

# Designing Policies & Procedures Information

Raymond E. Urgo

*The policies and procedures (P&P) developer must address more than format and style issues in designing policies and procedures information. There are at least five levels of design for policies and procedures information. Level 1 concerns the architecture in which the information resides. Level 2 concerns the type of relationship that exists among documents within the architecture. Level 3 concerns the approach used in designing and developing the information content within a policies and procedures document. Level 4 concerns the writing methods to use. Level 5 concerns the various writing techniques for presenting information in units individually and collectively within a policies and procedures document.*

## Introduction

One of the most frequently asked questions of policies and procedures information developers is “what format and style should I use?” If this was as easy to answer as it is to ask, the question would probably not be frequently asked. Format and style are the most visible aspects of information design – a no wonder they are talked about so frequently. Before addressing mere format and style, the astute policies and procedures information developer should address the larger context about policies and procedures information design. Perhaps a better question is “what should I consider in designing policies and procedures information?”.

This paper presents five levels of concerns that the policies and procedures information developer should address to understand policies and procedures information design.

## Level 1: Policies & Procedures Architecture

**Definition.** A policies and procedures information architecture refers to the systematic way an organization designs, structures, or organizes its collection of P&P information for purposes of storage and access. Other names used for architecture are structure, library, and system. (1) (2)

**Factors to address.** Depending on its size and maturity, an organization may have no P&P information, numerous documents, or subsets of documents. At this level of information design, the P&P information developer must either know or determine whether an architecture exists.

If an architecture exists, the P&P developer can either develop information to conform within the architecture or plan an effort to recreate the architecture to be more suitable for the organization. If an architecture does not exist, the developer needs to propose the creation of one if the organization is planning information development on many subject areas.

**Ways of organizing.** Some typical ways of designing and organizing a collection of P&P information include the following (1):

Architecture Type	Example
Organization's hierarchy	corporate level, division level, department level
Departmentally	Sales, Purchasing, Human Resources, Finance, Quality Assurance
Functionally	order entry, purchasing, accounts payable, accounts receivable
Information types	policy, process, procedure/instruction
Regulatory or certification requirements	elements within an ISO 9000 standard
Mega-processes and sub-processes	major processes of an organization (such as design product, build product, and deliver product)
Chronologically	order in which P&P document is developed and released
Ad hoc	no designed architecture

## Level 2: The Relationship among Policies & Procedures Documents

**Introduction.** After addressing the architecture, the P&P developer should address the relationship of any P&P documents to one another within the architecture. In particular, the P&P developer must determine whether a P&P document is or will be disunited or united.

**Disunited described.** A disunited P&P document refers to information written on one aspect of a subject and the user may go elsewhere in the collection or binder for another aspect on the same subject. In essence, the subject is likely to have multi-documents. (1) (2) (3)

**United described.** A united P&P document refers to information written in the form of a manual or book that covers all aspects of a subject (such as a major business process) from cover to cover with practically everything the user needs to know on the subject. In essence, the

subject primarily has a single-source document on the entire subject. (1) (4)

**Comparison.** In comparing a disunited and united P&P document, development is easier and shorter for a disunited type. Maintenance, however, may be more difficult in a disunited document should the change require that more than one document be changed. In a disunited document, users may tend to find too limited a view of the subject. A united document offers high-level (big picture) and low-level (detail) information for a user. (1)

### **Level 3: Content Development Approach**

**Introduction.** Level 3 concerns each P&P document in itself. There are two approaches to designing and developing the content of P&P information in a document: extrinsic and intrinsic.

**Extrinsic Described.** P&P information developers using an extrinsic approach create documents from a pre-designed shell (outside) and fill in the required information. In essence, the developer is given a content format or structure to follow or supply information into, regardless of the need, purpose, or amount of information for the user. (2) (3)

The following is an example of an extrinsic content format for each policies and procedures document in an organization:

- Purpose
- Scope
- Responsibility
- Policy
- Procedure
- Forms
- References.

**Intrinsic Described.** P&P information developers using an intrinsic approach create documents around the nature, purpose, and amount of information that needs to be communicated for the user. With an intrinsic approach, the writer determines the need, purpose, and amount of information for the user, and then creates (or designs) a structure for communicating the content.

**Combination.** Sometimes a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic may be used. If both approaches are used together, the intrinsic would be used within the extrinsic approach.

### **Level 4: Writing Methods**

**Introduction.** After determining how content will be organized, the P&P developer should identify what writing method will be used to create the information. Two typical writing methods for policies and procedures information are prose-based and structured/modular.

**Prose-based Described.** The prose-based writing method conveys information through a description or narration using principles and styles typically taught in writing essays, compositions, and reports. The prose-based writing method is based on principles of 17<sup>th</sup> century rhetoric. It tends to be more academic and subject based. Principles of prose-based writing tend to be vague, difficult to apply, and not always suitable for how readers need to access and use policies and procedures information, especially in the Information Age.

**Structured/modular Described.** The structured/modular method pre-interprets information by conveying the information in units, modules, and tables that can be easily moved about (hence the name modular). Structured/modular writing is based on principles of communicating for performance- and knowledge-based management systems. Structured/modular writing offers formal, concrete principles for information developers to learn and apply that are suitable for today's Information Age society, including online communication media. (5)

### **Level 5: Writing Techniques**

**Introduction.** Writing techniques refers to ways of communicating units of information individually and collectively within a writing method.

**Techniques for Units Individually.** Examples of writing techniques applied to a unit of information individually include paragraphing, chunking, and bulleting and numbering lists. Other techniques include presenting information in tables (decision tables, procedures tables, process tables), charts, diagrams (flow diagrams, pictorial graphics), and playscripts. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7)

**Techniques for Units Collectively.** Examples of writing techniques applied to units of information collectively include presenting information hierarchically according to chapters, sections, and appendices. Other techniques include applying formal outlining techniques, such as numerical outlines (roman numeral or decimal) and/or mechanical outlines (active space, indentures, subheadings, and font variations).

## **Closing comments**

The needs, requirements, and circumstances for designing and developing policies and procedures information vary from organization to organization, and even within an organization. At the same time, addressing and applying these five levels of information design appropriately can be a daunting endeavor for some information developers. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, developers are advised to implement key aspects from each level in their work. To enhance their information design talents, developers may need to seek readings, seminars, and experience in those levels in which they seek improvement. In short, there is no simple answer to “what format and style should I use?”. Hopefully though, these five levels of policies and procedures information design provide a framework to enhance the quality in documentation, a developer’s talents, and further discussion.

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### **Raymond E. Urgo**

Principal  
Urgo & Associates  
6565 Sunset Boulevard; Suite 346  
Los Angeles, CA 90028 USA  
323-957-9317    rurgo@aol.com

Raymond Urgo assists clients in planning and developing policies and procedures communication programs and information. His experience in this discipline includes author, speaker, and judge. Urgo teaches policies and procedures at UCLA Extension. He founded and is the first manager of STC’s Policies & Procedures Special Interest Group. He is STC’s Assistant to the President for SIGs.