

Guide

White Papers with Impact:

Five Guidelines for Writing a High-Value B2B White Paper

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In this guide, we identify our 5 best practices for writing a successful white paper effectively and efficiently.

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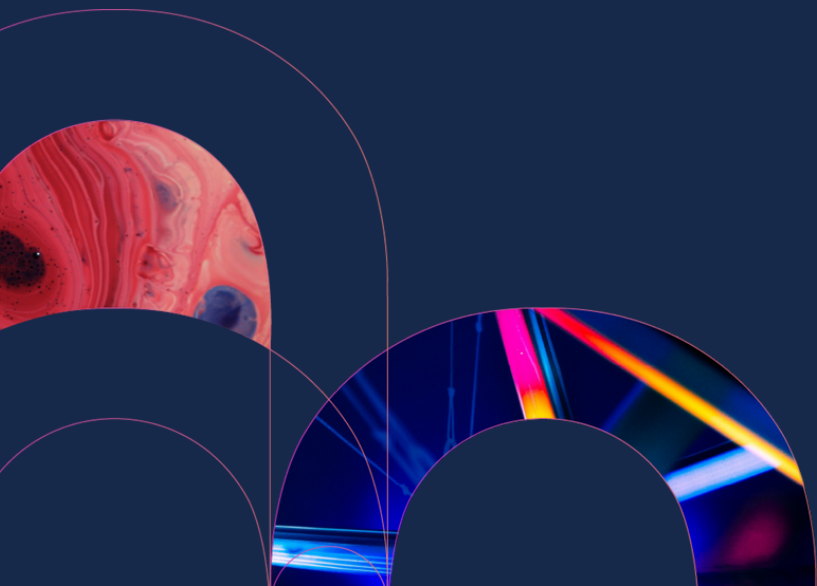
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Writing a white paper can be a challenging task, mainly because they are [expected to do a lot](#) for brands. They require a lot of effort—as many as 50 hours inclusive of research, writing, revision, and design—but they can also drive significant value.

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The Narratize team has more than a decade of experience creating high-impact white papers and other technical documents for innovative brands—and we know how tough it can be to get these pieces done. Our senior strategists often stepped in to white paper projects to help marketing and communications team problem-solve: providing supportive research, consulting on study design, and crafting a clear and compelling narrative framework. In the process, we've developed a process for navigating this complex, recursive writing task while delivering engaging, informative white papers that inform and persuade through narrative.

Read on to learn our **5 best practices for writing a successful white paper** effectively and efficiently.



Tip 1: Work across sales, marketing, and product teams to develop a shared purpose for your white paper.



Here's a common scenario: sales gets a request from a lead for a white paper articulating the product's technical specs and market differentiation. Marketing has another idea for a lead magnet white paper based on ongoing market research. Meanwhile, experts on the product team are heads-down on the build—even though their technical and strategic input on either idea is necessary.

There have been some meetings to kick off this project, but the writer still doesn't have a clear sense of direction. Hours are stacking up, and the project is stalling.

This is a moment where a shared sense of purpose for this deliverable needs to be established. Determine how the white paper works within the content strategy—which means, consider what organizational story this white paper needs to tell. In this stage, it's often helpful to ask questions like:

- Which ideal customer (ICP) needs this deliverable? What resonates with them? What motivates them? What kind of information do they find convincing?
- More importantly, what information are your ICPs asking for? The best content specifically addresses the assignment—make sure that your
- creative brief explicitly answers customers' questions.
- How will the white paper be used? For example, will it be gated content used to generate leads? Will it be the end point of an email campaign?
- Is it necessary to book a sales call?

This is a moment to think critically about how the idea for the project aligns with customers' needs: for example, a stellar, detailed white paper on PFAS substitutes might be too much information for certain ICPs, while it could also be exactly the right information for more technical buyers who want to see proof of expertise and validation. This is what we call impact-evidence quotient: choosing the right amount of technical detail to make the intended impact.

Tip 2: Choose a white paper format that helps tell a compelling narrative.

White papers hold a lot of complex information, but they should do more than just simply detail a mountain of facts. You need to transform that information into interesting, persuasive insights that hook readers and get their buy in.

Choosing a structure for your whitepaper can help. [Common formats include:](#)



Technical whitepapers

Technical whitepapers are used to explain how products work, often in great detail. They are often written for people most likely to purchase a product, or those who will use a product on a regular basis.

