IT Project Guidance

Professional Document Development

Version:

0.1

## Purpose

This document provides structured guidance on how to develop professional papers suitable for formal use in government and enterprise contexts. It outlines foundational concepts, structural conventions, formatting standards, and platform considerations that support clarity, consistency, and long-term usability. While the focus includes guidance documents, the principles apply broadly to other document types such as memos, options papers, executive summaries, and descriptive reports.

## Audience

This document is intended for professionals responsible for authoring, reviewing, or publishing formal papers. It is particularly relevant to those working in government, policy, or enterprise environments where precision, traceability, and document maturity are essential.

## Synopsis

Professional papers serve a range of purposes—from conveying decisions and describing current states to outlining future options or providing operational guidance. Their effectiveness depends not only on the content but also on how they are structured, formatted, and distributed. This document explores the anatomy of a well-constructed professional paper, including its front matter, structural logic, formatting discipline, and platform suitability. It also distinguishes between common document types and explains how each serves a distinct communicative function.

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## Background

Professional papers are a primary mechanism for conveying structured information in government and enterprise environments. They are used to describe current or desired states, present options to get there, record decisions, or provide operational guidance. Their utility depends not only on the accuracy of the content but also on the clarity and maturity of the document’s structure and presentation.

A common source of confusion in document development is the inconsistent use of foundational terms. For example, *context* and *background* are often used interchangeably, despite serving distinct roles. The **background of the issue** refers to the historical, policy, or operational circumstances that led to the need for the paper. The **background of the document** refers to its origin, authorship, and purpose within a broader program or initiative. In most cases, the former is more relevant to the reader and should be prioritized.

Similarly, terms such as *synopsis*, *summary*, and *executive summary* are frequently conflated. A **synopsis** is a brief preview of the document’s scope and intent, typically placed on the front page. A **summary** is a condensed restatement of the document’s key points, usually found at the end. An **executive summary** is a standalone section designed for decision-makers, providing sufficient detail to understand the issue and its implications without reading the full document.

Professional papers also vary in type and purpose. Common formats include:

* **Memo**: A short, targeted communication, often internal, used to convey updates or decisions.
* **Options Paper**: A structured presentation of multiple pathways, including pros, cons, and implications.
* **Current State**: A factual account of the current state of a system, process, or policy.
* **Desired State**: A forward-looking document outlining planned changes or future states.
* **Executive Summary**: A high-level overview for senior stakeholders, often extracted from a larger paper, structured loosely in alignment with BOSSCARD.
* **Guidance Document**: A prescriptive resource outlining recommended practices or procedures.

Each format serves a distinct communicative function and should be selected based on the document’s intended use and audience.

This document aims to clarify these distinctions and provide a consistent framework for developing papers that are both readable and fit for purpose. It emphasizes structure, formatting discipline, and platform suitability to ensure that documents meet professional standards and are suitable for formal distribution.

Separately to the above list of *general* business documents are *IT specific* documents:

* **Business Requirements**: a catalogue of intended responses to external or internal drivers,
* **User Requirements**: a catalogue of user requirements to contribute to the delivery of the business requirements, expressed independently of and system used,
* **Quality Requirements**: a catalogue of quality of experience, data and service, expected from the business service,
* **Capabilities Requirements**: a catalogue of business service capabilities required to provide to effectively contribute to fulfil User Requirements
* **Transitional Requirements**: a catalogue of project requirements external to the system requirements themselves, to support transition from current to future operational state (data resourcing, migration, onboarding, training, etc.)
* **System Requirements**, a logical set, composed of distinct:
  + Functional Requirements (FR): a catalogue of functional requirements required of a system to make available to end users the capabilities expressed in the earlier capabilities requirements,
  + Non-Fucntional Requirements (NFR): a catalogue of system qualities needed of a system to meet the business service quality requirements.
* **Technical Requirements**: a catalogue of technical implementation requirements developed to detail how the Functional requirements are implemented.

