

Developing Procedures

Introduction

There are five stages in developing and planning a procedure:

- identify the purpose
- identify the audience
- gather information
- flow chart
- write it down

Identify the Purpose

Do not write procedures for the sake of it. The standards for Quality Assurance require certain procedures to be established *‘where the absence of such instructions would adversely affect quality’*.

For example – you do not need a procedure or instruction on how to operate a PC or how to address an envelope!

The need for documentation may be determined by;

- the standard for Quality Assurance (AS3901)
- staff wishing to formalise activities
- induction training for new employees
- refresher training for existing employees

The first thing to do when developing a procedure is to write down the purpose. This means writing down why you are going to write a procedure.

Ask yourself, ‘What am I writing this for?’ If you can’t think of a reason there is no point in continuing. If someone else has asked you to write a procedure ask them to tell you the purpose.

Writing down a clear purpose helps you to keep focussed on the task. Without a purpose other things will distract you and you will end up with a long-winded, unclear procedure.

The purpose of the procedure is not ‘to write down how things are done’. The purpose may be ‘to ensure things are done properly and consistently’.

Identify the Audience

After writing the purpose work out who will use the procedure. This may not be as simple as it sounds. The procedure will generally be used by the people doing the work, but may also be used at various times by:

- new staff training to do the job
- auditors checking the system
- new/ prospective owners and managers

Ask the following questions:

- what is their educational standard?
- what do they already know (what can we assume)?
- how will they use the procedure?

Answering these questions will help you to write the procedure so that it is useful to all users. Whenever you are not sure what to include, or to leave out, go back to the answers to these questions.

Gathering Information

You can obtain information from many sources:

- published manuals
- specifications
- drawings
- flow charts
- other instructions and procedures
- people

If you are writing the procedure you will usually be the person who knows most about it. Even so, do not ignore offers of help or other sources of information.

Don't worry at this stage about sorting the information. Just get hold of it. Put it all in one place – usually in a file – so that it is readily available for you to look through when needed.

If you are getting the information from other people make sure you record or write down everything during, or immediately after, talking to them. Then check again with them that the information you recorded is accurate and complete. Never rely on memory. If you have to put the information on hold for a month you will not remember all that was discussed.

Flow Charting

Many organisations make the mistake of introducing completely new systems when there is nothing wrong with the existing ones. The introduction and implementation of a quality system is not a 'one off' event. Therefore the initial stage is to document what is happening at the moment and fine tune and modify systems at a later date. Obviously if a system does not meet quality standards or is creating problems then immediate changes are essential.

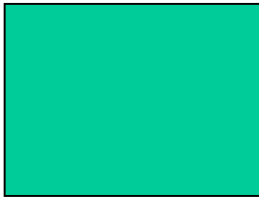
When documenting an existing practice then all employees should have some input. This not only insures that the documentation is correct but also gives some form of ownership. The other people will feel that they have helped to create the quality system and not had it forced on them.

A good way of organising and sorting the information in a logical system is to outline them in the form of a flow chart. By definition a flow chart is: *a chart, which shows the sequence (flow) of an activity, product, service, or instruction, by recording all events using the appropriate symbols.*

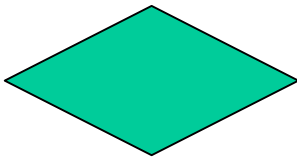
In other words it is writing down the logical sequence of events in the order that they happen, so that you can get an objective view and understanding of what happens (or is meant to happen).

A flow chart can take many forms. Some use symbols and lines and others just use words. There is an internationally accepted set of symbols for those wishing to learn and use them.

Basic Symbols



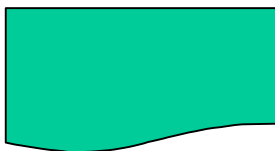
Activity Symbol – designates an activity, operation or process. A brief description is written inside the symbol.



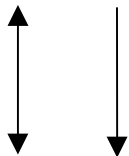
Decision Symbol – designates a decision made. A decision always results in two or more options. The path taken after the decision symbol depends on the answer to the question located in the diamond.



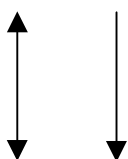
Terminal Symbol – identifies the start and finish points of the flow chart. Activities that happen before the start or after the defined finish do not concern the present chart, but may well be considered in other charts.



Document Symbol – allows references to forms, registers, lists, books, etc, etc. It is used to identify that information is recorded from, or obtained from a particular document.



Flow Lines – connects symbols to one another. They link the symbols and show the direction and order of process.



Connectors – like flow lines but these are attached to only one symbol and indicate a continuation of the flow onto another piece of paper or to another separate process or flow chart.

Writing it Down in Plain English

Spelling

If you are in any doubt as to how to spell a word look it up in the dictionary. Commonly misspelled words include:

- ‘of’ and ‘off’ They are used correctly below:
 - within a metre of
 - a packet of sugar
 - the city of Sydney
 - the handle has come off
 - break off negotiations
 - to see a friend off on a journey

- ‘to’ and ‘too’. They are used correctly below:
 - Monday to Thursday
 - rotten to the core
 - go to the rescue
 - too long
 - not too bad
 - too many

- ‘affect’ and ‘effect’. They are used correctly below:
 - affects the product
 - moss affects the northern slopes
 - the injury affected his family
 - the effect of the heat
 - to bring the plan into effect
 - to write to that effect

Take care with words that may be hyphenated (-). If you are unsure if a word is one single word, two separate words, or is hyphenated, consult the dictionary or use the spell checker on the computer.

Punctuation

Use a colon (:) to introduce a list.

Use a comma (,) when, if you were speaking the sentence, you would take a breath or pause to emphasise a point.

