

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Category of Communication	Definition
Upward	Intended for those above you within the workplace
Lateral	Intended for those at your own level in the workplace
Downward	Intended for those below you in the workplace
Outward	Intended for those outside your workplace

# Understanding Tone

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Tone indicates your attitude as a writer toward the subject and the audience.

It is what you say and how you say it.

Note: The tone of management writing should be informed, objective, confident, and sensitive.

# Three Levels of Style

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Informal Style

Semiformal Style

Formal Style

Note: Most workplace writing occurs in the semiformal style.

# Tactfulness

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Tactfulness means treating the reader with respect, being concerned about and considerate of the reader's needs.

It is basically exercising good manners.

Question: How would you define Performance Management?

# Policies and Procedures Defined

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WE TALK ABOUT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES ALL THE TIME, BUT WHAT IS A POLICY AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM A PROCEDURE?

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Policy:

What to do and why

Procedure:

Tells us when and how



# What is a Policy?

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A policy is a guiding principle used to set direction in an organization or a course of action to guide and influence decisions.

Policies should be used as a guide to decision making and should follow a given set of circumstances within the framework of the objectives, goals, and management philosophies determined by senior management.

# Types of Policies

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There are two main types of policies:

1. Employee/Business Policy
2. Procedure Policy

# Types of Policies

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1. **Employee/Business Policy:** Information you would find in an employee handbook such as smoking rules, dress code, vacation policies, computer use policies, etc. These policies are typically the responsibility of the human resources department.

**Purpose:** Project company image and communicate regulations that apply to all personnel.

# Types of Policies

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2. Procedure Policy: Functions as a mini mission statement. Includes information about the target user, the intended purpose, and some type of effectiveness measure.

# Procedure Policy Example

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Example: Warehouse personnel shall count physical inventory on a frequent basis to ensure the accuracy of the general ledger balance.

Target Audience = warehouse personnel

Intended Purpose = count inventory

Effective Measure = frequency and accuracy  
(The actual standards will be determined by the corresponding procedure.)

# What is a Procedure?

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The goal of a procedure is to instruct readers (employees and management) how to carry out an organization's policies. It is a particular way of accomplishing something.

A clear procedure makes a policy workable.

Usually consists of a series of steps to be followed as a consistent and repetitive approach to accomplish an end result.

# Desired Procedure Outcomes

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Have an established, documented method for conducting affairs within an organization.

For training, process auditing and improvement, and compliance/legal requirements.

Procedures provide a platform for implementing the consistency necessary to decrease product variation, increase procedure control, eliminate waste, and increase performance. (Performance Management)

# So What's the Difference?

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A policy is a guiding principle used to set direction in an organization.

A procedure is a series of steps to be followed to accomplish an end result.

By working together, policies and procedures empower the people responsible for a process with the direction and consistency they need for successful process implementation and improvement.



# Why Policies and Procedures Fail

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QUESTION: WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES WHERE YOU WORK?

FORMAT: PROBLEM/SOLUTION

# Why Policies and Procedures Fail

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Relying on "understood" policies may lead to misunderstandings

lower morale and productivity, more grievances

poor relations between supervisors and employees

*\*MI example*

# Problem #1

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1. The policies and procedures are out of date.

Information ages quickly. It is difficult to keep information current and relevant without becoming outdated.

Why?

- Technological Changes
- Regulatory Changes

# Solution #1

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1. Develop a system that keeps your policies and procedures current using your company intranet or other social media constructs (blogs, etc.)

Don't be afraid to delegate responsibility to lower level management who frequently use the policy or procedure.

# Problem #2

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2. The policies and procedures are too long or wordy.
  - No one wants to read 10, 15, 20, or 25+ pages, especially in an emergent situation. Remember that procedures especially are training tools. Consider your audience. How much do they need to know?
  - Most people simply use policies and procedures as occasional reminders about what needs to get done.

# Solution #2

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2. Keep your policies and procedures short and succinct so they are easier to use and update.

