

WBS Dictionary: A Detailed Guide with Examples | PM Study Circle

10–13 minutes

Today, we will discuss the **WBS Dictionary**, a vital [project management document](#) that complements the Work Breakdown Structure.

A Work Breakdown Structure Dictionary provides detailed descriptions of each component within the Work Breakdown Structure. The WBS breaks down the project into smaller, manageable tasks, and the WBS Dictionary adds depth by defining the scope, deliverables, timelines, responsibilities, and resources associated with each work package.

This detailed documentation ensures clarity and consistency, minimizing misunderstandings among team members and stakeholders. By offering precise definitions, the WBS Dictionary plays a crucial role in keeping the project aligned with its objectives, enhancing communication, and facilitating efficient project execution and control.

What is the WBS Dictionary?

A WBS Dictionary is a supporting document that provides detailed information about each element in the Work Breakdown Structure. It expands on the WBS by defining each work package, including work descriptions, deliverables, timelines, required resources, costs, and responsible personnel.

The WBS Dictionary helps clarify the scope of work for each task, ensuring that all stakeholders understand the project's requirements. This detailed documentation helps avoid confusion, manage scope, and ensure accurate project planning and execution.

According to the PMBOK Guide, the WBS Dictionary is “A document that provides detailed deliverable, activity, and scheduling information about each component in the work breakdown structure.”

The WBS Dictionary is part of the [scope baseline](#), which has three components: the [scope statement](#) and WBS.

A WBS Dictionary may include the following information:

- **WBS Identifier:** A unique identifier and title for each WBS element.
- **Description:** Clearly defined boundaries, assumptions, constraints, and scope for each element.
- **Responsible Team Member:** The assigned team member or group responsible for completing the WBS element.
- **Deliverable:** The specific product, service, or result to be delivered, including any intermediate deliverables.
- **Acceptance Criteria:** Customer-defined acceptance criteria for the deliverable.
- **Duration:** The estimated time required to complete the WBS element.
- **Milestones:** Key milestones, intermediate steps, and project management dependencies.
- **Budget:** The allocated budget for each WBS element.
- **Risks:** Any risks that may impact the WBS element.

The Objective of the WBS Dictionary

WBS Dictionary is a good communication tool that helps [stakeholders](#) understand the WBS.

The second objective of the WBS Dictionary is to help avoid [scope creep](#) [and gold plating](#) by defining the scope of work. A clear definition of work and transparent work assignments help avoid miscommunication, and team members will know what they should do.

No extra work will take place.

WBS does not explain the [scope of work](#), so WBS Dictionary comes to the rescue. It adds information to WBS to complete it and increase its usability. WBS Dictionary complements WBS.

WBS Dictionary Template

The following image shows a simple template for the WBS Dictionary.

