**SAFE WORK METHOD STATEMENTS WRITING**

*The purpose of a work method statement is:*

• to outline a safe method of work for a specific job

• to provide an induction document that workers must read and understand before starting a job

• to meet legal requirements, that is, hazard identification and control

• to program work, materials, time, staff, and to anticipate possible problems

• to use as a tool in quality assurance.

The safe work method statement is designed to help employers think through the hazards and risks involved in the work, and to choose effective control measures.

Safe work method statements form part of your overall Occupational Health and Safety Management System and is a risk management control allowing you to provide information and the basis for instruction in how to do a job safely.

Safe work method statements can be generic for common activities such as washing dishes or specific to a particular client/location depending on the specific risks identified.

Safe work method statements are the responsibility of management to develop but should be done in consultation with the workers undertaking the tasks. They should be accessible to all staff e.g. on intranet, provided in staff handbook etc and should be reviewed usually as part of a service review with a client or at least every 2 years for generic ones.

Safe work method statements should be the basis for specific staff training as well as competency assessments for particular tasks/equipment.

**Seven ways to write effectively:**

The following seven ways to write work method statements effectively in plain English will make your work method statements easier to write and understand. The seven ways to write effectively are:

1.Write out the job procedure step by step

2. Use active, not passive voice

3. Sequence ideas logically

4. Keep sentences short and clear

5. Choose words carefully

6. Use verbs not nouns

7. Consider layout and formatting

**1. Write out the job procedure step by step**

Start each step with an action word.

**Examples**

*Example 1:*

1. **Deliver** all shopping through the front door.

2. **Clear** work area of all obstacles.

**3. Store** heavy items between hip and shoulder.

4. **Place** rubbish in the otto bin at side of house.

*Example 2:*

1. **Put** on protective equipment.

2. **Remove** soiled linen.

3. **Carry** soiled linen to laundry.

4. **Rinse** soiled linen in tub prior to **placing** it in washing machine.

*Example 3:*

1. **Erect** ironing board.

2. **Plug** in iron and adjust heat settings.

3. **Place** washing to be ironed on bench.

4. **Test** heat setting on nylons etc.

**2. Use active, not passive voice**

Use active, not passive voice. It is more personal and direct and specifies who must do

the action.

*Examples:*

×Materials **must be removed** in manageable lots.

🗸 **Remove** materials in manageable lots.

×Protective gloves **are to be worn**.

🗸**Wear** protective gloves.

× Fork lifts must not **be driven** faster than walking speed.

🗸 **Never drive** forklifts faster than walking speed.

× Leads **are to be kept** above floor level.

🗸 **Keep** leads above floor level.

× All equipment **to be checked** and **tested**.

🗸 **Check** and **test** all equipment.

**3. Sequence ideas logically**

**(i) Put the main idea first**

*Examples:*

×When you are working in a dusty and windy area, **wear** safety glasses.

🗸**Wear** safety glasses when you are working in a dusty and windy area.

× From the information on the menu, **establish** the required ingredients.

🗸**Establish** the required ingredients from the information on the menu.

**(ii) Put the time phrase, if important, as a sub-heading and then the instructions in point**

**form underneath.**

*Example:*

When using an oven cleaner:

a) **wear** protective clothing

b) **use** a suitable dust mask

c) **avoid** contact with your eyes.

**(iii) Try to put information in point form for clear and easy reading.**

*Example:*

×When an abrasive cleaner is to be employed for the purpose of cleaning, it is advisable to obtain a copy of the material safety data sheet and read it thoroughly prior to using it and ensuring that all listed personal protective equipment is available and suitable for use with the product. Gloves should be worn with all cleaning products no matter what the level of hazard and adequate ventilation should be utilised.

🗸 When using abrasive cleaners for cleaning:

a) **obtain** copy of material safety data sheet

b) **read** data sheet fully prior to first use

c) **wear** gloves at all times

d) **turn** onfan or open window(s) prior to use**.**

**(iv) Separate any extra information that may be needed to make the instruction clear. Do this**

**by putting the extra information in a highlighted box or by using italics.**

*Example:*

Use a 2 person lift for heavy or awkward shaped objects.

***Safety Note***

When undertaking a 2 person lift ensure similar sized people if possible and appoint one person as leader to give instructions regarding when to lift or put down object.

**(v) Use parallel structures - that is use the same grammatical structure to express similar**

**ideas or two or more ideas in the same sentence.**

*Example:*

× To prevent falls:

• **fix** solid one metre high guard rail

• **workers must use** a safety harness

• **workers wearing** safety footwear

• securely **covering** all floor penetrations

🗸 To prevent falls:

• **fix** solid one metre high guard rail

• **use** safety harness

• **wear** safety footwear

• **cover** all floor penetrations securely.

