

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

WORK

METHOD STATEMENTS IN PLAIN ENGLISH

GUIDELINES FEBRUARY 1998
BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

Why do we need work method statements?

The purpose of a work method statement is:

- to outline a safe method of work for a specific job
- to provide an induction document that workers must read and understand before starting a job
- to meet legal requirements, that is, hazard identification and control
- to program work, materials, time, staff, and to anticipate possible problems
- to use as a tool in quality assurance.

Remember that a work method statement is part of a site safety plan. This plan should include:

- Induction Training
- Register of Hazardous Substances
- Work Method Statement
- OHS Procedures
- Responsibilities Flow Chart
- Rehabilitation Policy.

There is a growing need for companies to write work method statements in plain English. These procedures must be readily understood by all employees, including employees with low literacy/numeracy skills. The aim of this document is to provide you with ideas and suggestions to help you write work method statements in an easy to read style, that is, in plain English.

If you take time and care to prepare clear and concise site specific work method statements you can save your company valuable time and money. These savings return greater profits.

We hope that the suggestions in this booklet will assist writers of work method statements to use language and formatting that is concise, clear and easily understood.

PART A:

Suggested proforma

The proforma on the following pages covers all the main points required by major contractors and the law. In it we have suggested ways of filling in each section.

Explaining the proforma

Write all your work method statements after consulting the workers who are going to use them. You may then need to redraft them to include their suggestions. They may see a better and safer way of doing the job.

Workers will be more willing to take ownership of the documents and act on them if they participate in planning and writing them.

We designed the proforma to fit A4 paper. It is double sided. This overcomes the problems of having more than one sheet of paper to deal with. However, you could add extra pages if there is not enough space in any one section.

In the proforma the procedures, possible hazards and safety controls are printed side by side. This will make it easier for you to consider the possible hazards for each step. Then you can decide on the appropriate controls to overcome each hazard.

All employees should be aware that there are work method statements and that they **must see and sign them**.

Work Method Statement (Part 1)

Contractor:		Signed Off: _____
Project:		Date: _____ No: _____
Job		Accepted: _____ Yes / No
Procedure (in steps):		Area:
1.	Possible Hazards:	Safety Controls:
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
7.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		

Work Method Statement (Part 2)

Personal Qualifications and Experience:	Personnel, Duties and Responsibilities:	Training Required to Complete Work:
Engineering Details/Certificates/WorkCover Approvals:	Codes of Practice, Legislation:	
Plant/Equipment:	Maintenance Checks:	
Read and Signed by All Employees on Site:		

Work Method Statement (Part 1)		Signed Off: _____
Contractor: <i>Put the name of your organisation here.</i>		Date: _____ No: _____
Project: <i>Put the name of the building you are working on here.</i>		Accepted: _____ Yes / No
Job: <i>Write in the task or job that you are doing.</i>		Area: _____
Procedure (in steps):	Possible Hazards:	Safety Controls:
1. <i>Write out the job step by step</i>	<i>Include all possible hazards such as:</i>	<i>List all safety controls such as:</i>
2. <i>Start each step with an action word. For example</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous substances, explosives, dust, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSDS
3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix hand rail to stair well walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual handling, lifting heavy weights (15kg?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warning Signs
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twisting, pushing and pulling, lifting and carrying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal protective equipment
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazards to others in area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fellow workers/public safety provisions
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubbish, electrical, fills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage of materials and equipment
7.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housekeeping
7.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		

Work Method Statement (Part 2)

Personal Qualifications and Experience:	Personnel, Duties and Responsibilities:	Training Required to Complete Work:
You will need to list all the details of	Give details of the duties and specific	Make sure that all workers and their supervisors
qualifications and experience you and your	responsibilities of supervisors and other	are trained in the procedures needed to complete
workers will need for the job. Include: trade	personnel. For example, describe such things as	the job safely, especially where you are using
certificates, WorkCover tickets, demolition	daily safety check of the work area by leading	new or changed work methods.
licences for contractor. Experience may cover	hand. You might like to include on a separate	
previous work done in the area that may	sheet, a flow chart showing the structure of your	
not require certificates or licences.	organisation and include the responsibilities of	
	each person in that structure	
Engineering Details/Certificates/WorkCover Approvals:	Codes of Practice, Legislation:	
Give details that might be required for demolition, precast panel erection,	Are relevant codes of practice available on site? Is the work method equal	
structural steel erection. Certificates may be needed for formwork –	to or better than any applicable codes of practice for the job to be done?	
falsework, machinery on suspended slabs, point loading on suspended	Do procedures agree with relevant legislation?	
slabs and WorkCover approval of machine-felling for demolition work.		
Plant/Equipment:	Maintenance Checks:	
List plant and equipment that you use on the job, e.g. ladders, scaffold	Include: maintenance on cranes, forklift, monthly check on all electrical	
trestles, grinders, electrical leads and equipment, formwork materials	equipment and necessary tags, etc	
shoring materials, oxy set, welding machines, fire extinguishers, etc.		
Read and Signed by All Employees on Site:		