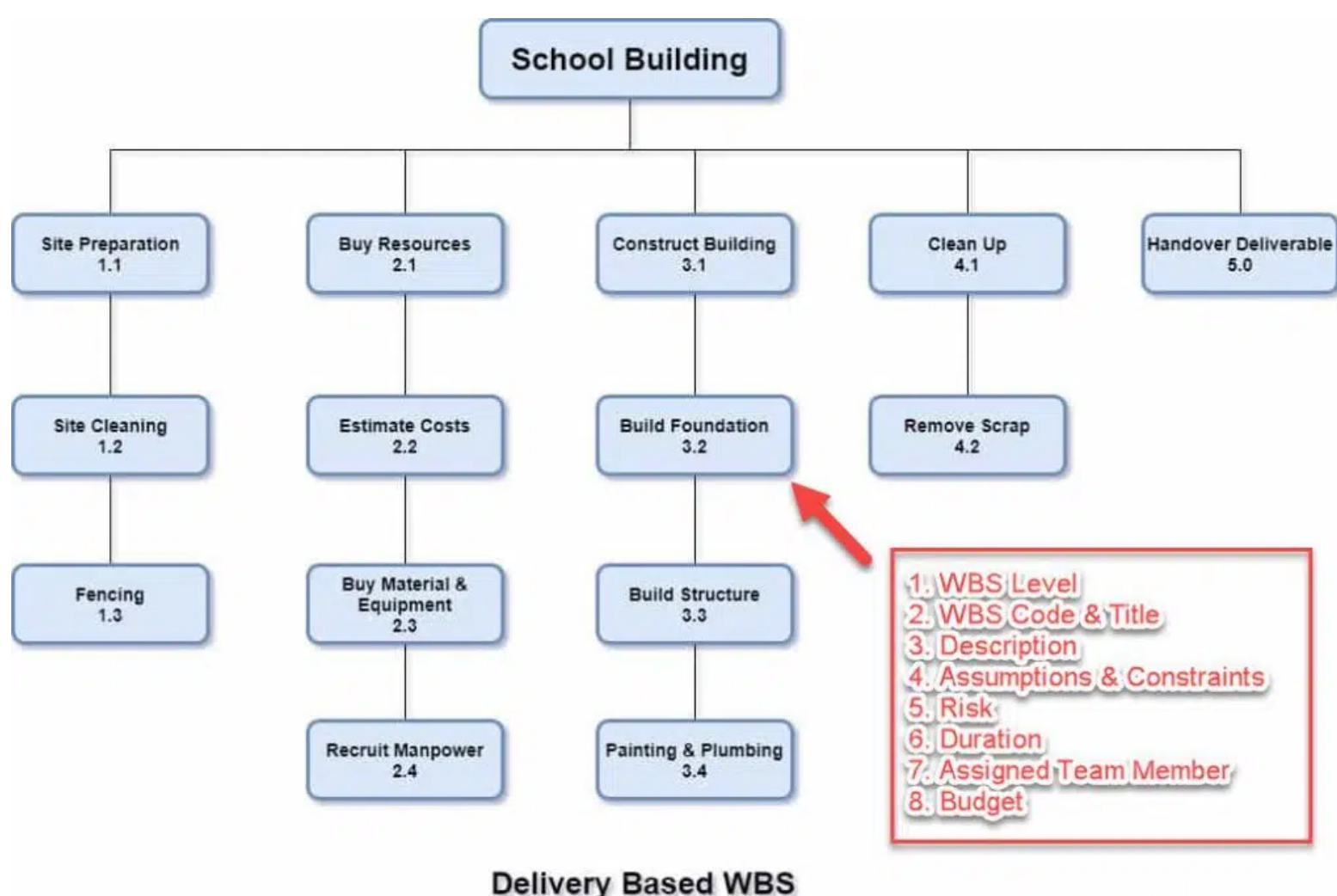
S. No.	Item	Description
1	WBS Identifier	This is the WBS title, number, or any other identifier.
2	Responsible Team Member	This is the team member responsible for the WBS element.

3	Description	This explains the work package scope and defines boundaries.
4	Deliverable	Identifies deliverables or intermediate deliverables or the product, service, or result.
5	Duration	Duration of the WBS element.
6	Start & End Dates	Start and end dates of the WBS element.
7	Resource Required	Resource requirements for the WBS element.
8	Budget	The cost required to complete the work package.
9	Milestones	Important project milestones.
10	Risk	Mention any risk that can impact the WBS element.

The WBS must contain 100% of the scope of work, and you cannot show it using a graphical or tabular form. Therefore, the WBS Dictionary explains the scope of work of each WBS element to ensure it covers all work.

Many experts call the WBS Dictionary a work package description tool. Like WBS, it is created hierarchically to explain each WBS element systematically.

Step-by-Step Process to Create a WBS Dictionary



You develop the WBS Dictionary after creating the [Work Breakdown Structure](#). You can use the following steps to develop a WBS Dictionary:

Step 1. Review the WBS

Review the WBS to ensure you understand the project's scope and hierarchy. Familiarize yourself with each level of the WBS, noting how the

project is structured into phases, deliverables, and tasks. Ensure that it covers 100% of the scope of work and that there is no duplication.

This step helps you align the WBS Dictionary with the project plan, ensuring nothing is missed or misrepresented.

Step 2. Create Top-Level Elements

Define the top-level elements in the WBS Dictionary. These elements represent the project's major phases or deliverables. Name each top-level element, add an identifier, and describe it. Document each top-level component's scope, objectives, and high-level deliverables. Specify the key stakeholders responsible for overseeing each phase.

This establishes the foundation for the WBS Dictionary and sets the stage for more detailed breakdowns in subsequent levels.

Step 3. Create Lower-Level Elements

With the top-level elements defined, document the lower-level elements that fall beneath each major deliverable. These represent more detailed tasks and activities that contribute to completing the top-level deliverables. Describe each lower-level element's scope, expected deliverables, and required resources.

This helps create a clear understanding of the tasks required for each phase, ensuring smooth project execution.

Step 4. Create the Work Package

At the most granular level, define the work packages—discrete units of work that can be assigned to team members. Each work package includes specific details such as task description, deliverables, duration, resources, costs, and responsible personnel. These work packages form the foundation for project scheduling, resource allocation, and progress tracking.

