

WORK STATEMENT WRITING GUIDELINES - SUMMARY

Clear, concise writing is the hallmark of acquisition professionals. Ambiguity and inconsistencies in work statement language often create problems during source selection and contract administration. These Summary Work Statement Writing Guidelines are based on the more extensive SAMPLE PWS Writing Guidelines, which were developed by a team of contracting professionals, program managers, and attorneys to identify best drafting practices. Adhering to these Guidelines will support the development of better documents, the reduction of work statement draft review cycle times, and more effective source selection and contract management.

1. **ORGANIZATION**

- 1.1. Organize the content in a logical sequence.
- 1.2. Limit each paragraph to a single concept or several closely connected concepts.
- 1.3. Number the task (requirement) paragraphs to facilitate organization and reference.
- 1.4. Use bullets sparingly because they are difficult to reference.
- 1.5. Provide a table of contents and page numbers; consider using line numbers. Include a Glossary attachment which lists and defines all acronyms, abbreviations, and "Defined Terms." See Guideline 6.9.

2. **SENTENCES**

- 2.1. Write in complete, direct, relatively short sentences. Break up long sentences; avoid stringing long lists into sentences.
- 2.2. Avoid overly complex sentence structures. Remove unnecessary prepositional phrases.
- 2.3. Limit each sentence to a single concept.
- 2.4. Delete unnecessary words.
- 2.5. Use positive statements.
- 2.6. Use active verbs.
- 2.7. Use adjectives and adverbs only when they add essential meaning.
- 2.8. Use parallel structure. Ensure that all words, phrases, and clauses linked in a series agree with the subject and verb.

3. **NUMBERS**

- 3.1. Except as otherwise specified in these guidelines, spell out numbers under 10, and use the numeral form for numbers 10 and above.
- 3.2. Spell out a number beginning a sentence.
- 3.3. Do not both spell out AND use a numeral to represent one number.
- 3.4. Always spell out one or zero when used alone, because these numerals are easily mistaken for letters.
- 3.5. Represent dimensions, degrees of temperature, percentages, dollars, and cents as numerals and symbols.
- 3.6. When using two numbers together to define different attributes, use a written word for one of the numbers.

4. **SPECIFIC WORDING ISSUES**

- 4.1. All, any, and either. Use "all" to mean "each one" of a group. Use "any" to mean a limited number (or none), at the discretion of the actor ("any" is ambiguous). Use "either" to mean that the actor must choose between two options.
- 4.2. And/or. Generally, avoid this construction, because it creates ambiguity.
- 4.3. "As applicable" or "as necessary." Avoid these phrases where practicable. Instead, state the specific requirements, so that the contractor can comply. If the specifics are unknown, state who will make the determination, how, and on what basis.
- 4.4. "As directed" or "as required." Avoid these phrases where practicable, because they are vague and connote personal services. If the specifics are unknown, state who will provide the direction or requirement, and on what basis.
- 4.5. "Assist" or "support." Generally avoid these words by themselves because they are vague and connote personal services. Specify what the contractor must do. If you can't identify all requirements, identify types or examples of specific performance you require, so as to provide sufficient information regarding the requirement's nature and scope.
- 4.6. Authorized under. An action is authorized under the FAR, not by the FAR.
- 4.7. Contractors, offerors, and vendors. Use "offerors" to denote RFP respondents (in Sections L and M, for example). Use "vendors" to denote respondents to a Request for Quotations (RFQ). Use "Contractor" to denote the non-government party to the specific contract resulting from the RFQ or RFP. See Guideline 5.5.
- 4.8. e.g. means "for example."
- 4.9. Engineering and technical services. Do not use this phrase without more specific information clarifying the work.
- 4.10. Ensure. Generally do not require contractors to "ensure," because this may be vague as to who is actually supposed to perform the task. Instead, specifically state the required contractor performance.
- 4.11. etc. Generally avoid this term, which is vague and ambiguous.
- 4.12. i.e. means "that is to say" or "specifically."
- 4.13. "It" or "They." A single corporation, offeror, vendor, or contractor is "it." Multiple corporations, offerors, vendors, or contractors are "they."
- 4.14. "May" or "Might." Use "may" to imply permissive circumstances and "might" to imply uncertain future conditions.
- 4.15. Quotation is a noun. Quote is a verb.
- 4.16. Responsive. The term "responsive," as used in the FAR, is only applicable to a FAR Part 14 procurement.