PART B:

Points to remember when writing work method statements in plain English:

“Plain English is getting a clear message across to your audience in an appropriate way. This means being clear about what you want to say, who you’re saying it to and how you’re going to say it. Plain English is effective communication”. NSW Adult Literacy Council

Plain English means:

- considering the reader
- communicating a clear message to the reader
- using clear, concise language
- rethinking how information is presented so that it attracts the reader.

Plain English does not mean:

- writing in simple English
- using the minimum amount of words
- getting rid of technical language
- talking down to the reader
- losing meaning.

Plain English has many benefits:

- Workers are more likely to read and act on written texts
- Readers are less frustrated and view documents in a more positive way
- There is less interruption to work from queries and misunderstandings
- Documents take less time to produce
- Safety and quality can be improved
- Training is easier and more time efficient.

Audience:

Keep in mind the personnel who are going to read the work method statement and consider these questions:

- How well do they read? (educational background)
- Are they from a non-English speaking background?

Seven ways to write effectively:

Now we will look at seven ways to write work method statements effectively in plain English. These will make your work method statements easier to write and understand. The seven ways to write effectively are:

1. **Write out the job procedure step by step**page ??
2. **Use active, not passive voice**page ??
3. **Sequence ideas logically**page ??
4. **Keep sentences short and clear**page ??
5. **Choose words carefully**page ??
6. **Use verbs not nouns**page ??
7. **Consider layout and formatting**page ??

1. Write out the job procedure step by step

Start each step with an action word.

Set it out as shown in the *Procedure Section of the Suggested Proforma* on page 5.

Examples

Example 1:

1. **Deliver** all duct to the site.
2. **Store** in areas set aside by the builder.
3. **Clear** work area of all obstacles.
4. **Join** ductwork on floor in lengths less than nine metres.

Example 2:

1. **Locate** centre of each hole.
2. **Check** that each hole would only penetrate the slab thickness.
3. **Drill** an 8 to 10 mm pilot hole.
4. **Insert** a small wire or rod through each hole.

Example 3:

1. **Erect** and **brace** columns.
2. **Erect** and **brace** beams.
3. **Tie** beams and bracing.
4. **Bridge** purlins.
5. **Tension** bolts.

2. Use active, not passive voice

Use active, not passive voice. It is more personal and direct and specifies who must do the action.

Examples:

- ✗ Materials **must be removed** in manageable lots.
- ✓ **Remove** materials in manageable lots.
- ✗ Protective gloves **are to be worn**.
- ✓ **Wear** protective gloves.
- ✗ Fork lifts must not **be driven** faster than walking speed.
- ✓ **Never drive** forklifts faster than walking speed.
- ✗ Leads **are to be kept** above floor level.
- ✓ **Keep** leads above floor level.
- ✗ All equipment **to be checked** and **tested**.
- ✓ **Check** and **test** all equipment.

3. Sequence ideas logically

(i) Put the main idea first

Examples:

- ✗ When you are working in a dusty and windy area, **wear** safety glasses.
- ✓ **Wear** safety glasses when you are working in a dusty and windy area.
- ✗ From the information on the plan, **establish** the required width of the formwork.
- ✓ **Establish** the required width of the formwork from the information on the plan.

(ii) Put the time phrase, if important, as a sub-heading and then the instructions in point form underneath.

Example:

When cutting, drilling or shaping glasswool insulation:

- a) **wear** protective clothing
- b) **use** a suitable dust mask
- c) **avoid** contact with your eyes.

(iii) Try to put information in point form for clear and easy reading.

Example:

- ✗ When compressed air jack hammers are to be employed for the purpose of excavation, it is advisable to make certain that the air compressor is placed within as close a proximity as practicable to the worksite and all equipment is to be fitted with suitable apparatus for noise abatement. Hearing protection is to be worn by all employees at all times and air hoses are to be fitted with snap-on safety couplings which are to be fixed to the hose by the use of safety locking pins.

- ✓ When using jack hammers for excavation work:
 - a) **place** the compressor as close to the work as possible
 - b) **make sure** that the equipment is fitted with noise controls
 - c) **wear** hearing protection
 - d) **use** snap-on safety couplings on all hoses
 - e) **fix** safety couplings with safety locking pins.

(iv) **Separate any extra information that may be needed to make the instruction clear. Do this by putting the extra information in a highlighted box or by using italics.**

Example:

Block off fixed type laser beams by using a beam stop.