# Structure

Professional papers must be constructed in a way that supports usability, traceability, and clarity.

Structure is not merely about layout—it is about enabling the reader to understand the document’s purpose, scope, and relevance without ambiguity. A well-structured paper anticipates the needs of its audience and provides navigational and contextual cues throughout.

## Front matter

The following aspects are commonly found on the front of professional papers. Their inclusion supports consistent interpretation and reuse across teams and agencies:

* **Title**: a clear, descriptive heading that reflects the document’s subject matter.
* **Subtitle** *(optional)*: a secondary line that adds specificity or scope.
* **Date**: the date of publication or the revision.
* **Version**: a version identifier to support change tracking and release history.
* **Purpose**: a concise statement of why the document exists.
* **Audience**: a declaration of who the document is intended for.
* **Synopsis**: a brief preview of the document’s scope and intent, typically placed on the front page.
* **Contents**: a table of content headers and their page numbers.

Note that a Synopsis are distinct from a Summary. A **Synopsis** is a forward-facing preview — it outlines what the document will cover and why it matters, helping the reader decide whether to continue reading. It is typically placed at the beginning of the document. A **Summary**, by contrast, is retrospective — it distils the key points, findings, or conclusions after they have been presented. It is usually placed at the end of the document or section.

## Back matter: Appendices

This section is introduced earlier than usual because it continues the descriptive framing of the document. While the front matter provides immediate orientation—through purpose, audience, and synopsis—the appendices extend that framing by offering supporting detail that helps the reader interpret, navigate, and reuse the document. These elements are not peripheral; they are part of the document’s infrastructure.

It is a common misconception that appendices form a single block of material placed at the end. The term “appendices” is plural by design. There is almost always more than one type of supporting material, and each serves a distinct function.

### First Appendix

The goal is to reduce ambiguity and support accurate interpretation. Appendices are not optional extras; they are part of the document’s architecture and should be constructed with the same discipline as the main content.

The first appendix is about the document itself. It includes the following sections:

* contribution roles,
* revision and release history,
* additional indexes, beyond the original Table of Contents (ToC), that support navigation,—such as lists of tables, diagrams, and references.
* Lists of acronyms, and terms. Or a combination, referred to as a Glossary.

These elements are not part of the front page, but they are still part of the document’s framing and should be treated as such.

### Secondary Appendices

appendices beyond the first shift focus from the document’s structure to its content.

These may include conceptual expansions, clarifications, or supporting definitions that help the reader understand the subject matter more deeply. This is where glossaries, acronyms, and terms are typically introduced.

## Body Proper

The main body of a professional paper typically begins with three foundational components: **Introduction**, **Background**, and **Context**. These elements serve distinct purposes, but they are closely related and sometimes merged depending on the nature of the document and its audience.

### The Introduction, Background and Context

The **Introduction** is the formal entry point. It states what the document is, why it exists, and what the reader can expect. It may briefly mention the issue at hand, but its primary role is to orient the reader and establish the scope of the paper.

The **Background** provides historical, policy, or operational information that led to the creation of the document. It explains why the issue exists and what has happened so far. This section is factual and retrospective, and it helps the reader understand the lead-up to the current situation.

The **Context** describes the environment in which the issue or document sits. It may include current constraints, stakeholder positions, political or operational sensitivities, or dependencies. Context is situational and forward-facing, helping the reader understand the conditions that shape the issue now.

These three components are typically presented in the order listed above. However, in practice, they may be merged when the distinctions are not critical to the reader’s understanding. For example, a section titled *Background and Context* may be used when historical and situational factors are tightly intertwined. The decision to separate or merge these elements should be based on clarity and relevance to the intended audience.

### The Conclusion

Before returning to the content and its layout, it is useful to first jump to the end of the document—the conclusion. This may seem out of sequence, but it is deliberate. The conclusion is not simply a closing remark; it is the destination the entire paper is built to reach.