**4. Keep sentences short and clear**

**Remember:**

a) Long and/or complex sentences are more difficult to understand. They take longer to

read and can hide information.

b) A sentence should contain only one or two ideas. Separate ideas with lists, dot points

and punctuation (commas, semi-colons, colons).

c) If you must have a long sentence (more than 18 words), follow it with a short one.

*Example:*

× The trainer will ensure that each forklift driver is fully skilled in lifting procedures

and, most importantly, will confirm that each forklift driver fully understands what

his duties are.

🗸Trainers must make sure that forklift drivers:

a) know correct lifting procedures

b) fully understand their duties.

**5. Choose words carefully**

**(i) Don’t use too many formal words or long winded phrases. (See Appendix 1)**

*Examples:*

×ensure

🗸 make sure

× accordingly

🗸 so

×without further delay

🗸 immediately

× at this point in time

🗸now.

**(ii) Avoid unnecessary repetition or redundancies. *(See Appendix 2)***

*Examples:*

× Power to the workshop is available **on an around the clock basis**.

🗸 Power to the workshop is available 24 hours a day.

**(iii) Do not use too many nouns together - they can make the document difficult to**

**understand because the reader must take in a lot of information in a short space.**

*Examples:*

×safety regulation handbook

🗸 handbook of safety rules

× estimated monthly attendance performance bonus

🗸 monthly attendance bonus.

**(iv) Avoid jargon, slang, idioms, sexist or racist terms, and foreign expressions.**

*Examples:*

a) chippie, sparky, gofer

b) I’m broke

c) as slow as a snail

d) foreman,

e) déjà vu.

**(v) Do not use contractions (short forms). They are not as strong as the words written in**

**full.**

*Example:*

× Don’t

🗸Do not.

**(vi) Beware of acronyms (words made from initials) - you must explain what they mean the**

**first time you use them.**

*Example:*

Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).

**(vii) Spell out abbreviations to avoid confusion whenever possible. If you must abbreviate:**

**a) do so only when necessary, and**

**b) make sure that the abbreviations are understood.**

*Examples:*

× e.g.

🗸 for example

× i.e.

🗸that is.

**(viii) Spell out one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and ten. Over ten, use**

**numbers -11,12,13 ......**

**(ix) Use spelling from the Macquarie Dictionary. It is the most suitable for Australia.**

**6. Use verbs not nouns**

Be careful of turning verbs into nouns (nominalisation). This makes the document

“heavy” or “academic” and hard to read.

*Examples:*

× **Utilisation** of private vehicles to transport clients must only be done in **consultation** with

supervisor.

🗸**Consult** supervisors before **using** private vehicles to transport clients.

×**Failure** to comply with these directives will result in **expulsion** from this facility and/or

**notification** of the agency.

🗸 We will **expel** you from this site and **notify** the agency if you do not comply with these directives.

**7. Consider layout and formatting**

• **Keep your layout open**. Use plenty of white space. This makes the procedure more

readable.

• **Use no more than two separate font styles:** one **Bold** and the other ***Italic***. If you use

more, the finished product will not present well.

• **Avoid using CAPITALS to write full words** - THEY ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO READ.

• **Do not use underlining**. Make important headings larger instead.

• **Justify (line up) the text to the left** as this helps you to read the document more easily.

• **Learn how to use your keyboard to its full capacity**. There are many features that can

be used to give a more professional finish.

• **Take care with the length of lines**. 50 - 70 characters is the ideal number of characters

per line.

• **Use subheadings to help break up large blocks of text and guide the reader to the**

**information.**

• **Use colour sparingly**. It is harder to read than black and white.

• **Make sure graphics are easy to understand.**

• **Keep layout consistent** throughout the document.

• **If you need to include a glossary of technical terms make sure that you follow the**

**agreed layout.**

**Finally, get somebody who does not know the job to read the work method statement.**

**You have achieved a satisfactory result if they understand it.**

**Alternatives to Writing:**

It is very important to consider alternatives to writing if you have employees who have reading

problems. They may not be able to read words but they may be able to follow a picture, a

diagram or spoken instructions.

Use alternatives to writing if these convey the meaning more easily:

• Flow charts for writing work instructions and procedures, explaining processes, defining

production goals

• Diagrams, illustrations, graphics, line drawings for technical terminology and procedures

• Tables, charts, graphs (pie, vertical, line etc.) for statistics, production data and figures

• Maps for emergency procedures, locations and layout of areas.

*Or*

**Read the work method statement to employees and check that they have understood it. Make**

**sure that they then sign it.**

**REFERENCES**

[WorkCover NSW “Guidelines for Writing Safe Work Method Statements in Plain English” February 1998](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Publications/AlertsGuidesHazards/General/writing_work_method_statement_plain_english_guidelines_0231.pdf)