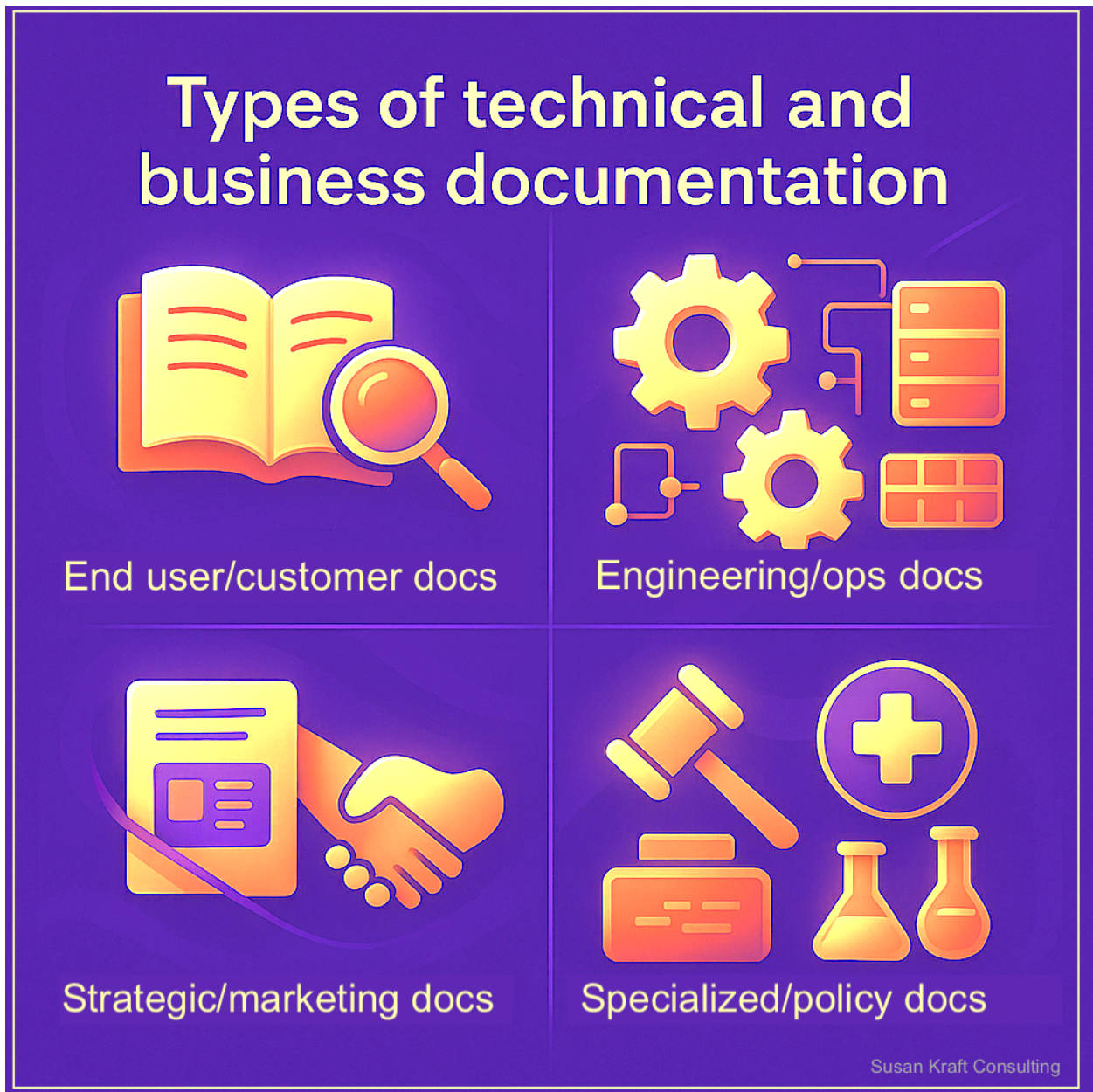


Technical documentation types, long version



By Susan Kraft-Yorke

Types of technical and business documentation: A unified view

Documentation is like a toolbox. Each type has its purpose, and using the wrong one makes work harder. This guide shows all the important documentation types in one table, then explains each category in detail.

Audience / Purpose	Doc Type	What It Does
Users / customers	User manual / guide	Full instructions from setup through every feature
	Quick start guide	Get started fast, do a “hello world” or basic flow
	Release notes	“What’s changed” new features, bug fixes, deprecations
	Troubleshooting guide	Help users solve common problems
	Tutorial	Step-by-step for a specific task or goal
	API documentation	For developers: how to call endpoints, integrate, etc.
	SDK documentation	Guide for using a software development kit
Internal engineering / operations	Knowledge base / FAQs	Searchable articles answering frequent questions
	Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	Exact steps to do internal recurring tasks
	Project plans	Goals, scope, timeline, resources
	System / architecture documentation	How the system is built, high-level design
	Technical specifications	Detailed functional and design requirements
	Code documentation	Inline comments and explanations inside or alongside code

Audience / Purpose	Doc Type	What It Does
	Test plans & reports	What and how the code was tested, and the results
	Onboarding materials	Help new employees or teams get up to speed
Persuasive / strategic / marketing	White papers	Deep dives into industry problem + your solution
	Case studies	Stories of real customers using your product well
	Proposals / grant writing	Persuade funders, clients, or stakeholders to approve something
	Brochures / datasheets	Quick highlights of features, specs, benefits
Specialized / domain-specific	Medical / regulatory documents	Compliance, clinical trials, device instructions
	Engineering / R&D docs	Blueprints, protocols, test data, detailed designs
	Legal / contracts / policy docs	Policies, contracts, regulation compliance

Documentation Types

Consider the audience as your end users or customers regardless of whether they are internal stakeholders of an external client. The following is a list of documentation types.