Ensuring accuracy and completeness at this level is critical for effective project management. Finally, validate the 100% scope of work.

Step 5. Finalize the WBS Dictionary

After documenting all elements and work packages, review the WBS Dictionary to ensure accuracy and completeness. Confirm that each

element is clearly described, that responsibilities are properly assigned and that all deliverables are accounted for. Share the WBS Dictionary with stakeholders for feedback and approval, ensuring alignment.

Once finalized, the WBS Dictionary is a reference throughout the project to maintain clarity, consistency, and control over the project scope.

How to Use WBS Dictionary?

In project management, you can use the WBS Dictionary in the following ways:

- **Reference for Scope Definition:** Use the WBS Dictionary to define the scope of each work package. This helps prevent misunderstandings about the required tasks and ensures that the project team stays aligned with the scope baseline.
- **Assign Responsibilities:** Use it to identify and assign task ownership by specifying the team members responsible for completing each work package. This ensures accountability and helps in resource allocation.
- **Guide for Execution:** Stakeholders can use the WBS Dictionary to understand task requirements, including timelines, deliverables, and necessary resources. This ensures everyone knows exactly what is expected.
- **Monitor Progress:** The WBS Dictionary helps track progress by comparing completed tasks against the detailed descriptions. This ensures deliverables are met on time and within scope and provides a performance measurement baseline.
- **Change Management:** If changes are proposed, use the WBS Dictionary to assess how they impact the scope, schedule, or resources. This ensures controlled change management and avoids scope creep.
- **Communication Tool:** Throughout the project lifecycle, the WBS Dictionary acts as a communication tool, providing a reference for the project team and stakeholders to understand project requirements and responsibilities.

WBS Dictionary Example

The following is an example of the WBS Dictionary:

Project: Online Checkout System

Project: Online Checkout System	
Work Package ID: 1.2.3.4	
Work Package Name: Design Checkout Funnel	
Work Package Description: Design the complete checkout panel, including payment screens, order confirmation page, etc.	
Assigned Team Member: Rob Breton	
Assigned Date: 10/22/2021	Date Due: 10/30/2021
Budget: 1,000 USD	Accounting Code : XYZ- 0450

Benefits of Using WBS Dictionary in Project Management

The WBS Dictionary offers several key benefits for effective project management:

- Clarity and Alignment:** Detailed descriptions of each task and deliverable ensure that all stakeholders understand the project scope and responsibilities.
- Scope Control:** The WBS Dictionary helps form the scope baseline, preventing scope creep by defining what is included and excluded from the project.
- Improved Communication:** It enhances communication by providing a single reference for all task-related details, reducing misunderstandings.
- Resource Management:** Clear task descriptions help allocate the right resources and personnel for each work package.
- Progress Tracking:** It facilitates better project tracking by aligning tasks with deliverables, making it easier to monitor performance and completion.
- Risk Reduction:** Offering detailed insights into task requirements, timelines, and responsibilities minimizes the risk of project delays and errors.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why Do We Need a WBS Dictionary?

WBS does not provide enough information because it is graphical, and your project stakeholders may struggle to understand the communication. In such cases, the WBS Dictionary is very helpful, as it explains and provides complete information on each element of WBS.

What Tools Are Required to Create a WBS Dictionary?

Most organizations use Excel or Word software to create the WBS Dictionary. However, for larger projects and in a big organization, you will have access to project management tools such as monday.com, [nTask](https://nTask.com), ClickUp, etc., that can help you quickly develop the WBS and WBS Dictionary.

Who Creates WBS Dictionary?

Creating a WBS Dictionary is not a one-person task; it requires teamwork. Team members with project management skills are necessary to create the WBS Dictionary.

A combined effort ensures a sense of responsibility, and team members will be committed to it.

The project manager may also need the help of subject matter experts to create the WBS Dictionary.

Summary

WBS Dictionary is the backbone of WBS. It provides detailed information on WBS elements. It is the basis for preparing work authorization, estimating costs, developing schedules, and monitoring project tasks.

WBS has minimal information, but the WBS Dictionary provides short and complete information to develop project management plans.

Further Readings:

- [What is the Scope Baseline?](#)
- [What is WBS?](#)
- [What is a Work Package?](#)
- [What is Statement of Work?](#)

- [What is the Scope of Work?](#)

References:

- [How to Make a WBS Dictionary?](#)
- [What is the WBS Dictionary?](#)

This topic is important from a PMP exam point of view.