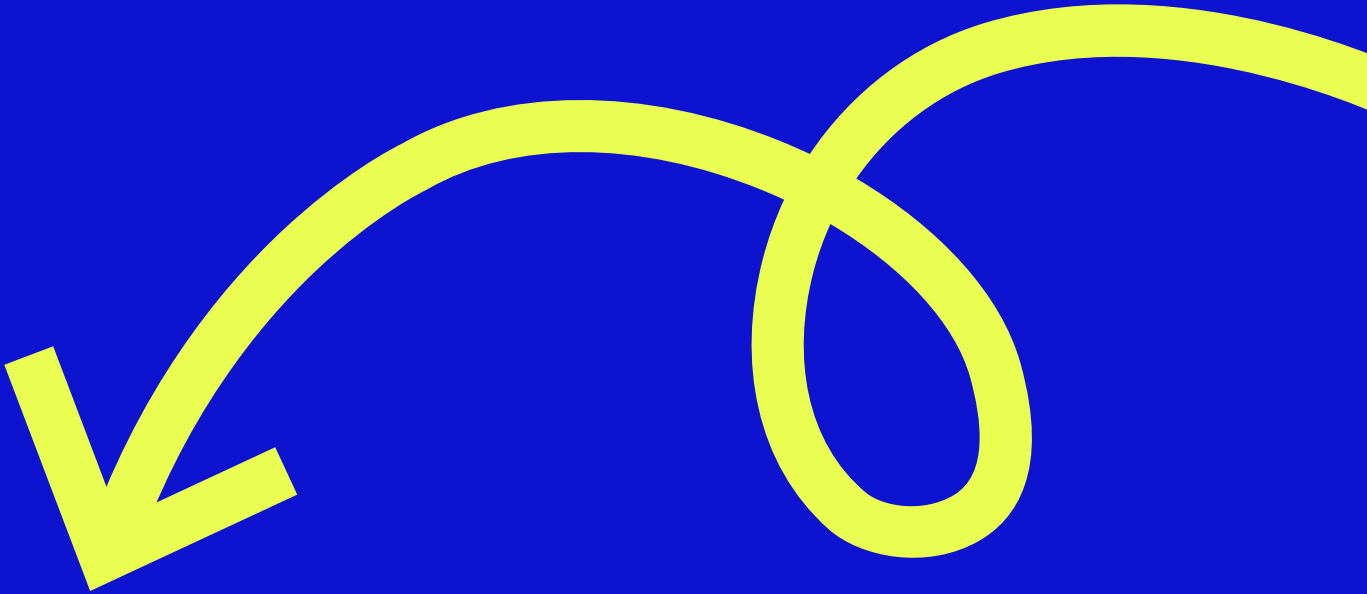


The writing problem that was *hiding* a **production failure**



How an **F1000** eyecare company recovered **\$145,598 a year** and **45%** of its lost output in one department.



we de-risk your
documentation.



01

***The complaint:* Slow reviews and weak writing.**

***The reality:* Something bigger.**

An F1000 multinational eyecare company came to us with two priorities: reducing the time managers spent reviewing and improving the quality of their team's writing, specifically their engineers' writing. Their principal engineers (PEs) were the writers and are referred to as writers in this Assessment.

02

A department of engineers asked to write like writers, with no system behind them

This department hired mostly principal engineers who had no formal writing training (other than college courses), but were expected to write various documents, including standard operating procedures (SOPs), deviations, and protocols.

The reviewers were also engineers who had been promoted and had no formal writing training beyond college courses or formal readability review training.

As in most organizations we work with, writers and reviewers rarely discussed documentation until it was finished, and both felt rushed to write and review. As one reviewer put it:

"I feel like I'm in a time-crunch all the time because I don't want to hold up a project based on how long I take to review. I often just approve a document without reviewing it because of this."

REVIEWER, F1000 EYECARE COMPANY



JHW



The risk beneath the writing: One experiment completed where five were required

During our assessment, we learned several key things that seemed unrelated to writing and reviewing:

- While their engineers (writers) were tasked with completing at least five experiments a month, most were completing one.
- Production was falling behind, and the experiments weren't being conducted as designed.
- Experiments were often conducted in parallel because results weren't required to be published until Q4.

We found that these seemingly unrelated issues were closely related to the underlying writing and reviewing issues that generated the original complaints.