All professional papers, regardless of type, are constructed to carry an argument. Whether the document is descriptive, analytical, or prescriptive, its purpose is to persuade the reader of a position, a recommendation, or a course of action.

The conclusion is where that argument is delivered in full. It should be brief, direct, and unambiguous. While the body of the paper, covered next, is used to present evidence, explore options, or provide context, the conclusion is where the paper commits. It is not a summary of what was said, nor a restatement of the introduction. It is the point at which the paper carries its message home.

A well-written conclusion does not introduce new material. It reinforces the position taken and signals closure. In some cases, it may include a call to action or a recommendation, but only if these have been substantiated earlier in the document.

The strength of a paper lies not only in its reasoning but in its ability to conclude with clarity and conviction.

### Content Structure (Between Introduction and Conclusion)

The structure of the main content depends heavily on the type of document being written. This is perhaps the most difficult part to get right, as it requires balancing clarity, relevance, and purpose while avoiding unnecessary complexity or emotional influence.

Common document types include memos, options papers, descriptions of current or future states, summaries, and guidance documents. Each has its own internal logic and expectations. There may be others, but these represent the majority of use cases in professional and government contexts, and are discussed in the next section.

## Common Document Purpose and Structures

Professional papers vary in length, structure, and intent—but most follow a consistent pattern: a title page, front matter (purpose, audience, synopsis), main body, and appendices. These elements provide framing, traceability, and navigability. They are not optional extras; they are part of what makes a document usable and mature.

There are exceptions. Memos are typically short and informal, and do not require a title page or appendices. Briefs are also lighter-weight, often omitting appendices, but they still benefit from a clear structure. All other document types—executive summaries, options papers, descriptions, guidance documents—should follow the full structure.

Think of document types as tiers of engagement:

* **10 seconds**: The synopsis—what this is and why it matters.
* **5 minutes**: The executive summary—what’s going on, what’s been considered, and what’s recommended.
* **30 minutes**: The full document—background, analysis, options, and conclusion.
* **1–2 hours**: Deep review—appendices, references, and supporting material.

People are busy. But they still need context to make decisions. A well-structured document respects their time while providing enough substance to support informed action.

### Memo

A memo communicates a decision, update, or instruction quickly. It is typically internal and directed at a specific audience—such as a team or manager. Memos are used when something needs to be communicated clearly and without delay. They are usually no longer than one page.

The structure to use for a memo is as follows:

1. Subject line or heading
2. Statement of decision or update
3. Supporting context (if needed)
4. Action required or next steps

Keep it tight and purposeful. A memo is not a discussion—it’s a directive. Avoid hedging language or unnecessary background. If context is needed, keep it to one paragraph. Use active voice and make the action clear. Before sending, ask: “Would someone know what to do after reading this?”

### Executive Summary

An executive summary is a standalone document or section that provides decision-makers with a high-level overview of an issue, the options considered, and the recommended course of action. It is designed to be read in five minutes or less—think of it as the version you’d explain during a short taxi ride to a meeting.

Executive summaries are typically one to two pages. They must be complete enough to support decisions without requiring the reader to consult the full paper. They are written in full sentences and paragraphs, not bullet points.

Use the BOSSCARD/BOOSSCARDD model as a guide:

1. Background
2. Objective, Outcomes
3. Scope
4. Stakeholders
5. Constraints
6. Assumptions
7. Risks
8. Decisions, Deliverables

Not all elements are required, and the order can vary. The key is clarity and completeness.

This is your elevator pitch to decision-makers. It must stand alone—don’t assume the reader will open the full document. Avoid jargon, and make the recommendation unmistakable. If you’re unsure whether to include a section (e.g., Constraints), ask whether it affects the decision. Keep paragraphs short and purposeful.

### Brief

A brief is similar to an executive summary but narrower in scope. It is focused on a specific decision or issue and is used to prepare someone for a targeted discussion. It is typically one to three pages.

Briefs are concise but structured. They may omit appendices but should still include purpose, audience, and recommendation. They are often used in policy, strategy, or operational contexts.

