Standard operating procedure

# Using this standard operating procedure template

This is the exact template we use at Middlestone as a starting point when writing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for our clients.

We’ve included instructions in coloured boxes (like this one). When you’ve filled in each section, just delete the coloured boxes.

This template is provided “as is”, without any guarantees or warranties. Obviously, we can’t be responsible for how you use this template, and we don’t claim that your finished SOPs will comply with any particular standard. We’re just trying to give you a head start.

If you need any help with your process mapping project, please do get in touch with us:

[www.middlestone.ltd/contact](https://www.middlestone.ltd/contact)

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First, create a cover page to match your corporate style and branding.

Fill in the Company, Title, and Subject fields below. These will then appear throughout the rest of the document—for example, in the page footers.

[Company]

[Title]

[Subject]

# Defining the process

## Process details

Division:

Department:

It’s helpful to include the division and department names if you’re writing lots of standard operating procedures. These might not be relevant to a smaller organisation though. Delete them if they’re not needed.

Process name: [Subject]

Give the process a meaningful name that tells the reader what the process achieves. Use a consistent naming format, for example a verb and then a noun.

Don’t use vague phrases like “Accounts Payable Process” or “Month-end Process”.

A common mistake is to name the standard operating procedure after the output, without a verb. Such as “Sales Invoices” or “Bank reconciliation”.

Good examples are: “Paying drivers”, “Creating and emailing customer statements”, “Injection moulding widget one”, “Reconciling the bank account”, “Refunding customers” etc

Process owner: [Manager]

The process owner is the person responsible for the success of the process. The process owner is not normally the person who is performing the work within the process.

To help identify the process owner, think about who would have the authority to change the process.

Process customer:

The process customer is the person, organisation, or group that benefits from this process.

To help identify the process customer, think about who would complain if things went wrong in the process.

Examples could be “Customers”, “Suppliers”, “Shareholders” etc. Or the process customer can be internal, such as “Employees”, “Directors”, “Production department” etc

## Purpose

Describe what the process should achieve. This is more than just repeating the process name (which describes *what* you’re doing). The purpose should briefly explain *why* too.

To help establish the purpose of the process, think about the consequences if things went wrong in the process.

For example, “To efficiently and accurately pay staff to avoid reputational damage and employee disputes”.

Or, “To produce high-quality widgets while minimising effort, rework, and wasted materials”.

## Policy

Write down or refer to any company policy that is relevant to this process.

Examples could include your organisation’s supplier payment policy, refund policy, or customer service level agreements (SLAs).

Delete this section if it’s not needed.

## Scope

Describe the areas or activities this procedure will cover. Do this by describing the boundaries—the start and finish—of the process, not every activity within the process.

This statement of scope helps the reader work out if they’ve picked up the right standard operating procedure or if they need to keep looking to find the information they need.

For example, “This standard operating procedure (SOP) covers all activities from receipt of an order until the order is despatched”.

If the statement of scope could reasonably raise a question in the reader’s mind about whether a certain activity is or is not included, then define any exclusions.

For example, “The work of the finance department is not included in this standard operating procedure”.

## Related process

List any other processes related to this one. Don’t list every other standard operating procedure you’ve written.

List:

* standard operating procedures that this process relies upon
* standard operating procedures that rely on this process
* standard operating procedures referred to within this one

# Process resources

## Personnel

These people are involved in this process:

List the people that will have a role in the process. Don’t include the process owner, unless they also perform work within the process.

Use either job titles or people’s names, depending on the company’s preference.

## Inputs and outputs

The process requires these inputs and produces these outputs:

### Inputs

List any tangible inputs that are needed in the process. Inputs are “what is put in, taken in, or operated on by [the] process”—OED

There may not be any.

To help identify inputs, think about what resources and information the operators need to do their jobs.

Don’t list tools, machinery, or software. They’ll be included in the *Systems* section below.

Examples could be materials, messages received, invoices to be processed etc.

### Outputs

List tangible outputs from the process. Outputs are anything produced by the process.

Again, there may not be any. And that’s ok.

Don’t list electronic records created in databases or intangible things like “Satisfaction”.

Don’t list things that are created only for use within the process itself—such as import files, workings, calculations, or sub-assemblies.

Good examples could be finished products, messages sent, reports, files etc.

## Systems used

List the tools, machinery, or software needed.

Rename this section if it makes more sense to call it something else.

## Other terms defined

Give the definition of any acronyms, abbreviations, or technical or ambiguous terms used in this document.

Delete this section if it’s not needed.

# Procedure

## Process diagram

Include a process diagram.

Add a key or refer the reader to extra information that will help them understand the process map. Not everyone will be familiar with process map symbols, even if you only use “basic” ones.

## Procedure

List the steps that need to be performed. Number each step.

## Controls

Controls are specific steps within the process that are included to reduce the risk of mistakes occurring or to prevent or detect defects. These could be quality control checks, manager approvals, peer reviews, or system features that validate the users input.

If you want to include a separate list here, then cross-reference each control from within the *Procedure* section above.

Delete this section if it’s not needed.

## Exceptions

The exceptions section lists extra steps to take in “exceptional” circumstances—for example, when things go wrong.

If you want to include a separate list here, then cross-reference each exception from within the *Procedure* section above.

Delete this section if it’s not needed.