- User manuals and guides: Full instructions, from installation to advanced use.
- Quick start guides: Get started fast with a simple path or “hello world.”
- Release notes: Show what’s new, fixed, or changed in each version.
- Troubleshooting guides: Fix common problems, error cases, and glitches.
- Tutorials: Step-by-step walkthroughs for specific tasks.
- API documentation: For developers, explains endpoints, parameters, sample calls.
- SDK documentation: Instructions for using software toolkits.
- Knowledge base or FAQ: Short, topic-based answers to common questions.

Audience: Internal, Process, or Engineering Teams

- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Repeatable steps for recurring processes.
- Project plans: Define scope, timeline, resources, and responsibilities.
- System or architecture documentation: Design overview of modules, services, and data flows.
- Technical specifications: Blueprints with requirements and design details.
- Code documentation: Comments and design notes embedded with code.
- Test plans and reports: Show what was tested, how, and the results.
- Onboarding materials: Resources that bring new team members up to speed.

Audience: Sales, Marketing, or Strategy

- White papers: Deep dives into problems and solutions, persuasive and research-based.
- Case studies: Real examples of products in use and their business results.
- Proposals or grants: Tailored documents to win funding or clients.
- Brochures or datasheets: Polished summaries of features and benefits.

Audience: Specialized, Regulated, or Niche

- Medical or regulatory documentation: Clinical, safety, or compliance materials.
- Engineering and R&D documentation: Protocols, blueprints, test logs.
- Legal, contracts, and governance: Policies, agreements, compliance rules.

Cross-Cutting Views

- Purpose-based (Divio model):
 - Tutorials — learning by doing.
 - How-to guides — accomplishing a specific goal.
 - Reference — look-up material like API references.
 - Explanations — background and conceptual understanding.
- Delivery formats:
 - Online or web portals.
 - Embedded in software (tooltips, in-app help).

- Offline formats like PDFs or eBooks.
- Multimedia (videos, interactive demos, simulations).
- Content structure styles:
 - Monolithic: long, traditional documents.
 - Topic-based: modular, task-oriented topics.
 - Component-based: reusable pieces assembled as needed.

Detailed Explanations by Category

End User and Customer Documentation

These documents help people succeed with your product. Good user-facing docs reduce support costs and increase satisfaction.

- User manuals explain everything in detail.
- Quick start guides focus on early success with minimal steps.
- Release notes summarize what changed.
- Troubleshooting guides solve common problems.
- Tutorials teach through specific workflows.
- API and SDK documentation serve developers with integration details.
- Knowledge bases and FAQs provide fast, searchable answers.

Internal, Process, and Engineering Documentation

These documents align your team, preserve institutional knowledge, and reduce duplication of effort.

- SOPs ensure repeatable, consistent processes.
- Project plans clarify goals and responsibilities.
- Architecture docs give a blueprint of systems.
- Technical specifications provide detailed requirements.
- Code documentation explains the “why” behind code decisions.
- Test plans and reports track quality and outcomes.
- Onboarding materials speed up integration of new employees.



Sales, Marketing, and Strategy Documentation

These documents are persuasive rather than instructional. They help win clients, investors, or market share.

- White papers establish authority and explain solutions.
- Case studies show proof in real-world examples.
- Proposals and grants aim to secure buy-in or funding.
- Brochures and datasheets highlight features at a glance.

Specialized and Regulated Documentation

Some industries require documentation that meets strict standards.

- Medical and regulatory documents are legally binding and safety-critical.
- R&D and engineering documents capture experiments, blueprints, and protocols.
- Legal, contract, and policy documents establish rules and compliance.

Cross-Cutting Documentation Dimensions

Not all docs fit neatly by audience. Some cut across categories.

- Purpose-based docs (tutorials, how-to, reference, explanation) help decide writing style.
- Delivery formats (online, embedded, offline, multimedia) shape how users consume information.
- Content structures (monolithic, topic-based, component reuse) influence scalability and maintenance.



How to Choose What to Build First

1. Identify your audience. Are they end users, developers, internal engineers, or buyers?
2. Match the right document type to their needs.
3. Choose a delivery format that meets them where they are.
4. Standardize your structure for scalability and reuse.
5. Expand to sales and specialized documents once core needs are met.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Producing too many doc types before you need them.
- Mixing audiences in one document.
- Neglecting updates and letting docs go stale.
- Skipping structure, which makes reuse and search harder.
- Writing in one giant manual instead of modular pieces.

Title font case types

Sentence case vs. initial caps (title case)

Feature	Sentence Case	Initial Caps (Title Case)
Capitalization	Capitalize only the first word of the title, plus any proper nouns (brand names, product names, etc.).	Capitalize the first letter of each major word.
Readability	Easier to read because the capitalization pattern is consistent with body text. This reduces visual noise and cognitive load for the reader.	Can be harder to read when used in headings and captions, as it is a less common capitalization pattern in continuous prose.

Localization	More easily translatable into other languages without complex capitalization rules.	Requires manual changes to follow different capitalization rules when translating.
Tone	Often perceived as more modern, approachable, and conversational.	Can appear more formal, traditional, or academic.
Consistency	The rules for when to capitalize are straightforward, which makes consistency easier to maintain across a large set of documentation.	Writers must remember which words to capitalize (e.g., distinguishing between major and minor words), which can lead to inconsistencies.

Summary

Documentation is more than manuals. It includes guides, specs, proposals, test plans, and more. Each type has a clear purpose and audience. Choosing the right combination saves time, improves user experience, and strengthens both internal operations and market reputation.

