

FAQs for Definitions and Descriptions

Length

1. **How much text is required for the info sheet?**

If the Info Sheet were printed out, it would fill the front and back of one sheet of paper. In a word processor, it would be two pages, front only.

Images

2. **How many images can be taken from the Internet without any edits?**

As many as you need? You can take your images from an online site like Flickr, draw them yourself, scan or photograph something from a textbook, or take your own photos. Just be sure that you credit your sources (See the Documentation section of the FAQ below).

3. **Do we need to include pictures in our document?**

Yes. The assignment requires that you “Include a minimum of one new or adapted illustration, designed for use by a specific semi-technical or nontechnical audience.”

4. **Can I use images for my assignment?**

Yes. In fact, it’s a requirement. See Question 19 above.

5. **Should I cite my picture sources, and if so, what format would you like that in?**

You can include a caption line if you’ve taken a photo from Flickr (like the example I used in the What Is an Information Sheet?). You could also include a line like “Photo courtesy of _____.” Add full citations for anything other than Flickr images in your References section.

6. **Can we have pictures in the glossary?**

Certainly. If you want to add an illustration or photo that helps explain your glossary terms, that’s fine.

7. **How do I cite a screenshot that I took of a website?**

For our purposes, you could use a caption like this: Screenshot of the Virginia Tech Homepage. Taken September 12, 2013.

Submissions

8. **What do I need to turn in?**

You need to turn in one file (a Word document or a PDF) that includes all three of the pieces you have written for this assignment: (1) your cover memo, (2) your info sheet, and (3) your glossary. I recommend that you use a PDF format to ensure that your layout looks right.

9. **How do I turn in my work?**

Go to *Assignments* in Scholar, choose the Definitions and Descriptions assignment, and add your work as an Attachment. Be sure that you agree to the Honor Code Pledge.

Format

10. What are the font sizes we should use?

Something reasonable and appropriate for your documents. My guess is something like 10 to 12 point font for the main body. Your headings will be slightly larger. If you need a little extra space, you could make your references and the image captions a little smaller. Choose something that looks professional and polished, and be consistent. Make sure that all the headings are the same size, for instance.

11. Are we supposed to use a specific font or format?

Your work should be polished and professional. You can choose any font, but try to stick with something that is widely used like Times New Roman, Arial, Helvetica, Calibri, or Palatino. Avoid any special fonts like these:

Apple Chancery

Bauhaus 93

Braggadocio

Curlyz MT

That kind of font is a little harder to read and distracts from your document. Stick with a basic font in most cases.

12. Could I afford to reduce the font size of the information sheets?

Your font needs to be clear and easy to read. If you move to a super tiny font, you might get more information on the page, but you can't be sure anyone would want to read it. I'd recommend around 10 to 12 point fonts in general.

13. Is there a template of glossary for definitions we could follow?

There's no specific glossary layout. I suggest choosing something that matches your Info Sheet. Use the same fonts and colors. You might use two columns so that it looks something like a page from a dictionary or just a basic single page. Just make sure that it looks polished and professional.

14. Should the glossary be its own separate document or be embedded inside the info sheet as a word bank?

The glossary is a separate page (or pages); however, you can include some words from your glossary on your Info Sheet if it is rhetorically appropriate. Remember how the FEMA document included some key terms in a marginal box? That model could work on your Info Sheet as well.

15. Do you mind if we use Publisher?

Not at all. Use whatever tool you want to make your documents. Just save your work as a PDF.

16. Can we look for pre-made templates? Info sheets have been made many times before and the layouts are available online for free so can we take advantage of this as long as we source material?

Please feel free to use an existing template if it is appropriate for your documents. Cite your source if it's appropriate. For instance, you don't need to cite a template you find in Microsoft Word, but if you've chosen a layout that comes with a copyright label, include it on your document.

17. For the info sheet, are there any specific guidelines such as fonts, borders, colors, etc.?

The primary guideline is to make documents that are polished and professional. The fonts, borders, and colors that you choose should match the topic, look nice, and help readers understand your message. Be consistent. If you are using blue headings, use the same shade of blue throughout the documents. Whatever you do, avoid anything that is distracting.