## Notes:

- If legal concerns require a lengthy policy or procedure, include an abstract containing a summary of the frequently used or necessary information.
- Consider having separate employee and management document.

# Problem #3

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3. The policies and procedures are unclear, complicated, or difficult to understand.

## Why?

- Language contains jargon or is too technical.
- Instructions make assumptions that leave out necessary information.
- The writer did not consider the intended audience.

# Solution #3

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3. Consider your Intended audience! Who will use this document? How will they use it? Why?

Use pictures, graphics, examples, and hyperlinks to illustrate what you expect.



# Problem #4

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4. The policies and procedures are not used or followed. Remember: An unused policy or procedure is one that is not updated and therefore is ineffective.

Why?

- Daily business routine
- I'll figure it out myself mentality
- I'll ask my coworkers

# Solution #4

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4. Incorporate your policies and procedures into the job at the point of use.

## Notes:

- This is easy to do if your company uses an intranet. When an employee submits a vacation request, link to the employee vacation policy.
- In a manufacturing company, laminate short procedures and attach directly to equipment.

# Problem #5

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5. The policies and procedures are hard to find.  
Remember: What you can't find, you won't use!

## Questions to consider:

- Do you know all the policies and procedures at your company?
- Do you know where to find them?
- Are they available on a general computer server or do employees have to “hunt them down”?

# Solution #5

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5. Develop a system with easy access (See #1). Make your policies and procedures searchable online or make them part of the employees everyday experience (See #4).

# Problem #6

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6. The policies and procedures are uncontrolled or out of control.

Management and employees can't find your policies and procedures. Maybe they don't even know you have them. When they do go to look for them, they don't even know where to look.

Lack of Organization = Suspect Management

# Solution #6

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6. Revision control is a requirement if your organization is subject to ISO standards. Therefore policies and procedures must be part of the employees' everyday life (See #1 and 4)

# ISO Defined

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The International Organization for Standardization forms a bridge between the private and public sectors. The ISO enables a consensus to be reached on solutions that meet both the requirements of business and the broader needs of society.

It itself is a non-governmental organization, but many of its members are within or regulated by the government.

# ISO in the United States

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ANSI is the US member body of the ISO.

ANSI: American National Standards Institute

Purpose: Comprised of a broad range of businesses and industrial organizations, trade associations, labor unions,... consumer groups, academia and government organizations for the purpose of enhancing global business competitiveness and improving the quality of life for the world's citizens



# Problem #7

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7. The policies and procedures are too generic, general, or simplistic

## Problem?

- Documents are not helpful, so the employees have no reason to look for them.
- Documents do not provide necessary information to allow employees to accomplish a required task.

Uninformed and Confused Employees = Frustrated Work Environment and Ineffective Employees

# Solution #7

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7. Eliminate generic policies and procedures entirely. This will save time and resources.
  - Allow for open feedback from employees.
  - Seek feedback from employees.
  - Consider utilizing usability testing internally

# Problem #8

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8. The policies and procedures are incorrect or poorly written.

## Considerations?

- Usability concerns internally
- Safety concerns internally
- Legal concerns externally

# Solution #8

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8. Keep policies and procedures updated and useful, and they won't be incorrect.

Consider your audience and purpose when writing the policy or procedures.

Utilize employees with strong writing and communication backgrounds to develop policies and procedures.

# Problem #9

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9. The policies and procedures are poorly designed or hard to navigate.

## Considerations?

- Is there a consistency of format across departments?
- Audience Analysis: Who will use this document?
- Purpose: How will the audience use the document?  
Is this a management tool or training aid?

# Solution #9

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9. Create a common format as part of your document control system.

This could be accomplished through a system of company approved, company created templates or through the use of a document software program.

# Problem #10

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10. The policies and procedures are inconsistent or enforced inconsistently.

## Considerations?

- Employees do not understand expectations.
- “Rules” do not mean anything if they are not enforced.
- Inconsistency in Management = Frustrated and Ineffective Employees

# Solution #10

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## 10. Educate the organization to follow the policies and procedures.