Safety Note

Effective beam stops have a matt finish to stop reflection. Earth, wood, plywood, brick, mortar, concrete or plasterboard surfaces are suitable.

Roughen the surface of metal beam stops.

(v) **Use parallel structures - that is use the same grammatical structure to express similar ideas or two or more ideas in the same sentence.**

Example:

- ✗ To prevent falls:
 - **fix** solid one metre high guard rail
 - **workers must use** a safety harness
 - **workers wearing** safety footwear
 - securely **covering** all floor penetrations
- ✓ To prevent falls:
 - **fix** solid one metre high guard rail
 - **use** safety harness
 - **wear** safety footwear
 - **cover** all floor penetrations securely.

4. **Keep sentences short and clear**

Remember:

- a) **Long and/or complex sentences are more difficult to understand. They take longer to read and can hide information.**
- b) **A sentence should contain only one or two ideas. Separate ideas with lists, dot points and punctuation (commas, semi-colons, colons).**
- c) **If you must have a long sentence (more than 18 words), follow it with a short one.**

Example:

- ✘ The trainer will ensure that each crane driver/chaser is fully skilled in lifting procedures and, most importantly, will confirm that each crane driver/chaser fully understands what his duties are.
- ✔ Trainers must make sure that crane drivers/chasers:
 - a) know correct lifting procedures
 - b) fully understand their duties.

5. Choose words carefully

(i) Don't use too many formal words or long winded phrases. (See Appendix 1)

Examples:

- ✘ ensure
- ✔ make sure
- ✘ accordingly
- ✔ so
- ✘ without further delay
- ✔ immediately
- ✘ at this point in time
- ✔ now.

(ii) Avoid unnecessary repetition or redundancies. (See Appendix 2)

Examples:

- ✘ Power to the construction site is available **on an around the clock basis**.
- ✔ Power to the construction site is available 24 hours a day.

(iii) Do not use too many nouns together - they can make the document difficult to understand because the reader must take in a lot of information in a short space.

Examples:

- ✘ safety regulation handbook
- ✔ handbook of safety rules
- ✘ estimated monthly attendance performance bonus
- ✔ monthly attendance bonus.

(iv) Avoid jargon, slang, idioms, sexist or racist terms, and foreign expressions.

Examples:

- a) chippie, sparky, gofer
- b) I'm broke
- c) as slow as a snail
- d) foreman,
- e) déjà vu.

- (v) **Do not use contractions (short forms). They are not as strong as the words written in full.**

Example:

- ✘ Don't
- ✓ Do not.

- (vi) **Beware of acronyms (words made from initials) - you must explain what they mean the first time you use them.**

Example:

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU).

- (vii) **Spell out abbreviations to avoid confusion whenever possible. If you must abbreviate:**

- a) **do so only when necessary, and**
- b) **make sure that the abbreviations are understood.**

Examples:

- ✘ e.g.
- ✓ for example
- ✘ i.e.
- ✓ that is.

- (viii) **Spell out one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and ten. Over ten, use numbers -11,12,13**

- (ix) **Use spelling from the Macquarie Dictionary. It is the most suitable for Australia.**

6. Use verbs not nouns

Be careful of turning verbs into nouns (nominalisation). This makes the document "heavy" or "academic" and hard to read.

(See Appendix 3 for a list)

Examples:

- ✘ **Utilisation** of backhoes on construction sites must only be done in **consultation** with supervisor.
- ✓ **Consult** supervisors before **using** backhoes on construction sites.
- ✘ **Failure** to comply with these directives will result in **expulsion** from this facility and/or **notification** of the construction company.
- ✓ We will **expel** you from this site and **notify** the construction company if you do not comply with these directives.

7. Consider layout and formatting

- **Keep your layout open.** Use plenty of white space. This makes the procedure more readable.
- **Use no more than two separate font styles:** one **Bold** and the other *Italic*. If you use more, the finished product will not present well.

- **Avoid using CAPITALS to write full words** - THEY ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO READ.
- **Do not use underlining**. Make important headings larger instead.
- **Justify (line up) the text to the left** as this helps you to read the document more easily.
- **Use a serif rather than a sans serif font**. Again, it is easier to read.

For example:

- ✗ Supply eye protectors to operators, other workers and visitors where there are eye hazards. Always wear eye protectors. (Sans Serif)
- ✓ Supply eye protectors to operators, other workers and visitors where there are eye hazards. Always wear eye protectors. (Serif)

- **Learn how to use your keyboard to its full capacity**. There are many features that can be used to give a more professional finish.
- **Take care with the length of lines**. 50 - 70 characters is the ideal number of characters per line.
- **Use subheadings to help break up large blocks of text and guide the reader to the information**.
- **Use colour sparingly**. It is harder to read than black and white.
- **Make sure graphics are easy to understand**.
- **Keep layout consistent** throughout the document.
- **If you need to include a glossary of technical terms make sure that you follow the agreed layout**.