The structure to follow for the document body is as follows:

1. Purpose of the brief
2. Summary of the issue
3. Options or considerations
4. Recommendation
5. Supporting rationale

A brief should be directive, not exploratory. Avoid ambiguity—make it clear what the reader is being asked to consider or decide. Use headings to break up the flow and guide the reader. If the issue is complex, include a diagram or table to simplify. End with a call to action or next step.

### Options Paper

An options paper presents multiple pathways for addressing a problem, evaluates them, and recommends one. It is used when a decision needs to be made and there are several viable choices. It is typically five to ten pages long.

Options papers are analytical and structured for comparison. They begin with the recommendation, followed by a description of each option, and then an evaluation section.

The structure to follow for the document body is as follows:

1. Recommendation (first)
2. Description of each option (start with “Do Nothing”)
3. Drivers, costs, and outcomes for each
4. Evaluation criteria and comparison
5. Conclusion

Start with the recommendation—don’t bury the lead. Use consistent formatting for each option to make comparison easy. Avoid emotional or persuasive language; stick to evidence and logic. Use tables or matrices to show how options stack up. Be transparent about trade-offs and assumptions.

### Current State

This type of document provides a factual account of the current state of a system, process, or situation. It is used to establish a baseline or provide a reference. It should be neutral and complete.

Descriptions of what is are typically structured around a clear introduction, followed by detailed sections describing the current state. Supporting data or diagrams may be included.

The structure to follow for the document body is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Overview of current state
3. Detailed description
4. Supporting evidence (data, diagrams)
5. Summary or implications

Stay descriptive, not evaluative. This is about what *is*, not what *should be*. Use clear headings and avoid speculation. If you include diagrams, make sure they are labeled and referenced in the text. The summary should highlight key patterns or gaps without suggesting solutions.

### Desired State

This document outlines a proposed or planned future state. It is used to support change initiatives, inform stakeholders, or guide implementation. It must be forward-looking but grounded in evidence.

Descriptions of what will be follow a similar structure to “what is” documents but focus on intended outcomes. They should clearly distinguish between confirmed plans and proposed ideas.

The structure to use for a desired state document is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Description of future state
3. Rationale and assumptions
4. Implementation considerations
5. Risks or dependencies

Be clear about what is confirmed versus proposed. Use modal language (“will,” “may,” “could”) appropriately. If the future state depends on other initiatives, name them. Avoid over-promising—this document should inspire confidence, not raise flags. Include visuals if they help clarify the vision.

### Guidance Document

A guidance document provides instructions or recommendations. It is used to direct action, explain how to perform a task, or apply a policy. It must be clear, structured, and easy to follow.

Guidance documents are typically structured around steps or principles. They may include examples, references, or appendices. The tone should be neutral and authoritative.

The structure to follow for the document body is as follows:

1. Introduction (purpose and audience)
2. Step-by-step guidance or principles
3. Supporting examples or references
4. Summary or checklist
5. Appendices (if needed)

Avoid ambiguity. Anticipate questions. Use consistent formatting and terminology. Clarity is everything. Use numbered steps or bullet points for actions. Anticipate questions—if something might be misinterpreted, explain it. Use consistent terminology throughout. If referencing policies or standards, link or cite them. End with a checklist or summary to reinforce key actions.

## Business Analysis Document Types

We’re not going to define what a Business Analyst does—but we will outline the core types of documents they typically produce. At a minimum, every BA should be familiar with the BUST model: **Business**, **User**, **System**, and **Transitional** requirements. However, in practice, a more complete view includes:

* Stakeholder Analysis / Map
* Business Requirements
* User Requirements
* Capability Requirements
* Quality Requirements (non-functional)
* Transitional Requirements
* System Requirements (functional refinements of capabilities)
* Technical Requirements (implementation constraints)

These documents often follow a general structure: front matter (purpose, scope, audience), followed by a **body section that lists and elaborates on the requirements**—grouped by type. Appendices may include traceability matrices, models, or supporting data.

