

5 Ways to Establish a Better Writing Review Process for Engineers

Which is worse for an organization: Having no writing review process in place or having an ineffective one? Obviously, neither is ideal. But honestly, the answer is likely an ineffective review process. That's a waste of everyone's time. And unfortunately, it can actually make the final documents *worse*. Ineffective writing review processes can result in:

- Confusing or poor quality documents
- Multiple rounds of review
- Wasted time
- Frustrated reviewers who feel like the writers aren't listening
- Resentful writers who feel like the reviewers aren't communicating clearly
- A feeling that the writers are "bad" or "atrocious"
- Spinning your wheels and the writing not improving

So, how do you establish a writing review process for your engineers that actually works? Here are 5 ways to establish a better writing review process.

1. Create common "look-fors" within your organization.

Organizations with successful review processes have established common standards that are written down and available to everyone. That way, reviewers can look for what has the greatest impact on the success of a document, rather than focusing on their pet peeves. Also, writers are clear from the start about expectations.

2. Review for both readability and content.

Most organizations only focus on a document's technical accuracy. However, they fail to give feedback about whether the document can be easily understood (i.e., the level of readability). Let's face it: a technically accurate document where the reader ends up confused or unconvinced is ultimately pretty worthless.

3. Allow for interaction between the writer and reviewer.

Many review processes are passive. That is, the writer hands a draft off to a reviewer and receives comments. Yet, the reviewer may not understand the context of the writing task or why the writer made the choices they did. So, the reviewer may suggest changes that are less effective than what the writer had in mind and may not help the writer where they truly need help. Depending on the power dynamics, the writer may feel compelled to make those changes regardless of if they make sense for the document's purpose. For a more effective approach, the reviewer and the writer should dialogue with one another (face-to-face, via phone, and/or in writing), before, during, and after the review.

4. Have the writer, not the reviewer, make the changes.

The reviewer fixing the writing by making the changes themselves does not create better writers (or even better documents). Rather, this trains the writer to depend on the reviewer to make the changes and not worry about improving their writing. After all, why should they when the reviewer will “fix” everything?

5. Play to a reviewer's strengths.

Asking one reviewer to review for technical accuracy, concise sentences, and grammatical correctness is a bit like asking a chef to specialize in pasta, empanadas, and dim sum. Instead, having multiple reviewers, each responsible for a particular area of expertise, can lead to more effective and efficient feedback.

Application Tool

Element	Answer
What standards do I have for my writers and are they aware of those standards?	
What opportunities do writers have to respond to feedback and discuss feedback during the review process?	
Am I trying to “fix” my writer's document through line editing?	

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