Problem-solution white papers

Problem-solution white papers allow you to outline creative solutions to common problems your audience faces, making them applicable to a range of stakeholders.

While these white papers include some technical information, they also include content focused on the broader industry context. It should show your audience that you understand the state of their industry, the problems they face, and why your product offers the solution they need.

Educational or research-focused white papers

Educational white papers are a great way for you to showcase your expertise to your audience. They can be used to educate your audience about certain technologies, processes, and even best practices.

Thought leadership white papers

Thought leadership white papers help establish credibility and expertise for your brand. They can take many different forms. For example, you could speak to the future of your audience's industry. You could offer expert commentary on a particular development in a given field. The goal is to show that you are a brand worth partnering with.

Tip 3: Gather secondary research to ground your white paper.

Research is a crucial step for any white paper project. Though your audience has some familiarity with the topic of your white paper, research establishes your brand as credible and helps you write from a position of authority. It can also help you establish a unique angle to take in your white paper.

This is where working closely with subject matter experts on product and R&D teams becomes important. Marketers are often excellent researchers—but few of us are also chemical engineers, nuclear physicists, or clinical researchers. Marketers can save time in the stacks by mapping out a white paper's narrative, then asking subject matter experts to provide the technical and scientific literature that matters for this particular narrative, including proof points that substantiate claims around a product's design and efficacy.

Best practice is to collect SMEs' top 10 publications that provide proof points for methodology and design. Use these publications as a jumping off point for further research. At the very least, capture a list of keywords from SMEs to guide your efforts. Then get started. For a Problem-Solution white paper, for example, you would seek secondary literature that provides:

- Context on your problem
- Summaries of how others have solved the problem, and, if possible,
- Validation for your unique approach to solving that problem

And don't be afraid to bring insights back to sales, marketing, and product/R&D teams from this work: research is always ongoing, and can change or bolster a white paper's narrative as well as the organization's mission when communicated consistently and well.



Tip 4: Conduct a successful SME interview.

SMEs provide technical insights on a product and even offer expert commentary on a particular industry. Aligning your brand with [insights from a respected SME can also help establish you as an industry leader](#), especially if you're creating a thought leadership-focused whitepaper.

The key to working with SMEs is getting the right insights, especially when interviewing them. But SMEs aren't mind readers: they can't give you what you need unless you ask. That's why creative teams need strategies to gather information from SMEs. Helpful strategies for SME include:

Doing your homework and being prepared

Coming prepared is basic etiquette and respectful of any SME's time. However, it also helps you understand the topic being discussed and identify gaps in your understanding. You should also read up on the SME you are interviewing to understand their contributions to the field.

Using open-ended questions

"Yes or no" questions usually validate what you already know. If you're asking a lot of yes-no questions, you may be missing out on rich insights. That includes insights you might not have thought to look for.

Open ended questions give your SME room to talk, share, and elaborate. For example, instead of asking "Is [new product] a game changer for the field?" ask "Why is [new product] a game changer for the field?"

Summarizing topics for your SME

When dealing with complex subject matter, make sure you understand your SME's insights. During your interview, it can be helpful to ask questions that "summarize" your understanding of a topic. Known as the [Feynman approach](#), this is a type of learning strategy that can help you ensure your understanding of complex material.



For example, you can summarize a complex medical procedure or product function and ask your SME if you've described it correctly. They can correct your explanation or expand on it.



Asking your SME for opinions on a topic

You have limited time with your SME. Instead of asking about facts you can gain through secondary research, focus your questions on what unique insight your SME can provide.

Their opinions, for example, offer something compelling and unique. As someone who has been working extensively in their field, your SME has opinions on changes, developments, and innovations.

Be prepared to ask questions that could ignite an SME's "passion," such as what excites them about a particular development in their field and why.

Types of questions you can ask here include:

- How is [new drug] going to change how patients are treated?
- Where do you see the banking industry in ten years if this new technology is widely adopted?
- What concerns do you have about widespread use of this product?

A caveat: we presented the conceptualizing and researching process up to this point as linear, but realistically, it is more recursive. In our experience, a white paper's narrative genuinely comes to life after the SME interview, since their technical insights and industry expertise often provide rich and occasionally surprising insights that in turn drive or reshape the narrative. That said, SMEs aren't always attuned to the demands that sales and marketing teams face from customers, so writers should work to find alignment between the technical narrative and customers'--that is, readers'--needs and expectations.