An executive summary is a condensed version of a larger document or a standalone summary intended for decision-makers. Its purpose is to provide a high-level overview of an issue, the options considered, and the recommended course of action. It must be complete enough to support decisions without requiring the reader to consult the full paper. Executive summaries are typically one to two pages in length.

A useful structure for an executive summary is based on the BOSSCARD model. This includes sections for Background, Objective or Outcomes, Scope, Stakeholders, Constraints, Assumptions, Risks, and Decisions and/or Deliverables. Not every element must be included, and the order can vary, but each should be considered. The summary should be written in full sentences and paragraphs, not as a terse list or bullet points.

Writers should avoid being too vague or too detailed. The goal is to provide enough information for a reader to understand the issue and the recommendation without overwhelming them. The tone should be neutral and professional, and the summary should stand on its own.

### Options Paper

An options paper is used to present a set of viable pathways, evaluate them, and recommend one. It is analytical in nature and must be structured accordingly.

The recommendation should be presented first. That is the point of the paper, and it should not be buried. The options should follow, typically three to five in number, beginning with the default or baseline—often referred to as “Do Nothing.” This option must be expressed clearly, including the drivers, costs, and outcomes of inaction.

Evaluation must be structured and evidence-based. It is essential to use available frameworks to select evaluation criteria and their measurement. Emotional reasoning must be excluded. Evaluation should consider business objectives, required capabilities, and the qualities that must be met. These qualities apply to systems, organisations, and people. Failure to define and apply them results in an unsupported argument rather than a structured evaluation.

There are established frameworks that support this kind of analysis. ISO 25010 provides a model for software quality. ISO 25012 outlines data quality characteristics. ISO 25022 addresses user experience. These frameworks are not limited to software—they are equally applicable when comparing cars, houses, or any other structured offering. They provide a disciplined starting point for evaluating options in a way that is repeatable, defensible, and free from bias.

When evaluating options, it is important to consider not only business objectives and required capabilities, but also the qualities that must be met. These qualities apply to systems, organisations, and people. Failure to define and apply these qualities results in an unsupported argument rather than a structured evaluation.

There are established frameworks that support this kind of analysis. For systems, ISO 25010 provides a model for software quality. For data, ISO 25012 outlines data quality characteristics. For user experience, ISO 25022 offers relevant criteria. These frameworks are not limited to software—they are equally applicable when comparing cars, houses, or any other structured offering. They provide a disciplined starting point for evaluating options in a way that is repeatable, defensible, and free from bias.

The same principles apply to other document types. A **memo** should be brief and focused, conveying a decision or update. A **description of what is** should be factual and neutral, outlining the current state. A **description of what will be** should be forward-looking, grounded in planned or proposed changes. A **guidance document** should be prescriptive, offering clear recommendations or procedures based on established practice.

Each format serves a distinct communicative function. The structure of the content must reflect that function, and the choice of format should be made deliberately, based on the document’s purpose and audience.

User Requirements

It’s too deep to go here beyond stating that Requirements will start with Business, then User System Transitional (BUST), or better yet, be more complete and be Business, User, Capabilities, Capabilities, Transitional System(FR/NFR), Technical. (ie, BUCQTST…which is unpronouncible).  
How ever they are presented with a certain structure, with the requirements being the main body. The structure is….  
  
Solution Architecture Descriptions

Not to be confused with Ssytem Design Descripption (SDD) docs, which come after an RFP, SADs come before.   
The purpose is to define the context of the problem and intended solution.   
These also have a specific format, as dictated by ISO-42020. The structure is …Context View, Information View, Capabilties View [domain and general func groups], Functional View delving into some of those, Qualities View [expected], [intended] Integration View, [intended] Interoperability View.  
  
SDDs  
come after …  
structure is…

* **Document Context** *(optional)*: Information about the origin or authorship of the document, or its relationship to a larger body of documentation.
* **Subject Context**: Background of the issue being discussed, including relevant history or policy framing.

