

4 Organizational Tips to Take Your Engineering Team's Writing to the Next Level

As you're probably aware, organization is key to clear written communication. Yet, writers may not know where to start in terms of organizing their information or they may not understand how organization affects readers' perceptions and understanding, which can:

- Confuse readers
- Stop readers from reading
- Dissuade potential clients and vendors from partnering with your organization
- Make information inaccessible to readers

Here are 4 organizational tips to ensure that your engineering team's documents relay the message effectively so that readers take the desired action.

1. Place the most important information in the first and last areas of the document.

Many people don't read every word of every document; instead, they skim, meaning that they're likely to read the first and last sentences of a paragraph. To capitalize on skim reading, the most important information should be first and last in the overall document, in the document's sections, and in paragraphs.

2. Use headings and subheadings to make the document skimmable and set expectations.

Readers (particularly busy ones) often skim documents and headings and subheadings help them do this efficiently.

Headings and subheadings also set the expectations for the text that follows. Headings encompass the overall idea, argument, or theme of the text that follows. Subheadings provide more detailed and focused snapshots within that "big picture" headline.

3. Have one main idea per paragraph.

Having too many ideas in a paragraph can overload it, resulting in confusion and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Simplify the paragraph's organization (and create a clearer message!) by ensuring each paragraph is only one idea.

This may mean having paragraphs that are only one or two sentences. So, what about that old-school adage that you must have at least three to five sentences per paragraph? We free you of that ball and chain. Bask in your freedom!

4. Don't sacrifice organization for sticking to a template.

Often, the most disorganized documents are those that are written according to a template. Certainly templates are important, but the quality of a document can depend on the usefulness (or uselessness) of the template.

If you're a leader and your team must use a template, you may wish to review that template's usefulness. If there's flexibility in terms of how the template is used, encourage your writers to organize their information within sections of a template, almost as if each section were its own document.

For more information on how to create templates that are actually useful, check out our "5 Best Practices for Creating Useful Templates."

Application Tool

Element	Answer
Where is the most important information in my document?	
Could a section use headings and subheadings to guide my readers to main themes and ideas in my document?	
Do I have only one main idea for each paragraph?	
Are there opportunities for me to further organize my information if I'm using a template?	

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