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# A Complete Guide to White Papers

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When it comes to the development of new methodology or technological solutions, it's often necessary for companies to provide their target audience with context and factual evidence before presenting their proposed solution. White papers are an authoritative and informative marketing tool utilized for organizations of all kinds, regardless of industry, to do just that. In this article, we'll define what a white paper is, as well as explore who uses them, different types of white papers, the proper formatting for creating one and some examples of effective and ineffective white paper titles.

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## What is a white paper?

A white paper, also known as whitepaper, is typically an informative document that presents research and expert knowledge about a particular recommendation or solution. These documents are designed to aid the reader in making a decision, solving a problem or understanding an issue. White papers are text-heavy, they generally contain at least 2,500 words, and rely primarily on data and research to present their cause. Because of this, they are usually written in a more formal or even academic tone.

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The term was originally used to refer to official government reports that were both informative and authoritative. Now, white papers are used primarily as a marketing tool by organizations to promote a product, solution or service. However, they are sometimes used as more of a technical document to provide details about a new product offering or invention. Regardless of their intention, the primary goal of white papers is to inform potential customers about a methodology, technology, product or service and to persuade them that it is an effective solution to a challenge that they face.

These documents are often utilized prior to a sale to provide details to potential customers. Because prospective buyers typically conduct research on the Internet prior to making a purchase, white papers have become an effective way to sell solutions or products online. They are persuasive but factual documents that provide new ways to solve challenges.

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## Who uses white papers?

White papers are used in a variety of ways by different types of organizations, such as:

- White papers are usually written for external use as a tool for companies to establish themselves in their market. Unlike a sales pitch, white papers are used to highlight an organization's expertise and provide solutions to problems. Additionally, white papers aim to convince prospective customers that their solution will solve a specific problem.
- White papers are often used in business to business, also referred to as B2B, marketing. This can be between a wholesale company and a manufacturer or between a retailer and a wholesale company. In either case, the white papers are designed to convince the other company that they can offer a superior solution that will address a challenge their company faces. In this realm of marketing there are three types of white papers:
  - Problem/solution white papers present a new, improved solution to a challenge.
  - White papers presented in a numbered list aim to highlight the main points related to an offering.
  - Backgrounders go into detail about an offering's technical features.
- Government organizations use white papers to present new legislation and policies. In this way, they are able to gather insight into the reaction of the general public regarding these changes.

## Types of white paper topics

A white paper's intended audience will vary depending on the organization and the solution that they are offering. Here are some of the factors that influence the topic that a white paper covers:

- **Audience:** The first thing a company must consider when developing a white paper is its intended audience. What are their primary challenges or concerns? How can the solution benefit them? The target reader and their familiarity with the industry will heavily influence the topic and tone of the white paper.
- **Expertise:** The topic of a white paper is largely determined by the company's area and level of expertise. Though external research is typically included, the organization's own knowledge determines the content and how it is presented.
- **Problem and solution:** The purpose of white papers is to address a specific problem that is relevant to the company and its intended audience. Issues addressed can include industry comparisons, new techniques, changing trends or common dilemmas. Though the white paper needs to address a challenge, it should also provide a solution based on factual evidence and research.

## White paper format

Typically, white papers follow a relatively standard format. However, unlike many other business communications like technical proposals or reports, white papers place the conclusion at the end of the document. This major formatting difference is due to the fact that a white paper educates the reader throughout the document, with an evidence-based solution providing the finale. Here are the other aspects of an effective white paper:

- **Informative title:** An accurate and informative title will both entice and prepare the reader for the context of the document. Though some include the term "white paper" in the title, it should really depend on the intended audience and their perception of the phrase. For instance, some readers may view it as an indicator of valuable and informative content while it may intimidate others.
- **Abstract:** A brief overview of the document is provided in the white paper's abstract. It is here that the reader is introduced to the document's main points, allowing them to make sure that the information to come will be both

relevant and beneficial.

- **Problem statement:** The problem statement will define and provide context for the issue being addressed.
- **Background:** The background section provides information that will be necessary for the reader to fully understand the issue and, consequently, the solution. Depending on the challenge and audience being addressed, this section may be more broad or technical and detail oriented. If research was conducted specifically for this white paper, it is here that the company would want to communicate the methods used for conducting it.
- **Proposed solution:** After the problem has been presented and explored, it's time to provide the reader with a solution. In this section, the solution is developed and then supported through the evidence gathered as well as the expertise of the company.
- **Conclusion:** The conclusion provides recommendations that are based on the proposed solution and summarizes the major points of the document.
- **References:** Citing the resources used to write the white paper is an effective way to reinforce the credibility of the evidence that is presented in the document. Additionally, it provides the audience with additional resources to further investigate the topic and claims presented. Citation formats such as APA or MLA typically need to be used in this section.

## Examples of effective and ineffective white paper titles

As with any kind of document, the title is an important indicator that serves to both entice the reader and provide context for the type of information they will likely find if they continue reading. Though white papers are intended to offer prospective customers with a solution, they are very different from a sales pitch and the title should reflect that. Here are some examples of effective and ineffective titles:

### Ineffective

White paper regarding Law 555.4 Referencing Technological Impact Assessments

### Effective

Keeping with the Times: White paper on the technological impact assessment of legal proposals in 2019

## Ineffective

12 Ways Company X will cut costs in your social media marketing budget

## Effective

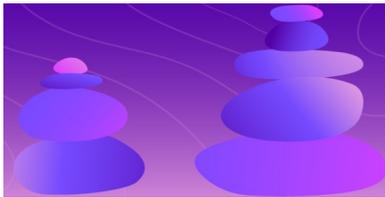
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