Finally, get somebody who does not know the job to read the work method statement. You have achieved a satisfactory result if they understand it.

Alternatives to Writing:

It is very important to consider alternatives to writing if you have employees who have reading problems. They may not be able to read words but they may be able to follow a picture, a diagram or spoken instructions.

Use alternatives to writing if these convey the meaning more easily:

- Flow charts for writing work instructions and procedures, explaining processes, defining production goals
- Diagrams, illustrations, graphics, line drawings for technical terminology and procedures
- Tables, charts, graphs (pie, vertical, line etc.) for statistics, production data and figures
- Maps for emergency procedures, locations and layout of areas.

Or

Read the work method statement to employees and check that they have understood it. Make sure that they then sign it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Formal words and long winded phrases

<i>Use these</i>	<i>instead of these</i>
no	absence of
so, therefore	accordingly
follow	adhere to
changes	adjustments
manage	administer
give, divide	allocate
clear, plain	apparent
when necessary	as applicable
later	at a later time
always	at all times
now	at the present time
because	because of the fact that
by	by means of
since, because	by virtue of the fact
work out	calculate
start	commence
complete	complete in all respects
has	contain
now	currently
make less, reduce	decrease
despite	despite the fact that
shown	described herein
stop, end	discontinue
send	dispatch
because, since	due to the fact that
length of	duration of
inside, within	encase
exit	egress
make sure	ensure
work out	estimate
check	examine
leave out	exclude
show, tell	explain
for	for the purpose of

Use these

because
later
need
causing
same
at once
according to
and
with
about
about
finally
soon
now
considering
if
look at, check
tell
see, adhere to, obey
regularly
before
part
rules, ways
why
fix
move
need, want, must
needing
must
must
to
after
job
the kind of
use
when
could, might
immediately

instead of these

for this reason
further down the track
have to
giving rise to
identical
immediately
in accordance with
in addition
in conjunction with
in reference to
regarding
in the final analysis
in the near future
in this day and age
in view of
in the event that
inspect
notify
observe
on a regular basis
prior to
portion
procedures
reason for
rectify
relocate
require
requiring
required to
shall
so as to
subsequent to
task to be performed
the nature of
utilise
whilst, while
with a potential to
without further delay

APPENDIX 2

Redundancies - unnecessary repetitions

<i>Use these</i>	<i>instead of these</i>
essential	absolutely essential
adequate	adequate enough
warning	advance warning
fundamentals	basic fundamentals
big	big in size
combined	combined together
eliminate	completely eliminate
component	component part
consensus	consensus of opinion
continue	continue on
cooperate	cooperate together
each	each and every
result	end result
identical	exactly identical
outcome	final outcome
thanks	grateful thanks
few	few in number
green hat	green coloured hat
inventory	inventory stock
cooperation	mutual cooperation
action required	necessary action required
prerequisite	necessary prerequisite
beginning	new beginning
first hand	on a first hand basis
history	past history
period	period of time
reason	reason why
red	red in colour
refer	refer back
repeat	repeat again
schedule	time schedule
little	tiny little
total	total and utter
facts	true facts

APPENDIX 3

Verb forms for commonly used nouns

Use these verbs	instead of these nouns
anchor	anchorage
act	action
alter	alteration
apply	application
analyse	analysis
assess	assessment
assist	assistance
attach	attachment
complete	completion
comply	compliance
connect	connection
construct	construction
erect	erection
examine	examination
expose	exposure
fail	failure
identify	identification
improve	improvement
inform	information
install	installation
isolate	isolation
investigate	investigation
maintain	maintenance
organise	organisation
place	placement
position	positioning
prepare	preparation
project	projection
protect	protection
recognise	recognition
reduce	reduction
reject	rejection
remove	removal
specify	specification
supervise	supervision
terminate	termination
train	training
vary	variation

APPENDIX 4 - CHECKLIST

Check List - Writing Effective Work Method Statements

Have you:	Yes/No	Comments
kept your sentences short and clear? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminated unnecessary words • avoided using too many clauses in a sentence 		
used active not passive voice?		
sequenced your information logically?		
chosen your words carefully? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used words familiar to employees • used consistent language • avoided using idioms • explained acronyms and abbreviations • defined technical words (used a glossary) • standardised modality (must, should) 		
used verbs not nouns for actions?		
avoided using strings of nouns?		
considered alternatives to writing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diagrams, graphics, charts, tables, maps, flow charts 		
followed the agreed format? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • layout • style guide 		
observed copyright laws? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledged sources 		

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