

Documentation Manual



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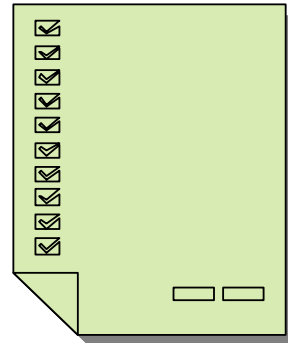
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Documentation Manual

What is documentation?

To make & maintain documents about work undertaken is documentation. To keep record of the work done is documentation. Documents are proof of the work done. Therefore documentation of any type of work is important.

There are several methods of keeping notes or records. Let us look at some instances. Whenever we go to any government office to submit some letter; the concerned clerk puts a number & a date on that letter. The letter is then marked to the respective department or officer. The same details are entered in the diary of that office.



All the sessions of parliament & state legislative assemblies are documented regularly.

A meeting takes place. All the proceedings of the meeting are documented in minutes. Who has called the meeting? What was the agenda? Who were called? Who were present? What were the points raised in the meeting? Who spoke what? What were the discussions & decisions?... etc is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Minutes are a kind of documentation.

We make tours as part of our work. During & after the tour, we write notes as to what was the purpose of the tour, what was the destination, whom we met there, what discussions took place, what was observed & felt etc. This is also a kind of documentation.

The report on our work is also documentation.

All these instances are of written form of documentation. We can make documentation even in audio / visual / digital form now with the help of technology. Photographs, audio & video recordings, website, CDs etc are different forms of documentation.

What is the importance of documentation?

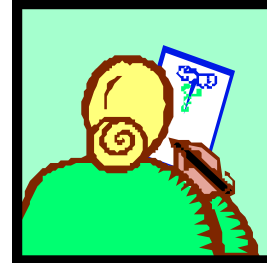
When we document events in the present, we are actually recording history for the future.

Imagine- Had Gandhiji or Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar not noted their experiences & experiments they used to organize & motivate people we would have lost all the valuable treasure of their thoughts.

Therefore, it is our responsibility & duty to document the happenings & processes in social development sector. Please remember, **our work is important. Documentation of work is equally important.**

We work day after day...month after month...year after year. But when the time comes to demonstrate that work we do not possess anything to show; e.g. reports, case studies, data or analysis. We normally describe our work in general terms such as: we brought

about a transformation in villages; women were empowered; we fought for the rights of dalits & adivasis; we worked for social revolution and so on. What we did precisely is not understood with the help of such narrative description of the work. *Transformation, empowerment, fight for rights, revolution* is only jargon that doesn't convey our specific



actions. There is no point in such a game of words. The effect of these words doesn't last long. **If we wish to inform & influence others about our work, good quality documentation is essential.**

We brought change in villages – what does that mean? What was the situation in villages earlier? The number of families, houses in villages, the caste profile, demographic information, the number of the landless, the unemployed, status of implementation of government schemes, school, ration shop etc. The condition after our intervention in villages may be compared to the earlier one and explained through documentation in form of reports, case studies, analyzed data, and photographs. We must be able to elaborate the objectives, methods & strategies of our work. The process could be described in detail. In what way the villagers responded; positive or negative; how the negative attitude was turned to a positive one? What special efforts were made.... all these details carry a lot of importance in documentation.

Documentation means recording the series of proceedings along with the analysis. There is no room for fiction in documentation.

Documentation helps us in many ways –

It helps us in future planning, in assessing the quality of our work & improving the same, in confirming the proper direction of our efforts, in finding out the strengths & weaknesses, in strengthening our skills. Documentation helps us in mobilizing resources for our work. It is an authentic source for those who wish to know about our work.

Report Writing

We work very hard. As part of our work we hold meetings, visit villages, talk to people, organize programs etc. People benefit from our work. When we are told to write about our work, we try to avoid that, simply because we are not used to



documenting the goings-on. It is advisable to learn how to write about work. **Report writing is a skill. We must learn it. We can learn it by practice.**

Report writing helps us in many ways. It helps us to understand our work, objectives, methods, and strategies clearly, to monitor the planned activities, to influence others, to mobilize support.

There is a specific norm of report writing. A report should be authentic, accurate, and articulate. It has to be supplemented with data, statistics, graphs etc. A report should be

readable. It should be written in grammatically correct & effective language. Layout of report should be neat & clear. Report must serve the purpose behind writing it. Target reader or audience of the report must be properly addressed.

If you really wish to learn to write a good report please do the following –

- Be clear about the objectives of the report and its readers.
- Observe the on-goings minutely.
- Learn to read human beings, their body language.
- Make a habit of taking notes while at work, in meetings, on tours.
- Analyze events, processes consistently.
- Don't hesitate while writing.
- Set aside time for report writing.
- In the beginning you might find it difficult to write effectively. Gradually you will learn the skill of report writing.
- Reports should be written by those who actually do the work. You can get help of an expert for editing.
- Do take the help of a dictionary, a thesaurus to find appropriate words. Try to express in a fresh manner instead of the routine one.
- Do read reports written by experts.
- Read newspapers, magazines, and books. Reading enriches language & vocabulary that helps to write in an effective manner.
- Make two or three drafts before finalizing the final draft.
- Go on writing, re-writing.
- Enjoy reading & writing. You will discover new things every time.
- Don't treat report writing as a mundane formality. Feel the creativity in it.



Writing Case Study

The word 'case' means situation / circumstance / instance / condition / position / state / state of affairs etc. A case study is a document written after the in-depth study of the respective 'case'. A case study is a very significant evidence of the success of our work. It can rightly project the power of our work.

Let us learn it through one or two examples. There is an alcoholic villager. With the help of your NGO, he



becomes de-addicted, starts living normal family life. How would we document this transformation? We will write a case study of that villager. The following points should be included in the case study –

The name of the villager, description of his home, family, place of job, neighbors, friends, general environment, his social status, financial condition, relationship with family members & friends, his nature etc. What caused him to become alcoholic, what went wrong, how his addiction brought about adverse effects on his normal life, how he was inspired to quit drinking, description of the moment he decided to stop drinking, what support he got to stay away from his earlier addiction, process of his rehabilitation, improvement in his family life compared to the earlier condition.... etc etc.

Writing a case study is like writing a story; certainly not a fictitious one though; a true story, a ground reality.

Let us have another example. Many CBOs form Self Help Saving Groups of women in villages. A village has three SHGs. One hundred women are members of those. They receive a good amount of loan from the bank to start a business on their own. We would actually be omitting a lot of important facts if we only narrated this much. If we write a ‘story’ of SHGs in that village, more details will have to be added as what made the women come together, get organized; did they get support from the male members in their families, how the village responded to the initiative of women, what discussions took place among the women getting organized, how the leadership emerged, what type of doubts were raised, how they were cleared & removed, what were the points of agreement & disagreement, what message the SHGs carried in the surrounding villages, what positive changes this initiative brought in families of women members & in the village overall.....and so on.

Minute observations, communication skills, power of expression are the qualities required for writing a good case study.

A good case study makes the reader relive the case.