18. How should we title each of the documents in the assignment?

Your Info Sheet should have a title specific to what it covers. The example I shared in class had the title "What Is an Information Sheet?" You could use a similar question or a statement, like "Introduction to Recycling" or "Choosing a Tablet."

Your Glossary could just be titled "Glossary" or "Glossary of Terms." You can also be a little more creative and use a title that relates to your topic, like "Words You'll Hear If You're Building a Tesla Coil."

Your cover memo will use standard format (with To, From, Subject, and Date). It won't have a title. We'll talk about memos more in class on September 16.

19. How should we mark our names on the assignment; our names are already in the title of the word document, is that enough?

Your name will be on the cover memo, so that takes care of labeling all the documents since they will all be in one file. If you want to include a byline or mark your name as the author on the other documents you can. Just make sure it looks professional and polished.

20. I assume that following a generic, journalist two-column format is acceptable, or is it necessary to have additional boxes off to the sides on our Info sheets to explain additional questions?

A two-column layout is fine. Other formats work too. Just choose something that is appropriate for your topic and that looks polished and professional.

21. How "pretty" you expect these to be? Some of the example papers looked great, and I don't really know how to add that much flair to a word document.

I expect the work to look polished and professional. It doesn't have to look like an established graphic artist made it, but it should look neat, clean, and inviting. You can use Templates in Word to help. The Templates for Flyers, Brochures, and Newsletters are probably the closest to this project. Search for Datasheet templates as well.

Content

22. I am concerned that the topic I want to cover is very broad. Can I change my topic on my own, or do you have to give me permission and review it?

You can change your topic if you need to. You may get into the process of writing your Info Sheet and realize that you have far more material than you can cover in a one page, front and back, document. The solution would definitely be focusing on a more specific aspect of your topic. You don't have to clear your topic change with me, but you can send me an email or ask me after class or during office hours if you are unsure or need feedback.

23. My one concern is the length of the info sheet. I'm unsure if I should focus on one topic at length, or if it would be more beneficial for me to explain many different parts of my main idea.

What does your reader need to know? The way to decide is to think about what the person you are explaining your topic to most needs to know. Would many different parts be adequate or would an explanation at length be better? Put yourself in your reader's shoes. What would most help your reader as an introduction to the topic?

24. Should we refer vocab words in the info sheet to the glossary, or redefine them inside the sheet as we use them?

It depends upon the term. If the term is fundamentally important to what you are explaining in your Info Sheet, you probably need at least a short definition on the Info Sheet. For instance, if your Info Sheet is about using embossing in card making, you definitely need to make sure you have defined embossing on your Info Sheet, even though it's also in your glossary. You might go on in that Info

Sheet to identify different methods of embossing (e.g., dry embossing, heat embossing, paste embossing) but you may not go into detail or define those terms further.

The decision about which terms you need to define within the Info Sheet is a rhetorical one. Ask yourself if the reader needs to know more information to understand what you are describing. If so, include the definition.

25. Do we have to describe a product AND a process? Or are we given a choice between the two?

Your Info Sheet can focus on an object, a mechanism, or a process. Check page 366 of Markel for more information.

26. One question I have is about submitting it electronically, since it will be an electronic document are we able/required to use web links in our glossary?

Yes. Hyperlinks are fine. When you save your document, make sure that the links still work. Sometimes PDFs will lose their links. Try using the Save As... command rather than printing as a PDF.

27. When I think of technical writing, I think about writing about engineering and more of the technical and factual side of technologies and not just writing to write. Maybe if you gave an explanation of what technical writing is and what you expect from us out of it that could help one understand the assignments more too.

Technical writing (or communication) is a genre, or way, of writing. It focuses on strategies and techniques of writing, not on subjects. There is technical writing for every field, not just disciplines like engineer or computer science. In your assignments, I expect you to write polished, professional documents that fit the genres we are covering. For this first assignment, you're focusing on technical definition and technical description. You can learn about the genre by writing on any topic, as long as you write a technical definition and technical description.

