USING SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
AND CROSS REFERENCING

Supporting documentation

Documents more than 5 pages may require supporting documentation and possibly graphical elements. Outline large writing projects to determine what should be included in the main body of the writing and what is better included as supporting documentation, either as attachments or online links.

Do you need supporting documentation?

Situation	In the main doc	In supporting docs
Audience already knows the information, but you would like to refer to it anyway	Include briefly as a reminder, and if nesc., cite the refs where audience can find more information	If nesc., include in an appendix
Need to reference other works	Properly cite and include brief context for the cited information	Include in an appendix; can also include a list of online links
Need to include methods, raw data, analytical derivations, etc.	Summarize and cite; stick to main conclusions, results, overall methods	Include details in an appendix
Need to present a proposal and back it up with data	Summarize and cite; stick to main points	Include details in an appendix

When to use an appendix
- For supplemental, background, or explanatory information that illustrates or amplifies information within the main document

- For graphics that illustrate derivations for methods or calculations, or that enhance information within the main document, and which would clutter the main document if included within

What not to put in an appendix
- New information that has not been discussed or summarized in the main document unless that new information is a free-standing supporting document

- Irrelevant or redundant information or otherwise does not enlighten the audience

Cross-referencing (x-ref)

Keep x-refs to a minimum because it can overtax readers and challenge their attentiveness to the material. If your document is well organized, you won't need to x-ref so much.

In some cases, repeating the information or a graphic is better than referring readers to another section, especially if the information is just a sentence or two, or the graphic is easily inserted.

All x-refs must clearly describe the referenced material so that readers can decide whether they need to jump to another section to read it.

Try to keep x-refs to 1 or 2 in each main section, or at the most 4, if the section is longer than 4 pages.

Consider putting x-refs at the end of sentence or paragraph rather than in the middle. Doing so is less disruptive to readers. It gives them a chance to absorb your main message before you send them on a treasure hunt.

Avoid these x-ref pitfalls

- **I'm not sure what to write here.** Using x-refs instead of writing actual useful content. Instead, if necessary, simply summarize or briefly reiterate information stated earlier in the writing. Reorganize your material to eliminate unnecessary x-refs.

- **Can you hear me now?** Adding unnecessary x-refs to ensure readers don't miss something. If your table of contents and headings are informative, assume readers will find everything they need without hand-holding.

- **Murky definition.** Adding an x-ref to a definition can create problems if you don't continue to repeat it every time you use the word (see the example in the following table).

If you say:	Then you must not later say:
"a monitoring station as defined in Section 1…" when Section 1 discusses USGS monitoring stations and DEQ stations that each collect different types of data.	"a monitoring station" Readers won't know whether you mean a USGS one or a DEQ one.

  Solution: Clarify whether it's a USGS station or a DEQ station and delete the x-ref to Section 1, which isn't necessary.

- **Boomerang.** Referring readers to something you said earlier in the same section. Doing so sends readers on a futile hunt for another section of the same number, until they finally realize you are referring to the same section they were reading in the first place. If you mean "listed in paragraph (b) of this section" say it that way.

- **All-inclusive.** Assuming readers know, or expecting them to find out, information they aren't likely to. For example: "As a permittee, you must comply with sections 542.6 and 543.10, and all other applicable laws and regulations." What exactly does "all other applicable laws and regulations" cover? Don't expect readers to become legal scholars and research the answer to that question. Instead, be specific.

- **Never-ending story.** Referring readers to another section containing another x-ref, which takes readers to yet another section containing another x-ref. Unless your readers are spiders, don't expect them to follow the web of references.

How to track and manage a document's x-refs and graphics

A spreadsheet will come in handy for updating or changing any text or graphics that might be x-refed.

- Use a spreadsheet to list of all your graphics. For each, include a brief description and the section numbers in which they appear.

- Use a spreadsheet to list of all your x-refs. This helps for when you need to reorganize your document; you'll know where each x-ref needs to be updated.

- During the review and edit phase of writing, look at your spreadsheet to determine whether you've overdone the x-refs and graphics. Are you sending readers all over the place? Are you using the same graphic more than twice?

- During the review and edit phase of writing, go to all the sections that have x-refs and follow them. Is it tedious or confusing? Are all x-refs necessary? Can you eliminate any and instead simply repeat a short excerpt of pertinent information rather than sending readers to another section? What do readers gain by being sent elsewhere? Make your trail of bread crumbs simple so readers aren't led to the candy cottage of irrelevant x-refs and, when they are sent elsewhere, can find their way back home.