Why the documents were failing: **Missing standards, not missing skill**

■ No written standards meant no way to meet the quota

- After surveying and interviewing the engineers, we found that they weren't conducting more experiments because there was no clear written guidance on how to write about them, when to submit them for feedback, or how to engage with reviewers. Instead, they often depended on one another for guidance rather than on written standards, which did not exist, slowing the process.
- In addition, we found that these engineers were unclear about when and whether they would receive feedback on the documents they wrote about their experiments; consequently, many would wait for feedback before starting the next experiment. When that feedback wasn't given, the writers were already behind.
- Contributing to this problem was that writers and reviewers had very different expectations about documents, writing, deadlines, and standards, none of which had been communicated.



■ Uncertainty bred procrastination, and procrastination bred the time crunch

- There was no process in place to guide writers and reviewers on how they should work together; this lack created confusion about when writers should submit documents for feedback and when they could expect feedback. This uncertainty often resulted in procrastination, creating the time crunch reviewers complained about and procrastination by writers, since they weren't sure when to submit their documents for review.

■ Homemade templates and Strunk and White: The tooling gap

- Because the tools were lacking or nonexistent, writers spent time creating their own but remained uncertain whether their creations were correct. In addition, because there were no tools, writers would often wait to write. Reviewers were left to their own devices regarding what to review, so feedback was often conflicting and unclear. Writers weren't clear about submission deadlines, and reviewers, unclear about their primary focus, spent more time rewriting than providing actionable feedback that improved document quality. They also spent time focusing on items in the document that didn't enhance its quality.

■ Homemade templates and Strunk and White: The tooling gap

- The engineers' shortfall on experiment quotas wasn't a motivation or capability problem, it was a systems problem. Without written standards for how to document experiments, when to submit them, or how to engage reviewers, engineers were left to reconstruct process knowledge informally, leaning on one another rather than on any shared, reliable source of guidance. That informal knowledge transfer is inherently slower and less consistent than documentation, and it meant every writer was, to some degree, improvising.
- That improvisation compounded into a genuine bottleneck. With no defined feedback timeline, writers often paused work entirely while waiting to hear back on a submission, and when feedback didn't arrive, they had already lost ground. Reviewers, meanwhile, operated with no shared standard for what to look for, so their feedback was inconsistent, sometimes focused on details that didn't materially improve the document, and delivered as rewriting rather than actionable guidance. Because writers and reviewers were never brought into alignment on expectations, deadlines, or quality standards, each side was, in effect, working blind to the other.

JW



- The absence of process didn't just slow things down — it created the conditions for procrastination. Without clarity on when to submit or when to expect a response, both writers and reviewers deferred action, and that deferral is precisely what produced the time crunch reviewers later complained about. This was a predictable outcome of ambiguity, not a failure of individual discipline.
- The tooling gap made all of this worse. Lacking any standard template or reference, writers spent time building their own tools from scratch, uncertain whether their approach was even correct, which only added friction to an already slow process and gave writers another reason to delay starting.
- The fix wasn't to push engineers to work faster within a broken system, but to build the system that was missing. That meant establishing written standards for how experiments should be documented, setting clear expectations for submission and feedback timelines, aligning writers and reviewers on shared quality criteria, and providing standard templates so writers aren't reinventing structure with every document. Most importantly, it meant replacing the current handoff model (writer submits, then waits) with a collaborative one, where writers and reviewers engage throughout the process rather than at its end. This would shorten the cycle, catch problems earlier, and remove the uncertainty that has been quietly suppressing output.

JW



05

What the risk was costing:

\$145,598 a year in one department

■ Reviewers

According to the information the client provided, the average document was reviewed four times, while the team felt that two or fewer should be the norm. In addition, it took 2.5 weeks per review, and the team says it should take 1 week or less.

Principal engineers at this company earn an average of \$106,630 a year. Reviewers average 30 documents per month at 1 hour per document. Based on our experience with similar projects, we showed them how they could cut review time in half, saving 15 hours per reviewer per month.

At \$51.26/hour, that's a savings of \$768.90 per reviewer per month. Multiplied by 13 reviewers, the total is \$9,995.70 per month, or \$119,948.40 per year, in just one department.

4 vs 2

REVIEWS PER DOC, VS TARGET

2.5wk vs 1wk

TIME PER REVIEW

15

HRS SAVED / REVIEWER / M

13

REVIEWERS

PROJECTED ANNUAL SAVINGS, REVIEWERS **\$119,948**

■ Reviewers

According to our survey, writers produce roughly 3 documents per month, averaging 4 hours per document, or 12 hours of writing per person per month. The average salary of these PEs is \$79,457.00.

Based on similar projects, we showed the company how it could reduce writing time by 25%, saving writers 3 hours per month. Based on an hourly rate of \$37.50, that amounts to \$112.50 per writer per month. Multiplied by 19 writers, that equaled \$2,137.50 a month or \$25,650.00 a year in savings in just one department.