- If the policies and procedures are part of the employees daily work experience, they are more likely to be used and followed.
- Positively remind employees (consider tone) of the policies and procedures during regular informational or safety meetings.



# A Closer Look at Policies

EXPLAINS AN ORGANIZATION'S UNDERSTANDING OF AN ISSUE AND THE EXPECTED METHOD FOR DEALING WITH IT.

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“MANAGERS DON'T HAVE PROBLEMS;  
MANAGERS SOLVE PROBLEMS.” – BERNARD  
SCHULMAN

# A Practical Look at Writing Policies

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“Good writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.” - William Strunk

# Overview: Good Policies

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Policies are written in clear, concise, and simple language.

Policy statements address what is the rule rather than how to implement the rule.

Policy statements are readily available and their authority is clear.

“Policy experts” are readily available to interpret policies and resolve problems.

Policies represent a consistent, logical, and legal framework for business action.

*\*Orwell's rules handout*

# Policies: Prewriting Guidelines

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Consider your purpose, audience, and context

1. What is the issue (including its history), and how does it relate to concepts in the mission statement.
2. What is the organization's definition of the issue and method of addressing it?
3. What procedural guidelines will carry out this policy?

# Policies: Prewriting Guidelines

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Review the mission statement, related policy statements, minutes from meetings, the employee handbook, and other relevant documents.

Interview people (management, employees, legal council) knowledgeable about the topic or related issues.

Consider other organization's policies on this or similar topics.

# Policies: Writing Guidelines

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Organize a general policy into three main parts:

1. **Opening:** Introduce the policy by stating the policy name, main idea, and why it was adapted.
2. **Body:** Explain what the policy means and how it will be implemented, including what the employees will do (when, where, how) and what the organization will do (when, where, how).
3. **Conclusion:** List documents used as reference, along with the dates the policy was adapted, revised, or will expire.

# Policies: Writing Guidelines

Components	Definition
Headline Banner	Includes the policy title, issuing date, and identification information such as office of origin
Purpose Statement	A concise statement of the purpose of the policy.
Detailed Statement	Complete policy statement
Applicability	Who the policy applies to and the consequences for non-compliance, if applicable
Help	The office and or individual that should be contacted for interpretations, questions, or problem resolutions
Definition	Definition of terms (as needed)
Policy Authority	The highest administrative officer authorizing the policy.
Related Policies	Information about related policies or procedures
Implementation	Reference to the procedures recommended to carry out the intent of the policy.

# Policies: Revision & Refinement

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With help from management or legal council, check the ideas, organization, and tone.

1. Is the policy correctly cited, clearly explained, and sufficiently supported?
2. Is the organization clear and logical?
3. Is the tone informed, reasoned, and fair?
4. Are the names, titles, and dates correct?
5. Does the format provide easy access and use?



# Exercise

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Group Activity: Analyzing and Writing Policies

University of Buffalo

PPE Policy

# A Closer Look at Procedures

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THE GOAL IS TO INSTRUCT READERS (BOTH EMPLOYEES AND MANAGEMENT) HOW TO CARRY OUT A POLICY.

# Overview: Good Procedures

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The procedures are directly linked to policies.

Procedures are developed with the audience in mind and benefit the user.

The procedures are written in a way that provide for a sense of ownership among the users.

The procedures are understandable and are easily followed by all users.

Procedures offer their users options. When they are too restrictive they limit their usefulness.

# Procedures: Prewriting Guidelines

Consider your purpose, audience, and context

1. What must readers know to implement the policy?
2. What can they expect other to know and do?

# Procedures: Prewriting Guidelines

Study relevant documents such as related policies and procedures, as well as the minutes for the meeting in which the policy was adopted.

Interview people familiar with the issues addressed in the policies.

Identify each person who will have to carry out the policy.

List each person's tasks, duties, and responsibilities as they relate to the policy.