Using Lists

When you have a number of things to do or to include, make a list rather than a long sentence. Compare the following. Which is easier to understand?

- ‘Ensure all the client’s details are known including the client’s name, delivery address, contact name, invoicing address, delivery date and agreed price.’

- ‘Ensure all the client’s details are known including the client’s:
 - name
 - delivery address
 - contact name
 - invoicing address
 - delivery date
 - agreed price.’

Use dot points (bullets) when the order of the list is not important. Use a numbered (or lettered) list when it is important. This is especially important when the procedure will not work if carried out in any other order.

Active Voice

Using the 'active voice' livens up procedures. They are easier to read and much more interesting. Some examples:

√ Plan the job on the planning sheet
X The job is planned on the planning sheet

√ Proofread the document before faxing
X The document should be proofread before being faxed

√ Take minutes and prepare a contact report
X Minutes should be taken and a contact report prepared

Use this checklist to see if you have used the 'active' or the 'passive' voice. If you have the following words in your procedures, check to see if you can use a more active tone:

- **'is'**
- **'was'**
- **'are'**
- **'be'**
- **any word that ends in 'ed'**

The difference between active and passive voice might not seem much, but it makes a big difference to the reader. Passive voice is boring and active energises people!

Short Sentences

Keep sentences short and simple. Sentences longer than 12 to 15 words are difficult to read and understand. If you must write long sentences you can usually either:

- separate them into two or more sentences by adding or changing a few words
- cut out duplicated or redundant words that do not add to the meaning

It is very easy to add words that don't add much meaning to the sentence – redundant words. These just make the procedure harder to understand. So remove any word that doesn't have a direct impact. This helps to get your message across more clearly.

- √ Using an aggressive telephone manner may scare clients away
- X When speaking to clients on the telephone avoid using an aggressive telephone manner as this may scare certain of our more sensitive clients away and cause us to lose valuable sales.

Simple Words

Use short words instead of multi-syllabic (long) ones. Wherever possible use the same word for the same thing. For example don't use 'the driver's cab' in one sentence, 'the control compartment' in the next, and 'the steering and power space' in the third when you mean the same thing each time.

Call a spade 'a spade' and not 'a manual digging instrument'.

USE	INSTEAD OF
is for, does	provides
stays	remains
end	terminate
enough	sufficient
start	initiate, commence
go	proceed
get	obtain

Using Capitals, Bold & Italics

Always use capital letters (upper case) as the first letter for a proper noun and for the start of all sentences. Other than that avoid using capital letters for any more than a single word or a person's or things title (eg Prime Minister, Section Control Officer, etc). Capital letters are much harder to read than lower case letters. If you want to emphasise text from other text in the same block or for titles and headings then use other methods such as:

- **size**
- **bold** or
- *italics*

Just remember that bold does not always photocopy well.

Compare the following:

- √ 'The document is then forwarded to the Documentation Control Officer who will arrange its distribution.'
- X 'THE DOCUMENT IS THEN FORWARDED TO THE DOCUMENTATION CONTROL OFFICER WHO WILL ARRANGE ITS DISTRIBUTION.'

If your organisation has a standard way of presenting the information use it. Do not make up your own as this will cause confusion and inconsistency. Incidentally this should apply to all documentation produced by the business – not just procedures.

Layout and Format

Introduction

A format needs to be established for procedures to ensure uniformity and consistency within the quality system documentation.

Typical headings can include:

1. Purpose
2. Scope
3. Responsibilities
4. Definitions
5. Procedure
6. Referenced Documents

Purpose

This should outline the object or intent of the procedure. It is important because this is the guide to why you are writing the procedure. If you do not have a purpose for writing the procedure, why are you?

Scope

The scope should outline the department, employees or activities to which the procedure is to be applied. It may define how this procedure is started and what the finishing point is. In other words this describes the length and breadth of the procedure. This helps you to keep on track when writing the procedure and not to wander off the subject. Depending on how you approach the scope, you may be able to trace a job as it passes through the organisation, eg:

Procedure - Getting the Brief

Scope – from first client contact through to accepting the brief

or

Procedure – Planning

Scope – from accepted brief to starting work on it

Responsibilities

Allocates responsibilities for activities covered within the procedure. This is useful in large organisations or when many people may or may not be involved in a procedure. Listing the people whose position titles appear in the procedure allows them to see at a glance if they need to read the rest of it.

Procedure - Getting the Brief

Scope – from first client contact through to accepting the brief

Responsibilities – Salesperson, Sales Manager, Accounts Dept

Definitions

If there are any particular words or abbreviations not defined elsewhere it is useful to do so here. If you have many definitions it is generally better to define them together in one place. This may be at the beginning or end of the manual or in a completely separate reference document.

Procedure

Details the actions needed for the activity the procedure relates to. Details the who, what, where, when and why of the activity.

Referenced Documents

All documents that are included in the procedure need to be listed. Some may be included in the procedure manual as appendices or attachments. The documents can include:

- forms
- registers
- other procedures
- standards
- specifications

Reviewing Procedures

As stated before, if a current practice works and complies with the purpose or with the standards don't change it. However if you review it and improvements and changes are needed then introduce them immediately and rewrite the procedure.

Points to remember when reviewing:

- does it meet the purpose?
- are we having problems?
- are objectives being achieved?

Take your time and be sure to check:

- spelling errors and typos
- cross referencing
- diagrams or charts match the text
- grammar
- simple sentences
- active voice
- simple words
- one word only for the same thing

Review everything at least twice before you even think about issuing it for use.

The importance of this review cannot be overstressed – it is vital. If you issue a half-finished, misspelt, factually inaccurate procedure it may be worse than never having written it.

You will probably never get the procedure perfect but it must be good enough to convey the right information clearly and concisely.