Dennis Jerz, from Seton Hall, offers [this explanation](#): "'Technical' comes from the Greek *techne*, which simply means 'skill.' Every profession has its own specialized forms of writing. Police officers, lawyers and social workers all write specialized reports, and someone has to learn, perform, critique, and teach each one. Every major politician hires staff members to design, administer, and analyze surveys — and to write the secret reports that get leaked to reporters. Somebody has to design tax forms and the accompanying instruction books, assembly instructions for toys, and scripts for product demonstrations or multimedia presentations."

If you want more information, I recommend [the definition from the Society for Technical Communications](#).

28. Are there any examples of this project for the process model?

Figure 14.3 (p. 372) and Figure 14.5 (p. 374) in Markel are examples of process descriptions. They are shorter than the Info Sheet, but they demonstrate the kind of writing that is required.

29. How in-depth do the glossary definitions need to be?

The glossary terms need to provide a complete definition of the terms that are included. The definitions will probably be sentence-length, but can be two or three sentences. Look at the examples included on the Assignment in Scholar.

Audience

30. **I am not exactly sure who our audience is supposed to be. In the assignment it says we can choose our audience, but later on it says that we are supposed to be introducing someone new into the community.**

I can see why that might be confusing. You choose your topic, so in a way you also choose your audience. Generally, the audience is someone new to your topic, and your job is to provide your reader with an overview of the topic. If your topic is how fire extinguishers work, you can think of your audience as someone who doesn't know how fire extinguishers work, but wants to or needs to. You can think more specifically about audience if you want, and that's where you have a little more choice. You might have been an intern at a plant that manufactures fire extinguishers, and your audience is the intern who will have the position next summer.

31. **I am a little concerned about who can be described as a semi-technical audience. My readers probably have some familiarity with technical terms that goes beyond common knowledge.**

If there are technical terms that you expect your readers to know already, you can go ahead and write your document with that idea in mind. Just remember that even the best of us sometimes forgets the exact specifics of all those things we're supposed to know. You may want to include a definition in your glossary even though you expect and hope your target audience will understand.

Documentation (Citing Your Sources)

32. **Is there a specific guideline we have to follow when including the references? Can we list the URL of the references on a separate page?**

Your references should be included at the end of your Info Sheet or the end of your glossary. Take a look at the [What is Biodiesel?](#) Info Sheet (from Purdue Extension) for an example.

33. **Are we supposed to use in text citations or do we just need a bibliography at the end?**

Yes, please cite your sources as you use them.

34. **I'm not sure which format I should use to cite the sources I use in my information sheet.**

You can use whatever citation format is appropriate for your field. If you're in engineering, you probably want IEEE. If you're in the social sciences, you probably use APA. If you're in the sciences, you probably use CSE. Choose what makes sense, and make sure that you are consistent.

35. **Are we also supposed to include citations for the definition sheet if we reference outside sources?**

Yes. Always cite your sources. Anything else would be plagiarism and an Honor Code violation.

36. **Almost all of the information that will be in my paper will be personal knowledge that I have acquired over the years. How would I go about that?**

If the personal knowledge is relatively basic, you can just write about what you know. If you consult some other text, please cite it. Even if you are working from personal knowledge, rather than a references section at the end, you might include a section like "Suggested Reading" or "Further Information" with additional resources.

37. **In an example that you provided, in the references for the Info Sheet, you listed yourself as a reference; was that intended to be part of the references, or was that just some mark of authorship?**

I was just adding my name as the author. My only reference was the Markel book.

Grading

38. How will you grade our work?

I'll add annotations or comments using the tools in Acrobat or Word to your document and return a copy of your file. I'll also give you a copy of the rubric with the sections that relate to your text highlighted.

39. Besides, will there be any revision on the information sheet? Do we get to improve the marks after the first submission?

I don't plan to accept revisions. Since we spend so much time working on the documents in class, the documents should have already been through several drafts before you submit them.