- 4.17. Shall means the imperative. Use “shall” to state a required action (such as a binding provision in the contractor’s work requirement). Do not use “will” to identify a task that the contractor is required to perform.
- 4.18. Should means an expected course of action or policy that is to be followed unless inappropriate for a particular circumstance. Avoid using this word in work statements because it is not imperative or sufficiently clear.
- 4.19. Subject matter expert. Focus on contractor performance standards, rather than requiring that contractor employees have specific experience, certificates, or licenses. However, you may expressly require certificates or licenses that are necessary prerequisites to the required performance, subject to certain exceptions and requirements.
- 4.20. Utilize. “Use” is more direct than “utilize.”
- 4.21. Whether or not. Avoid adding “or not” to “whether.”
- 4.22. Will. Use “will” to refer to the government’s future actions or to describe an action or event expected to take place or exist in the future. Remember to use “shall” for all contractor performance requirements.
- 4.23. Would. Use “shall” plus a statement of condition, rather than “would,” for conditional performance requirements.
- 4.24. / Avoid use of slashes, which may be ambiguous.

5. **PUNCTUATION**

- 5.1. Serial Commas (aka “Oxford” commas) - include the final comma in an enumerated series to avoid ambiguities.
- 5.2. Rewrite a complex sentence, or break a long sentence into several sentences, to minimize complicated punctuation.
- 5.3. Commas and periods go inside quotation marks.
- 5.4. Minimize use of dashes.
- 5.5. In general, only capitalize proper nouns, defined terms, the word at the beginning of a sentence, and the word at the beginning of each bulleted list item.
- 5.6. Separate items in a numbered or bulleted list by semi-colons, and capitalize each beginning word after a semi-colon.
- 5.7. Use two spaces after punctuation ending a sentence.

6. **CONTENT & USAGE**

- 6.1. Be complete and explicit. Don’t rely on assumptions, unspecified trade practices, or “we’ve always done it this way.”
- 6.2. Be concise. Redundancy reduces clarity and increases the likelihood of ambiguity and inconsistency.
- 6.3. Use possessives where appropriate – they generally are more concise and direct.
- 6.4. Avoid vagueness. Instead, state the requirement precisely and in objective terms.
- 6.5. Use consistent terminology throughout when referring to a specific item.
- 6.6. Use the simplest words possible. Avoid complex words.
- 6.7. As much as possible, avoid technical jargon, legal phrases, and other elaborate phrases.
- 6.8. Always write in active (not passive) voice, to eliminate ambiguity regarding who is responsible for the action.
- 6.9. For ease of reference, you may create a shorthand reference (a Defined Term) that refers to a longer phrase in the document; when using a Defined Term for the first time, state the phrase followed by the Defined Term with initial capital letters in parentheses. Similarly, when using an abbreviation or acronym for the first time, state the complete term followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses. Thereafter, use the Defined Term, abbreviation, or acronym.
- 6.10. Beware of abbreviations or acronyms that have multiple meanings.
- 6.11. Use pronouns cautiously to avoid misunderstandings. Repeat the noun to avoid any misinterpretation.
- 6.12. Avoid unnecessary phrases such as “Be advised that...” and “Note that...” and “Offerors are on notice that....”
- 6.13. Be sure to use the correct form with respect to plural and possessive nouns.
- 6.14. If you say something will be done (e.g., posted, reviewed, or approved), be sure to say by whom it will be done.
- 6.15. Follow the word “this” with a specific object (noun), in order to precisely identify what “this” is.
- 6.16. Provide specific information regarding what the contractor is going to achieve, produce, or deliver.

7. **MISCELLANEOUS**

- 7.1. Eliminate schedule inconsistencies among various parts of the RFP.
- 7.2. Beware of unreasonable or impossible schedule requirements. These hazards can lead to misinterpretation and risk.
- 7.3. Avoid unnecessary comments or nonessential statements. They can cause confusion.
- 7.4. Proofread carefully. Read the entire document from start to finish.
- 7.5. Make the page format easy to read and annotate. Consider font style, font size, margins, and headings.
- 7.6. Follow configuration management best practices. Date each draft, and label master sets of comments and questions with the reviewer’s name and date. Consistently document changes to requirements.
- 7.7. Use the correct FAR citation format, in accordance with FAR 1.105-2(c).
- 7.8. Avoid contradictory terms.
- 7.9. Avoid including constraints or requirements inadvertently limiting the contractor’s ability to do the work.
- 7.10. Be careful using templates and samples; tailor language for the current procurement. Make sure that all “borrowed” language is applicable, the language makes sense and adds value, and there are no issues the template language ignores.
- 7.11. Because a document or specific language “made it through” a previous review does not mean it is sufficient and appropriate for the current procurement.