Five-line outline and one-page SOP worksheet

LoftyBiz 165 — Write Faster and Better: Outlines, Editing Passes and Short Documents

These are examples, not promises. The people and businesses in this video are illustrative examples, and results vary. Figures are rough examples from the official script, not targets or forecasts. This is general business education, not financial, legal, HR or tax advice.

This week

- Pick your longest guide or SOP.
- Write a five-line outline of what it must say.
- Then rewrite it in three passes: structure, clarity and polish.
- Aim for one page with the steps, what to never skip and the common mistakes.
- Ask one team member if they would use it.
- Put the short version into Systex, so the team always opens the same page.

Habits to keep

- Start with an outline before anyone writes, because fixing a plan is cheaper than fixing a draft.
- Edit in separate passes: structure, then clarity, then polish.
- Compress your guides to the steps, the things never to skip and the common mistakes, and move the rest to a background note.
- Keep the short guides in Systex so they stay easy to find.

Worked example: Beatrix, small marketing studio, Madison

Setting	Beatrix, small marketing studio, Madison, USA	
Team	four freelance writers	
Problem	rewrites; some pieces went through three full drafts	
Time for one full rewrite, in her example	about four hours, at 45 dollars an hour	
Cost of one rewrite, in her example	180 dollars	
Rewrites a month, before the change	about ten	
New order of work	a short outline before writing a single paragraph	
What the outline has	the main point in one sentence, who the piece is for, four or five sections with one line each, and the key example	
Time to write and check the outline	about twenty minutes to write, five minutes for Beatrix to check	
Editing passes	structure, then clarity, then polish	
Full rewrites a month, after two months, in this example	dropped from about ten to two	

Beatrix runs a small marketing studio in Madison with four freelance writers. Her biggest headache was rewrites. Some pieces went through three full drafts. In this example, each full rewrite took a writer about four hours, at 45 dollars an hour, which is 180 dollars for one rewrite, and she was paying for about ten rewrites a month. She changed the order: before writing a single paragraph, each writer now sends a short outline. It takes about twenty minutes to write and five minutes for Beatrix to check. Writers then edit in three separate passes: structure, clarity and polish. After two months, in this example, full rewrites dropped from about ten a month to two. These figures are illustrations, not forecasts, and are examples, not promises.

Worked example: Rafael, heating and cooling company, Tucson

Setting	Rafael, heating and cooling company, Tucson, USA	
Team	fourteen technicians	

Old SOP length	eight to ten pages; the service SOP was nine pages	
Why the crew did not use them	on a hot rooftop with a customer waiting, nobody has time to read ten pages on a phone	
Three compression questions	What must a person do, in order? What must they never skip? What usually goes wrong?	
Where those answers went	page one; history, explanations and rare cases moved to a background note	
Shorter wording, in his example	"Turn off the power first." Each step starts with a verb and is one line	
Service SOP length, after compression	from nine pages to one and a half	
How he tested it	a technician who had joined only two months earlier followed the short version on an ordinary job site	
Time to rewrite the first five SOPs	about two weeks, working an hour a day	
Procedure calls to the office, over the next three months, in this example	dropped by about half	
Night call-out SOP	needed two full pages because of the safety steps	

Rafael runs a heating and cooling company in Tucson with fourteen technicians. Each SOP was eight to ten pages, and technicians still called the office with questions that were answered somewhere on page seven. He compressed each guide to the steps, what never to skip and the common mistakes, and moved the rest to a background note. In this example, the service SOP went from nine pages to one and a half. He tested the short version with a technician who had joined only two months earlier. The first five SOPs took about two weeks to rewrite, working an hour a day. In this example, calls to the office about procedures dropped by about half over the next three months. Not every guide could be that short: the night call-out SOP needed two full pages because of the safety steps. These figures are illustrations, not forecasts, and are examples, not promises.

Keep the checklist in one place

When you have a short outline and a one-page SOP, keep them in Systex, our own product. You can find Systex at loftybiz.net, and click the link in the description.

LoftyBiz · loftybiz.net · Systex is our own product. This worksheet sits under LoftyBiz 165. All figures are from the official script and are examples, not promises.