

A special report for B2B
writers and marketers



10 Quick & Easy Tips To Make Your Next White Paper a **SMASH** Hit!

thatwhitepaperguy

Contents

Welcome	2
Tip 1: Tell, don't sell	3
Tip 2: Know your audience	4
Tip 3: Pick a topic your audience cares about	5
Tip 4: Say something new	6
Tip 5: Find proof for your claims	7
Tip 6: Make sure your title pops!	8
Tip 7: Write text that's easy to read	9
Tip 8: Keep to the right length	10
Tip 9: Design an appealing look	11
Tip 10: Promote like a madman	11
Bonus tip: Using AI for white papers	13
About the author	14

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Welcome

If you're reading this, you're likely a B2B writer or marketing manager who wants some sure-fire tips to make your next white paper better.

Here is my promise: If you follow these tips, I guarantee your next white paper will be more effective.

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These tips are drawn from my hands-on experience with more than 320 white papers over the past 25 years.

And these are the absolute top best practices that I've learned always pay off.

If you want to dive deeper, each tip includes two or three further resources.

And if you need more help with the basics, you can find more guidance on my website www.ThatWhitePaperGuy.com

I wish you great success with your next white paper. Now, on to the tips!



Gordon Graham
That White Paper Guy

Tip 1: Tell, don't sell

The worst thing you can do to a white paper is make it a sales pitch. That's not what readers want.

Survey after survey confirms this. B2B buyers look to white papers for facts and logic.

A businessperson downloads a white paper when they need to understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision.



If they wanted to talk to a salesperson, they would just call 1-800-BUY-NOW.

But they're not ready to do that yet.

Instead, they want to gather their own research. They often want to draw up a shortlist of three or four possible vendors.

Your prospects are seeking useful, factual information presented in a thoughtful way.

A white paper gives you an ideal chance to position your company—or your client—as a helpful source.

Don't blow it by giving them a sales pitch. That can easily backfire. Instead of engaging prospects, you will turn them off. Instead of building sales, you will lose them.

Further resources

- [Quick tip: Teach, don't preach](#)
- [White paper writer tip #1: Stop selling](#)

Tip 2: Know your audience

Everything starts with your audience. Before you write a single word, figure out who you're trying to reach.

You might think this chore will take days, and you just don't have time. Surprise! You can likely do it in 15 minutes and sum up your findings in a sentence.

To define your audience, ask three basic questions

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1. What do you know about them?

Start with *demographics*, anything you can put a name or number to, like their age, sex, education, or job title. And it's okay to give a range like, "30- to 50-year-old men" along with several likely job titles.

2. Where do they work?

What industry? What region? How big is their company? Their team? It's okay to say something like, "medium-size clothing firms that sell online."

3. What keeps them up at night?

These are *psychographics*: work-related concerns, pressures, or worries. You need to understand the pain your audience is going through so you can show them how to reduce it.

If you don't know the answers to these three questions, don't worry. Ask your colleagues who talk with customers every day, like your support people or sales team. They will most likely be happy to fill you in.

Then sum up your findings in one sentence, something like this:
"30- to 50-year-old marketing managers in medium-sized clothing firms who worry about Amazon eating into their online sales."

This simple sentence pinpoints who you're trying to reach. And that will help you keep your white paper on target from start to finish.

Further resources

- [Quick tip: Understand the audience for your white paper](#)
- [How to layer information for different audiences](#)

Tip 3: Pick a topic your audience cares about

Here's the deal: You give some helpful info to your audience. They give you a little time and attention.



Too many white papers are told from the vendor's point of view, as though your reader's time doesn't count.

Your paper must focus on what your audience cares about most. That's usually the problem they need to solve. The issue they need to understand. The decision they need to make.

If your white paper helps people do that, they will keep reading. They may even pass it along to their colleagues. If not, they will click away to something else. Guaranteed.

How do you find a good topic?

If you're not sure what your audience cares about, check:

- The questions they ask your support team
- The objections they raise with your sales people
- The issues they point to in surveys
- The topics covered by their trade association
- The comments they make on LinkedIn

Here's another way to know your audience. Gather four to six typical customers for a Zoom. Ask them what's on their minds and where they could use some help. Give them a gift card for their time.

Then focus like a laser on the topics they mention.

Further resources

- [Quick tip: Don't cross the red line](#)
- [Quick tip: Pick your idea the way Goldilocks does](#)

Tip 4: Say something new

Don't just rehash the same old things other people have already said.

Any AI can spit out a remix of the material it was trained on. Any lazy writer can rehash content they find on the web. Where's the value in that? How does that help your audience?

Don't just march down the same beaten path. As a human writer, dig for insights buried in the brains of your company's experts. Top get noticed, break a fresh trail and say something different.



True story: A topic that was already old news

One time a consultant from Montreal asked me to write him a white paper on how to pick the right ERP system. I thought that idea sounded a little stale.

After all, ERP software like **SAP** has been around for more than 50 years!

When I Googled “how to pick an ERP system,” I got 14.7 million hits. The first screen of the search results was packed with lists: 2 checklists, 3 key steps, 4 how-to's, 5 and 6 steps, 10 criteria, 11 tips, and 12 steps. It sounded like the 12 Days of Christmas!