# Procedures: Writing Guidelines

Organize a general procedure into three main parts:

1. **Opening:** Introduce the procedure by identifying the policy that the procedure implements and by briefly summarizing that policy.
2. **Body:** In clear, step-by-step instructions, explain what must be done. Identify forms, reports, or proposals to submit, which people to contact, and which tasks to complete. Cite who must do each activity and when
3. **Conclusion:** State the outcome of the procedure.

# Procedures: Writing Guidelines

Components	Definition
Headline Banner	Includes the procedure title, issuing date, and identification information such as office of origin
Procedure Description	Describes the overall objectives, functions, or tasks that the procedure is designed to accomplish and the circumstances in which it should be used.
Areas of Responsibility	List department, offices, and individual job titles for those who have responsibility for aspects of daily control and coordination of the procedure.
Procedure Details	Provide the reader with the necessary procedural and “how to” information. Include definitions of terms and copies of all forms needed to complete the procedure.
References	Include company policies, federal or state laws and regulations, or other reference directly applicable to the procedure
Help	Lists help for completing forms or carrying out procedures.

# Procedures: Revision & Refinement

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Review the procedure for ideas, organization, and tone.

1. Does the procedure accurately implement the policy?
2. Are safety, security, and legal issues correctly addressed.
3. Are steps, assignments, and completion dates clear and correct?
4. Are correct names, titles and procedural terms used?
5. Did you use action verbs, numbered steps, and an efficient format?



# Focus: Writing SOPs

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PROMOTE QUALITY AND SAFETY BY PROVIDING A METHOD OF  
CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION

ADAPTED FROM THE EPA GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING STANDARD  
OPERATING PROCEDURES

# SOPs: Defined

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A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a set of written instructions that document a routine or repetitive activity followed by an organization.

They document the ways the activities are to be performed to facilitate consistent conformance to technical and quality system requirements and to support data quality.

The term SOP may be replaced by terms such as protocols, instructions, and laboratory operating procedures.

# SOPs: Purpose

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Should be located and readily accessible for reference in work areas of those individuals actually performing the activity, either in hard copy or electronic format, otherwise the SOP serves little purpose.

# SOPs: Benefits

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SOPs minimize variation and promote quality through consistent implementation of a process or procedures within the organization, even if there are temporary or permanent personnel changes.

SOPs can indicate compliance with organizational and governmental requirements and could be used as a training document, since they should provide detailed work instructions.

# SOPs: Benefits

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SOPs minimize opportunities for miscommunication and address safety concerns.

SOPS can reconstruct project activities when no other references are available

SOPs are frequently used as checklists by inspectors when auditing procedures.

SOPS ultimately reduce work efforts and improve comparability, credibility, and legal defensibility.

# SOPs: Special Considerations

SOPs should be written in a concise, step-by-step, easy-to-read format.

The information presented should be conveyed clearly and explicitly to remove any doubt as to what is required.

The active voice and present tense should be used.

Use a flow chart to illustrate the process being described.

Use a company style guide for readability.

# SOPs: Special Considerations

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SOPs should be written with sufficient detail so that someone with limited experience with or knowledge of the procedure, but with basic understanding, can successfully reproduce the procedure when unsupervised.

Since SOPs do tend to be longer than regular procedures, they should include a title page for organization and ease of use.

# SOPs: General Format

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While SOPs vary from corporation to corporation, there are five general components:

1. Title Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Procedures (Scope, applicability, methodology, definitions, health and safety warnings, cautions, equipment, etc.)
4. Quality Assurance/Quality Control
5. References



# Discussion

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WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED TODAY?

# Citations

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<http://www.ofmq.com>

# Resources / Events

APRIL 15 [So You Think You Know Facebook?](#)

MAY 1 Grow your Business through Facebook

MAY 8 [Develop Your Marketing and Editorial Calendars](#)

JUNE 17 [FREE UWGB Webinar](#)

JUNE 19 [Get What you Want](#)



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