

3-1-2016

9. Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

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Recommended Citation

McMurray, David, "9. Standard Operating Policies and Procedures" (2016). *Sexy Technical Communications*. 9.
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*Sexy Technical
Communication*

Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

David McMurray

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Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

This chapter introduces you to policies and procedure documents and to standard operating procedure documents. Click on the links, below, to see samples.

[Hand-washing policies for health care personnel](#)

[Accounting policies and procedures](#)

[Standard operating procedures: pouring dental impressions](#) (Thanks to Melissa Burke for making this SOP available.)

Standard Operating Policies and Procedures: Overview

Standard operating procedures and policy-and-procedure documents are roughly the same: they establish standards for doing things and present specific step-by-step procedures for doing those things. Although these distinctions blur in practice, a policy-and-procedure document focuses more often on behavior expected of employees (for example, policies and procedures on smoking, substance abuse, sexual harrassment). Standard operating procedures focus more standard expectations for performing specific procedures such as hand-washing by health care professionals or taking a dental implant in a dental lab.

Organizations use policies and procedures documents to record their rules and regulations: attendance policies, substance-abuse policies, work-flow procedures, and so on. Once recorded, the policies and procedures are there for everybody in the organization to refer to, and these documents become the means of settling most disputes within the

organization. To distinguish between these two terms, policies are rule statements. Policies are like laws: for example, most organizations have antiharassment policies, which mimic actual government-legislated laws. Procedures, on the other hand, are the step-by-step methods of carrying out those policies. Of course, some policies do not require procedures. If the organization has a no-smoking policy, that's all that need be said. However, if someone breaks that policy, a procedure is needed for handling that situation

Standard Operating Policies and Procedures: Writing Projects

If you are enrolled in a course associated with this page, you are in a writing course, not a business management course. Our focus is on good writing; well-designed documents; documents that accomplish their purposes; and documents that meet common expectations as to their content, organization, and format. Standard operating procedure and policy-and-procedure documents are obviously an important application of writing and can contain substantial technical information about an organization's operations. But don't view this chapter as the last word on these topics.

Standard Operating Policies and Procedures: Structure

As you can see from the two standard operating procedures and policy-and-procedure documents in the links above, there are some standard contents and format.

- Decimal numbering system—This feature enables policies or procedures to be "cited." For example, if an employee smokes at a building entryway, you can cite admin policy 23.1.4 (or just give a warning and forget the whole thing this once).
 - Heavy use of predicates ("Establish" this, "promote" that).
 - Distinction between policies and procedures in the hand-washing example. Policies tell employees what to do; procedures tell them exactly how to do it.
 - Tracking numbers to enable ease of reference.
 - Ownership and approval names are specified.
 - Revision dates, to enable employees to know whether they are looking at the most current version.
 - Definitions to establish the precise meanings of key terms.
 - Use of "will" to indicate a requirement (older style uses "shall").
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Standard Operating Policies and Procedures: Resources

Here are some resources for standard operating procedures:

- www.bizmanualz.com/blog/how-to-write-standard-operating-procedures-sop.html

Provided by bizmanualz.com.

- www.nsf.gov/about/contracting/rfqs/support_ant/docs/environ_health_safety/usap_sand311.pdf

Medical procedures developed for McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

- [Guidance for Preparing Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\)](#). From the EPA.

Here are some resources for policies and procedures:

- Stephen Page. www.companymanuals.com. Articles about policies and procedures.
- About.com. <http://humanresources.about.com/od/policysamples/>. Sample policies and procedures.
- [Management](#). Articles from about.com.
- [Policies and Procedures](#). From Wikipedia.
- [Guide to Writing Policy and Procedure Documents](#). From UC Santa Clara.
- [Policies and procedures](#). From BusinessDictionary.com.