**Appendices and Supporting Material**

To support traceability and usability, the following appendices are recommended:

* **Review and Release History**: A log of who reviewed the document, when, and what changes were made.
* **List of Tables**: A navigable index of all tables included.
* **List of Diagrams**: A navigable index of all diagrams included.
* **List of Resources**: References to external or internal materials cited or used.
* **Glossary of Acronyms and Terms**: Definitions of domain-specific language used in the document.

**Front Page Considerations**

The front page should be reserved for the most essential metadata and framing information. This typically includes:

* **Purpose**
* **Audience**
* **Synopsis**

Other elements such as versioning, date, and title may be included in headers or footers depending on the platform and format.

**Distinctions in Context and Background**

It is important to distinguish between:

* **Background of the Issue**: The historical or operational circumstances that led to the need for the paper.
* **Background of the Document**: The origin, authorship, and placement of the paper within a broader initiative or program.

In most cases, the background of the issue is more relevant to the reader and should be prioritized in the body of the document.

They are used to describe current or desired states, present options to get there, record decisions, or provide operational guidance.

Appendices

Appendix A - Document Information

Authors & Collaborators

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### Versions

* 1. Initial Draft

### Images

[Figure 1: TODO Image 2](#_Toc144995112)

### Tables

[Table 1: TODO Table 3](#_Toc145048484)

[Table 2: TODO Table 2 3](#_Toc145048485)

### References

**There are no sources in the current document.**

### Review Distribution

The document was distributed for review as below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Identity | Notes |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

### Audience

The document is technical in nature, but parts are expected to be read and/or validated by a non-technical audience.

### Structure

Where possible, the document structure is guided by either ISO-\* standards or best practice.

### Diagrams

Diagrams are developed for a wide audience. Unless specifically for a technical audience, where the use of industry standard diagram types (ArchiMate, UML, C4), is appropriate, diagrams are developed as simple “box & line” monochrome diagrams.

### Acronyms

API

: [Application Programming Interface](#Term_ApplicationProgrammingInterface).

DDD

: Domain Driven Design

GUI

: [Graphical User Interface](#Term_ApplicationProgrammingInterface). A form of [UI](#Acronym_UI).

ICT

: acronym for Information & Communication Technology, the domain of defining Information elements and using technology to automate their communication between entities. [IT](#Acronym_IT) is a subset of ICT.

IT

: acronym for Information, using Technology to automate and facilitate its management.

ToC

: table of contents

UI

: User Interface. Contrast with [API](#Acronym_API).

### Terms

Refer to the project’s Glossary.

Application Programming Interface

: an Interface provided for other systems to invoke (as opposed to User Interfaces).

Capability

: a capability is what an organisation or system must be able to achieve to meet its goals. Each capability belongs to a domain and is realised through one or more functions that, together, deliver the intended outcome within that area of concern.

Domain

: a domain is a defined area of knowledge, responsibility, or activity within an organisation or system. It groups related capabilities, entities, and functions that collectively serve a common purpose. Each capability belongs to a domain, and each function operates within one.

Entity

: an entity is a core object of interest within a domain, usually representing a person, place, thing, or event that holds information and can change over time, such as a Student, School, or Enrolment.

Function

: a function is a specific task or operation performed by a system, process, or person. Functions work together to enable a capability to be carried out. Each function operates within a domain and supports the delivery of one or more capabilities.

Person

: a physical person, who has one or more Personas. Not necessarily a system User.

Persona

: a facet that a Person presents to a Group of some kind.

Quality

: a quality is a measurable or observable attribute of a system or outcome that indicates how well it meets expectations. Examples include reliability, usability, and performance. Refer to the ISO-25000 SQuaRE series of standards.

User

: a human user of a system via its UIs.

User Interface

: a system interface intended for use by system users. Most computer system UIs are Graphics User Interfaces ([GUI](#Acronym_GUI)) or Text/Console User Interfaces (TUI).