Bridging this gap is the white paper writers' job--and it's a tough one. At this stage, we find that it's helpful to stop preparing and start writing.

Tip 5: Don't stare at a blank screen. Get creating.

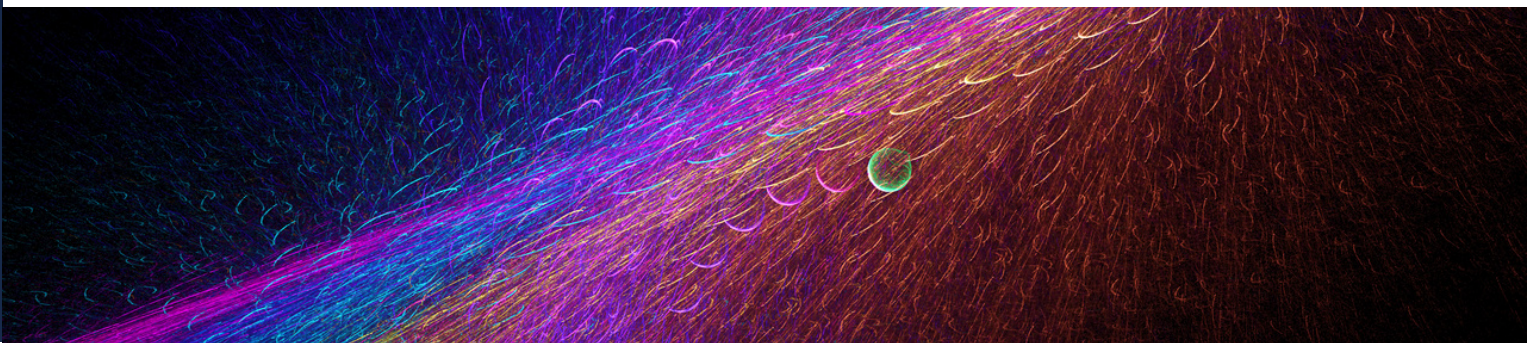
One of the hardest parts of the writing process for white papers isn't the preparation—it's executing the vision on the page. "In my experience as a content consultant, finding the right words to actually tell the story is the hardest part of writing complex pieces like white papers," says Narratize Content Director, Dr. Kate Greulich. "When clients struggle at this phase, it's because they need to do the fine, micro-decision making around sentence structure, word choice, metaphor use, descriptive language, information and logic, etc. to truly get this piece delivered and out the door."

Writing is just outrightly hard—even seasoned technical writers can clam up when it's time to bring all of the insights, research, and narrative framework together. And nothing is more stressful than spinning your wheels on a white paper draft with a close deadline approaching.

Here's how we deal with the pressure to execute:

- Get started. Writing is thinking, so even if what you produce is not clean or pretty, it is helping you find the words that do resonate.
- Partner with design. Designers are visual storytellers - and sometimes a white paper's layout can help clarify and simplify writing decisions.
- Set a timer. Sprint through your first draft by setting a timer. Not every decision needs to be pinned down—just focus on creating the general structure.

We would be remiss if we didn't mention generative AI solutions here - they can absolutely be helpful for getting words on the page quickly and overcoming the initial fear of getting started. But using a generative AI tool for complex pieces like white papers can cost time if outputs are inaccurate and low-quality: one expert white paper writer, for example, [wrote a C+ quality white paper using ChatGPT, but took over 100 prompts and 10+ hours](#) to complete the project.



The fact is that white papers are complicated. They will always require synthesizing knowledge, information, expertise, and strategy from across the company to execute well, and a team of sharp, efficient creatives to pull it all together.

We wanted to make writing compelling scientific and technical white papers easier—so we poured our expertise into the world’s first generative AI white paper builder, now available in the Narratize Use Case Library.

Let us do the hard work of turning insights into narratives: [contact our team](#) to see it in action today.

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We created Narratize to transform how teams write, communicate, and innovate at work. Narratize bridges the gap between R&D, Product, Innovation, and Marketing teams through intuitive collaboration features and all of the use cases organizations need to capture, propel, and scale their boldest, most brilliant ideas.

Powered by our patent-pending Human-led AI methodology, Narratize delivers superior accuracy and quality for customers in high-reliability industries.



Interested in learning how Narratize can accelerate innovation at your enterprise?



Contact Kara Uchtman, Chief Product Officer, to schedule a demo today.

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