And those articles were from reputable sources like **CIO magazine**, **Salesforce.com**, and others. That topic had clearly been done to death.

When I showed the consultant those search results, he gave up on that topic. And when I challenged him to come with something fresh, I never heard from him again.

Further resources

- [What's a good topic for a white paper?](#)
- [Finding a white paper topic](#)

Tip 5: Find proof for your claims

To research a white paper, think like a lawyer. Find a mountain of evidence to build an open-and-shut case.

Inside any company, most executives walk around telling everyone that their product is the best. But that's not an argument; that's groupthink.



To convince the outside world, a white paper needs solid proof to back up every claim. And you need to dig deep to find it.

A few minutes with **Google** or **ChatGPT** won't do. Remember, many white papers cover new breakthroughs or innovations. Google and ChatGPT may know nothing at all about your topic.

The only people who may know about your topic are your own subject matter experts (SMEs). Expect to do some interviews with real people.

During those interviews, don't be timid! Ask them to explain anything you don't get. Press them for examples of how the company's approach is better than anything else.

For more proof, check for sources at related trade associations and industry journals. Don't overlook analysts, commentators, journalists, and professors who follow your industry.

Don't stop researching until you can build a solid case for every point you want to make.

Further resources

- [Quick tip: Don't start your research with Google](#)
- [Quick tip: Build your own list of sources](#)
- [4 ways to evaluate white paper sources](#)

Tip 6: Make sure your title **pops!**

The most important line in any white paper is the title.

In just a few words, your title must say exactly what the white paper is about and who it's for.

Think of the title as an ad for your paper.

A good title helps **Google** index your paper and show it in the search results. This gets your content in front of the people you really want to see it.

Of course, your title must be truthful. You don't want to promise one thing and give your readers something else. That's called bait-and-switch, and it turns B2B prospects off. Instantly.

Here are some proven formats you can use to frame your title:

- How to solve a pressing problem
- An intriguing question
- One of the 5 W's: Who, What, Why, Where, When
- A negative slant: Problems, issues, or hidden gotcha's
- A positive slant: Benefits, tips, or best practices

Don't expect to come up with the perfect title in one flash of inspiration. You can keep tweaking the title until the day you publish your paper.



Further resources

- [Quick tip: Cook up your titles like lasagna](#)
- [Quick tip: 3 steps to a stronger title \[with example\]](#)

Tip 7: Write text that's easy to read

The readability of English writing has been studied for more than 75 years. It's not an art; it's a science.

We have proven formulas to measure how much effort it takes to read a text. Two metrics are built into Microsoft Word and available online:

Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease

The effort it takes to read a text. The higher your score, the better. For a white paper, I aim for 50 or higher.



Grade Level

How many years of schooling it takes to read a text. The lower your score, the better. For a white paper, I aim for Grade 10 or lower.

Sounds good. But what if you test your white paper draft and it scores really poorly, like 36 on Reading Ease and Grade 16?

Three sure-fire ways to improve readability

1. Use shorter words.
2. Use shorter sentences.
3. Use shorter paragraphs.

Wherever you can, swap in shorter and simpler words. Sure, we often need some long words in white papers about technical subjects. So make sure to use some short, simple words to balance those out.

Break long sentences into two, or even three. Press Return to break up long paragraphs. None of that costs anything or takes any advanced skills.

If you do those three things, your readability scores will improve, and your text will be noticeably easier to read.

Further resources

- [3 keys to readable white papers](#)
- [You asked: How do I write in a crisp, clear, conversational style?](#)

Tip 8: Keep to the right length

How long should a white paper be?



The right answer is not too long, not too short.

I've seen everything from one-page flyers to 99-page books labeled "white papers." But the best length is whatever works for your audience.

The best length is whatever works for your audience

Remember, business people are busy. They're not reading white papers for fun; they're reading it for work.

They only pay attention for as long as your paper helps them solve their problem.

The second they get bored, they'll click away to something else. Don't you?

White papers are getting shorter

The sweet spot for a white paper today is 10 to 12 pages:

- 3 pages of front matter (cover, Contents, and Executive Summary)
- 5 to 7 pages of main body
- 2 pages of back matter (Conclusions, call to action, About the Company, and Sources)

Ten pages won't scare a B2B reader looking at a white paper—especially if you follow the other tips in this report.

Make sure your white paper has a useful topic, a title that pops, and easy-to-read text. If your white paper is inviting and engaging, no one will complain about the length.

Further resources

- [Quick tip: Fix a draft white paper that's too short](#)
- [Quick tip: Fix a draft white paper that's too long](#)

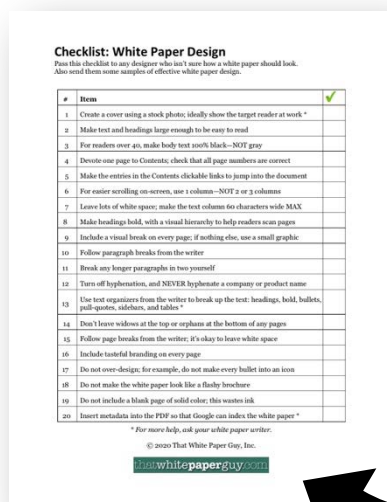
Tip 9: Design an appealing look

Nine out of 10 people read white papers on the screen. Your document must be easy to scan and easy to read.

