**Document Development Lifecycle Cheatsheet** (including key questions to ask at each step)

**1. Planning**

**Purpose**: Define the scope and goals of the document.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **Audience & Goals**:
  + Who is the target audience for this document? What are their roles (e.g., end-users, developers)?
  + What problems or questions will this document solve for the audience?
  + What is the primary purpose of this document (e.g., teaching, guiding, reference)?
  + What is the expected outcome after the audience uses this document?
* **Scope & Type**:
  + What specific topics or features need to be covered? What can be excluded?
  + What type of document will best suit the needs (e.g., user manual, installation guide, FAQs)?
* **Logistics**:
  + What is the deadline for delivering this document?
  + What resources (SMEs, tools, budget) are available for creating this document?
  + Are there any templates, style guides, or previous documents to reference?
  + Who are the key stakeholders and decision-makers for approvals?

**2. Research and Information Gathering**

**Purpose**: Collect all necessary information to create content.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **SME Interviews**:
  + Can you walk me through the process/product this document is about?
  + What are the most common pain points or misunderstandings users experience?
  + Are there any specific workflows or edge cases that should be highlighted?
  + Are there any FAQs, support tickets, or customer feedback to address?
* **Existing Resources**:
  + What documentation already exists? What is useful or outdated in those materials?
  + Are there release notes, system architecture diagrams, or user feedback available?
* **Hands-On Testing**:
  + How can I access the product or system to test it myself?
  + What tools or environments do I need to use for testing?

**3. Drafting**

**Purpose**: Create the first version of the document.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **Structure & Style**:
  + What is the best way to organize the content? (Chronological steps, thematic sections, FAQs?)
  + What tone and level of detail should the document have? (e.g., formal, instructional, conversational?)
* **Content Creation**:
  + Are there any industry or internal style guides I need to follow?
  + Do any sections require examples, screenshots, or visuals for clarity?
  + How can I phrase technical concepts in simpler terms without losing accuracy?

**4. Review and Editing**

**Purpose**: Ensure the document is accurate, clear, and aligned with its goals.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **Feedback & Accuracy**:
  + Are the technical details in the draft correct? Can an SME verify this?
  + Is there anything unclear, ambiguous, or inconsistent in the content?
* **Consistency & Quality**:
  + Does the content align with the organization’s tone and style guidelines?
  + Are formatting, grammar, and punctuation consistent throughout the document?
  + Are all visuals (diagrams, screenshots, etc.) accurate and properly labelled?
* **Iterative Improvements**:
  + What specific areas need revision based on feedback?
  + Is additional information or clarification required for any section?

**5. Approval**

**Purpose**: Obtain final sign-off from stakeholders.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **Stakeholder Feedback**:
  + Do you have any final feedback or concerns about this document?
  + Does the document meet its stated goals and purpose?
  + Are there any unresolved questions or comments from earlier reviews?
* **Final Steps**:
  + Who has the authority to provide final approval?
  + Are there any last-minute changes needed before sign-off?

**6. Publishing**

**Purpose**: Make the document accessible to its intended audience.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **Formatting & Platforms**:
  + What is the best format for this document (PDF, HTML, printed)?
  + Where will the document be published? (e.g., website, intranet, software UI)
  + Are there platform-specific guidelines or limitations to consider?
* **Distribution**:
  + How will the audience be notified about this document’s availability?
  + Are there instructions or links to guide users to access the document?

**7. Maintenance**

**Purpose**: Keep the document up-to-date and relevant.  
  
**Questions to Ask**:

* **Feedback Loop**:
  + What feedback have we received from users about this document?
  + Are there recurring questions or issues that the document could better address?
* **Change Tracking**:
  + Have there been any updates to the product, system, or process that affect this document?
  + Are there planned updates or releases that will require revisions?
* **Review Cycle**:
  + How often should this document be reviewed and updated?
  + Who is responsible for maintaining and updating the document?

These questions can guide you in gathering the right information, meeting the document's objectives, and ensuring its quality and relevance.