**What is a white paper?**

A white paper is a persuasive essay that uses evidence, facts and reasoning to help a business audience understand a specific topic or particular problem and is usually between 2,000 and 5,000 words long. White papers encourage their target audience of potential customers or partners (and the technical experts that work with them) to solve a problem in a specific way or come to a specific conclusion. White papers are usually part of the early or middle stages of a customer’s buying cycle.

 There are two main types of white papers:

* A *backgrounder* talks about the benefits of a product or service and uses evidence to explain why that given product or service is advantageous for the target audience. This is not necessarily a hard sell document. Rather, the evidence about the product or service should speak for itself.
* **A *problem-solution approach* identifies common pain points for that industry and offers solutions to those pain points. Those solutions should direct the audience to the product or service your company provides.**

In either case, the purpose of a white paper is to showcase your company’s expertise and knowledge and to exhibit your ability to create value for your customers. While white papers are very much a part of an overall marketing strategy, they are more about cultivating relationships and building trust with your potential clients than directly seeking conversions.

**What to include in a white paper.**

**An executive summary.**

White papers begin with a short encapsulation of the subject matter, known as an executive summary. This summary should always contain the key takeaways and main ideas of your white paper. This section should be entirely accessible to a non-technical audience.

**Research that makes the case for your product or service.**

White papers are persuasive, but they are not sales pitches. Even if a white paper is about the efficacy of a given product or service, it makes its case with research, useful information and hard numbers rather than rhetoric or branding. It should read more like an educational or academic text than something from a marketing department, even if that’s who wrote it.

 A good white paper presents data in the most optimal way possible for your business and addresses your customer’s potential pain points. Often it will call out third-party research or a case study that shows results that support your brand and help steer your customers when making buying decisions. 

**A professional yet accessible tone.**

White papers walk a fine line between high-level business ideas and on-the-ground technical details. They should be accessible for business decision makers such as executives or department heads who might have a good high-level understanding of the technical side of their business, but who may not be familiar with every bit of technical minutiae.

 You should also write them with a technical audience in mind. Decision makers like COOs or CTOs may very well have a technical background and executives often look for input from technical experts before coming to a decision. Technical professionals will read your white paper and it should be sufficiently detailed and fact-based for them to appreciate the content.

**Clean and functional design.**

White papers often incorporate photography, charts and infographics. However, all of these elements should be included to inform, rather than to illustrate; [white paper design](https://www.behance.net/gallery/18132943/CEDAR-White-Paper-Design?tracking_source=search_projects_views%7Cwhite%20paper) should be clean and professional. Visual elements can greatly enhance a white paper’s understandability and persuasive power, but they should serve the same role as visual elements in an academic paper or technical article.