That takes teamwork between the writer and the designer. Without that, your white paper could turn out to be, well, cringe.

If you're the writer, use lots of “text organizers” like bullets, boldface, headings, pull-quotes, sidebars, and tables. Type them right into your file so your designer can see how you want the text to look.

You can also create rough charts or graphs from Excel and suggest likely stock photos to help break up the text.



If you're the designer, make up a striking visual cover that still looks good as a thumbnail on the landing page.

In the main body, leave lots of white space around the text for easy scanning.

Include some tasteful branding, but not an overwhelming amount.

And avoid huge swatches of color that distract from the message.

For more tips on white paper design, click this graphic to get a free checklist.

Your company or client may have a standard page template the designer is always supposed to use. If that template makes your white paper easy to scan and easy to read, that's fine. If not, push hard to change it.

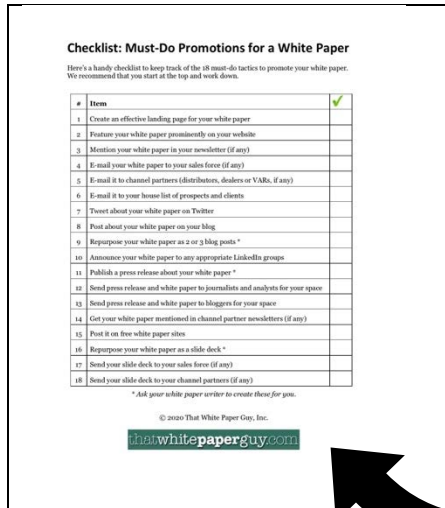
Further resources

- [Quick tip: Don't make your readers squint](#)
- [Designers, here's how NOT to format a white paper](#)

Tip 10: Promote like a madman

Writing and designing a great white paper is just the start. Next, tell the whole world about it.

You want to make so much noise that anyone who should know about your white paper hears about it. More than once.



Here are some basics your marketing team must do to get the word out:

- Create a landing page
- Email your house list
- Mention it in your company blog or newsletter (if any)
- Tell your distributors, VARs, and salesforce (if any)
- Post about it on **LinkedIn**

For a list of more must-do promotions, click the graphic for a free checklist.

A note on social media

Despite all the noise you may hear about **Facebook**, **TikTok**, **X**, and **YouTube**, these are not the best channels to promote a B2B white paper. Why not?

Because you want to go where your prospects go and use the social media they use for work, not for fun. Recent surveys confirm that most B2B prospects use LinkedIn for business and professional networking.

So go where they go: LinkedIn.

Further resources

- [How to write a killer landing page](#)
- [Quick tip: When a promotion is working, do more of it](#)

Bonus tip on AI for white papers

You can use AI to save time on your next white paper—maybe 50% of your time!



[In my early discussions with ChatGPT](#), the AI told me it was familiar with my work and had been trained on “tens of thousands” of white papers.

With AI,
a writer can
now create
a white paper
in half
the time

Early in 2023, [I used ChatGPT 3.5 to write a white paper from scratch](#). I figure the AI saved me about one-third the time to complete that project—even though I was just learning to prompt.

With today’s more advanced models and better prompting, **I think a writer can now create a good white paper in half the time...** especially if you know what makes a great white paper in the first place.

The more you know, the better you can direct AI

Look, if you’ve never painted a house, you can’t give a lot of advice to the college kids you hire. But if you’ve been a professional painter for 10 years, you can tell them exactly how you expect the job to look.

The same applies to AI. If you’ve never written a white paper, you can’t give it a lot of guidance. But if you’ve learned the white paper format and written a few, you can tell AI exactly how you expect the job to turn out.

So keep learning about white papers.

And stay tuned to my newsletter to get ongoing tips on using AI to help with your white papers.

Further sources

- [How AI will affect writers](#)
- [Quick tip: 6 easy hacks for ChatGPT \[with sample prompts\]](#)
- [What ChatGPT says about white papers](#)

About the author



Gordon Graham—also known as **That White Paper Guy**—is an award-winning writer who has worked on more than 320 white papers for clients from Silicon Valley to Switzerland.

Gordon has written white papers on everything from choosing enterprise software to designing virtual worlds for kids... for everyone from tiny startups to household names like **3M**, **Epson**, **Google**, and **Verizon**.

He wrote the definitive book “[White Papers for Dummies](#)” that earned 60+ 5-star reviews on **Amazon**.

That title has been called “a must-read... an invaluable resource... a real treasure... priceless... terrific... excellent in every way.”

Click the cover to see more on that book. →

Earlier, Gordon won 16 awards from the **Society for Technical Communication** for various projects. And in 2019, Gordon was named **AWAI Copywriter of the Year**.

Click to follow Gordon on **LinkedIn**:
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