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DOCS / WRITER / MO

4

HRS PER DOC

2

WRITING HRS / MO

19

WRITERS

PROJECTED ANNUAL SAVINGS, WRITERS **\$25,650**

06

The 12-month de-risking plan

After our diagnosis, we put a 12-month plan in place for the company to

- Improve its review process by establishing specific milestones and communication requirements.
- Upskill its writers via workshops, coaching, and document feedback.
- Create new templates that were easy to use and that included guidance.
- Put SOPs in place to guide the writing and reviewing process.

07

The turnaround:

Reviews 63% faster, production up 45%

After the company implemented our plan, the company reported

-50%

less time managers spent reviewing.
Managers were also 65% less likely
to have to rewrite work.

Monthly

PUBLISHING CADENCE, UP FROM WAITING
+45% production

-23%

REVIEWER TIME ON FINAL PRODUCT
From closer writer-reviewer collaboration

63% faster

REVIEWER TURNAROUND
Reports published sooner

+34%

TEMPLATE AND TOOL ADOPTION
Use of templates and standard tools

- Managers spent 50% less time reviewing and were 65% less likely to rewrite.
- The writers published their experimental results monthly instead of waiting, resulting in a 45% increase in production.
- Reviewers turned around documents 63% faster, so reports were published sooner.
- Reviewers and writers increased their collaboration, reducing reviewers' time on the end product by 23%.
- The use of tools such as templates increased by 34%.

■ Beyond the numbers

- Writers, because they had a process and were collaborating earlier and more often with reviewers, reported feeling “more confident” about their writing skills and better supported.
- Writers and reviewers set up monthly meetings to discuss writing projects, which helped ensure everyone was on the same page and reduced review time.
- Writers reported that the tools we helped them build, such as templates, decreased the time they spent writing.

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Inside the assessment: ***What writers and reviewers told us***

■ Writers

In our in-depth analysis, interviews, and surveys of writers, we uncovered that they

- Wanted more guidance; in fact, they were creating their own standards and templates because they were unaware that the company had these in place and were unclear about expectations.
- Felt that the feedback they received on their documents focused more on pet peeves than on improving document quality.
- Were also spending time outside their normal workday writing and rewriting, often in the evenings and on weekends, because they didn’t know what reviewers expected.
- Had a strong desire to improve their documentation but felt that their efforts weren’t supported.
- Wanted a more collaborative writing and reviewing process in which expectations were clearer.
- The system was so broken that writers didn’t know when or whether they would receive feedback on their documents.

■ Reviewers

In our interviews with reviewers, we learned that they, like writers, wanted “better quality documents” and believed their feedback was improving document quality, contrary to writers’ views. They also wanted a more collaborative review and writing process.

Reviewers also

- Felt pressured to approve documents quickly without an in-depth review because they didn’t want to “hold up” the project.
- Felt that reviewing wasn’t targeted; that is, everyone was reviewing based on what they saw as most urgent, even if that feedback didn’t improve document quality.

■ Guidance and standards

The lack of guidance and standards was a major problem at this company, creating uncertainty and procrastination and contributing to delays in experiments and production. In addition, in many cases, the document would undergo several reviews by multiple reviewers; however, writers were not kept abreast of the number of reviewers or reviews.

Due to the lack of standards and the resulting lack of communication about the review process, writers were unclear about how to write documents, at what stage of the experiment they should write them, and when or if they would receive feedback.

No guidance on what to review, how often to review, or what was expected of a review meant that reviewers were “doing their own thing,” resulting in a chaotic environment.

The reviewers also had different ways of reviewing: some would use track changes, some would make changes without alerting the writer, and some would handwrite their changes directly on the document.

The lack of continuity in how and when feedback was provided also contributed to the time it took the engineers to publish their reports.

■ Tools

The lack of standards and guidance was directly related to the tools available to writers and reviewers. While some tools existed, none existed for writing, specifying when reports were due, and defining the writer’s responsibility for getting them reviewed and/or incorporating feedback.

The organization had no guidelines for reviewing, including the process, what should be reviewed, whether there was a priority for what to review, and how reviewing should be handled, including alerting writers.

The company had templates in place for certain documents; however, the writers didn’t know they existed and were therefore developing their own based on what they’d experienced at other companies and what they knew about writing.

The writers also wanted a style guide that was unique to their organization; however, because the company didn’t have one, they were using Strunk and White (an outdated book that, arguably, isn’t a true style guide).

There were no tools in place to guide reviewers on what to review, how long a review should take, and/or what the efficient process should look like.

