

TIPS FOR DRAFTING YOUR DOCUMENT

1. Define your audience.
Who are they? What do they know?
What do they need or want to know?
What, if any, are your reporting requirements (regulatory, informational, etc.)?
2. Write your objective in no more than 2 sentences or up to 4 sentences if you have several sub-objectives.
Why are you writing this document?
What do you hope to accomplish?
What do you want your readers to know or do?
Craft a working title, if necessary, based on your objectives and that clearly describes what your document is about.
3. List the main components (topics) of your document and the general supporting ideas.
What are the main points you want to make?
Organize the ideas into groups of related items.
How do you want to present them?
4. Decide what format your document will take: Q&A, fact sheet, user manual, standard report with or without traditional section formatting (i.e., 1.0, 1.1., 1.2.1, 1.2.1.1, etc.). Your decision is based on who your audience is, their needs, and how your objective is best presented to promote maximum understanding without readers having to work too hard. Build readability into your structure by using the best format style for your document.
5. Using your topics from item #3 and your format from item #4, craft your topic headings into clear statements or phrases (or even single words). The headings must serve as a reliable guide for your readers, assisting them in finding the information they need/want. Headings should be grammatically consistent. Three main types of headings:
 - Topic Heading (e.g., Water Use in Montana)
 - Statement Heading (e.g., Water Use in Montana has Reached Epic Levels)
 - Question Heading (e.g., How Can I Reduce My Water Use?)

6. Under each main heading topic, list the items to be included.
What do you want or need to say about the topic?
Is the topic broad enough that you can divide the information into further categories, e.g., subheadings? (See item #7.) Some main topics may not have subheads, but you still need to list what you're going to say under the main heading.
7. If you create subheadings under each main heading, list what you want or need to say under each of these subheadings. Try to keep your headings, including subheads, to 3 levels only; 4 or more levels make for difficult navigation, and readers can lose their way (e.g., Section 1, Section 1.1, Section 1.1.1).
8. Re-evaluate your structure. It should resemble a basic Table of Contents.
Do the topic headings flow?
Are they logically organized?
Is there anything else you need to cover as a main or subhead?
9. Once you have a solid structure with detailed information about what to include, think about what types of supporting documents might go in the appendix (if any) and where graphics can enhance reader understanding of the information without being redundant or irrelevant.
10. If you've followed these instructions so far, you'll have enough information that most of your draft will be completed. To create topic sentences, begin with a general statement by summarizing the information you will include in that paragraph. All sentences after your topic sentence will support your claim or statement made in the topic sentence. Your supporting sentences provide more information, offer facts, or describe your point.