

SMALL BUSINESS SOP STARTER CHECKLIST

A practical starting point for documenting recurring work clearly and consistently.

START SIMPLE

You do not need a complicated documentation system to begin creating useful SOPs. Start with one recurring process that matters to the business, identify how the work should be performed, and document enough information for a properly trained person to perform it consistently.

Use this checklist before drafting a new SOP - or to identify obvious gaps in an existing one.

Choose the Right Process First

- ☐ The process occurs regularly enough to benefit from standardization.
- ☐ Inconsistent performance creates quality, cost, customer, safety, or operational problems.
- ☐ Important knowledge currently depends heavily on one or two experienced employees.
- ☐ New employees need instruction before performing the work independently.
- ☐ The process includes important handoffs, approvals, inspections, or controls.
- ☐ There is a reasonably established "right way" to perform the work.

DON'T DOCUMENT A BROKEN PROCESS

If employees routinely work around the current process, determine why before turning it into the official SOP. Standardization should capture a sound process - not freeze avoidable problems into place.

Before You Start Writing

- ☐ Talk with the people who actually perform and supervise the work.
- ☐ Gather current forms, checklists, specifications, photographs, or other job aids.
- ☐ Observe the process when practical rather than relying only on memory.
- ☐ Identify the result the process is supposed to produce.

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Build the SOP - 10 Essential Characteristics

Use the same ten characteristics presented in the ACS guide What Makes a Good SOP? to build or review your procedure.

1. PURPOSE & SCOPE <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ State why the SOP exists.☐ Identify what process or activity it covers.☐ Define where, when, and to whom it applies.☐ Identify important exclusions where necessary.	6. TOOLS, MATERIALS & RESOURCES <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Identify required equipment and tools.☐ Identify required materials or supplies.☐ Reference forms, checklists, software, specifications, or job aids.☐ Identify required PPE where applicable.
2. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Identify who performs the work.☐ Identify who supervises or approves it.☐ Define important handoffs.☐ Identify who verifies completion or quality.	7. SAFETY, QUALITY & COMPLIANCE CONTROLS <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Place critical controls at the steps where they apply.☐ Identify actions that must not be taken.☐ Define required approvals or safeguards.☐ Include escalation points where appropriate.
3. STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURE <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Write the steps in the order work actually occurs.☐ Begin instructions with clear actions.☐ Include important preparation and closeout steps.☐ Capture critical knowledge experienced employees may take for granted.	8. VERIFICATION & DOCUMENTATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Define how completion will be verified.☐ Identify who performs the verification.☐ Specify required records, checklists, photographs, sign-offs, or system entries.☐ Identify where required records are maintained.
4. CLEAR, ACTION-ORIENTED LANGUAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Use direct, concise instructions.☐ Remove unnecessary jargon.☐ Define specialized terms where necessary.☐ Replace vague terms such as properly, regularly, and as needed when a clearer requirement can be stated.	9. EXCEPTIONS & CORRECTIVE ACTION <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Explain what happens when normal conditions do not apply.☐ Define when work should stop or be escalated.☐ Identify who owns corrective action.☐ Require verification of significant corrections before closure.
5. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Define what acceptable completion looks like.☐ Include measurable or observable criteria where practical.☐ Identify important frequency, time, quality, accuracy, or condition requirements.	10. REVIEW & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Assign an SOP owner.☐ Include version and effective-date information.☐ Establish approval and review requirements.☐ Update the SOP when processes, equipment, responsibilities, or requirements change.

AFFILIATED CORPORATE SERVICES, LLC
ACS SOP STARTER CHECKLIST

Before You Release the SOP

Test the document before you call it finished. A procedure can look complete on paper and still be difficult to use in real work.

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| ☐ Have someone familiar with the work review the SOP for technical accuracy. | ☐ Verify that important standards can actually be observed or measured. |
| ☐ Have someone other than the writer follow or walk through the procedure. | ☐ Confirm that exception and escalation instructions are usable. |
| ☐ Confirm that steps appear in the actual order of work. | ☐ Remove outdated, duplicate, or conflicting instructions. |
| ☐ Check that referenced forms, links, photographs, and attachments are current. | ☐ Obtain required approval. |
| ☐ Confirm that responsibilities and handoffs are unmistakable. | ☐ Remove superseded versions from normal use. |

AFTER RELEASE

DOCUMENT -> TRAIN -> PERFORM -> VERIFY -> IMPROVE

Publishing the SOP is not the finish line. Train affected employees, verify that the procedure works in practice, collect feedback, and revise the document when the process changes or experience identifies a better method.

Three Questions Before You Finish

Could a properly trained employee use this SOP without repeatedly asking what the writer meant?

☐ Yes ☐ Not Yet

Could a supervisor determine whether the work met the expected standard?

☐ Yes ☐ Not Yet

Would the SOP still be useful if the employee who currently knows the process best were unavailable tomorrow?

☐ Yes ☐ Not Yet

If the answer to any of these questions is "Not Yet," the SOP probably needs more work.

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

Download the companion ACS guide *What Makes a Good SOP? - 10 Essential Characteristics* for explanations, examples, and a 10-point self-check.

Would you like an independent look at one of your SOPs? Request the complimentary ACS SOP & Training Introductory Assessment at acsllc-nc.com/assessment. No fee. No obligation. No requirement to purchase an ACS service.

EXPECTATIONS DEFINED. PERFORMANCE MEASURED. RESULTS MANAGED.

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