Providing information to RSSB

Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to set out what RSSB expects suppliers to deliver in terms of information, in the form of reports or other documents. We value the expertise and knowledge that our suppliers provide, and want to make the best use of the material provided for publication to the RSSB R&D website, and potentially for reproduction in print.

The credibility of RSSB rests on the quality of the products that it delivers to the rail industry. We need to work together to make sure what we deliver is to a sufficiently high standard: it is something that both RSSB and the suppliers we work with will be judged on. The following sets out, in general terms, our expectations. We are committed to working in partnership with suppliers to meet these and so will provide as much help and guidance as we can.

Specification

Contents

Suppliers should deliver:

- A clean copy of the final documents in MS Word, using templates provided by RSSB
- No protected documents
- Names but no signatures
- No document history
- No distribution records
- No internal supplier reference, one supplier logo is okay on the front cover

Final reports should NOT include:

- Individual supplier confidentiality statements (unless expressly agreed otherwise)
- Document history or internal supplier document reference
- Distribution records
- Signatures (due to the increase of Internet related fraud)
- Any tone or language that may be offensive to people
Copyright statement

RSSB will include its own copyright statement, similar to that shown below, as part of the publication process

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This publication may be reproduced free of charge for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced and referenced accurately and not being used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as the copyright of Rail Safety and Standards Board and the title of the publication specified accordingly. For any other use of the material please apply to RSSB’s Head of Research and Development for permission. Any additional queries can be directed to enquirydesk@rssb.co.uk.

Templates and formats

All documents should be provided in an electronic format and written on templates provided by RSSB. Documents should not be security protected in any way, as this inhibits editing, commenting, and the production of the final outputs.

The pre-defined paragraph formats and styles in the RSSB templates should be used effectively and exclusively. The templates are designed to simplify the RSSB publication process, which includes importing the content of Word documents onto other publishing applications. Incorrect use of our templates significantly increases the work needed by us, and work will be returned to you for correction if there is significant deviation from the pre-determined paragraph formats.

If you need support with this, please contact our senior technical communicator before you start writing. Getting it right first time is much more effective than having to rework a whole project after the fact. Using paragraph styles effectively will help to make the writing and editing process much easier for all concerned.

Images and illustrations

Images (photographs, illustrations, charts, spreadsheets, etc.) used in documents should also be provided as separate files. 

**Please do not use the Drawing tool in MS Word to produce illustrations**, MS Visio, or Adobe Illustrator are the preferred applications. Save your drawings using a format that is compatible with Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator. Avoid the GIF format.

Images used in the production of reports should be in jpeg (for photographs) or eps (for charts and line drawings) formats. When
pasted into Word these may automatically be reproduced with a
resolution of 72 dpi and transformed into a .gif file with an
accompanying .xmp file; this is not suitable for print reproduction.
So, high quality image files should also be provided in a format
that is compatible with Adobe Photoshop CS5, and of a resolution
suitable for printing (2-300 dpi). RAW format photograph files are
also acceptable.

Large documents, and associated files, may be provided on CD
or DVD media rather than being sent by email. The RSSB mail
server will quarantine, or reject, any emails containing files over
10MB in size or any images.

Where you are writing text for multiple audiences, as discussed in
the Writing for Multiple Audiences section, please make
consistent use of a separate paragraph format with a name such
as ExpertAudienceExtra, or BackgroundInformation the
appearance of these paragraphs is not important, consistent use
of the chosen paragraph format is. The RSSB publishing process
will transfer the content you have written into a different
publishing application and only if the information type is
identifiable will it be reproduced correctly for the audiences.

### Layout of a deliverable report

This section does not apply specifically to project management
reports, the layout of which should be agreed with the research
manager.

Research reports prepared for RSSB should aim to provide
information in a format and an order that makes it easy to find and
use. Reports should be developed in identifiable sections so that
the most important and interesting headline information can be
found first. More complex information should be delivered in the
second part of a report; and supporting data and materials should
be provided as separate appendices to the report.

1. Executive summary
2. Section one
   a. Purpose or problem
   b. Summary of findings
   c. Summary of recommendations
3 Section two
   a Background
   b Literature search results
   c Approach, methodologies, methods, materials
   d Options or solutions apparent
   e Collected data
   f Discussion of interesting aspects
   g Interpretation of findings
   h Conclusions reached
   i Recommendations arrived at

4 Any appendices

Navigation
Reports prepared for RSSB should be easily navigated. An automatically generated table of contents will be created as part of the publication process. This will be placed between the executive summary and the first section of the report during the publication process.

Heading levels should be used to easily identify where information sits with the overall hierarchy of the document. This must be logical, and must not confuse the reader. Numbering of sections appears very formal and daunting to some, and should only be used where it provides a significant navigational benefit to the primary audience.

Tables, diagrams, and illustrations should be clearly labelled and defined so that an automatic table of figures can be created.

Sub-headings
Research shows that your text will be more easily remembered, and is more easily navigable, if you provide a meaningful sub-heading every 200-300 words. That sub-heading should tell the reader what to expect in the text that follows it.

Cross-references
Positional references should never be used within your text. For example, you should not refer to 'Table 1, below', as it is possible that, in the final document it may be placed differently in relation to the text.
Referencing supporting evidence

Where conclusions and recommendations are listed, it is useful for readers to be able to refer to that part of the report where the supporting evidence is provided, discussed, or interpreted. Please provide cross-references to the original information, whether it be in that document or a supporting appendix.

Not always a report

Not all deliverables from RSSB projects will be 'reports'. In these cases the deliverable should be designed to provide the information needed by the identified audience(s) in the most effective way possible, to help them achieve what they need to do.

If you have any doubt as to what that format might be, please contact the RSSB senior technical communicator.

Writing for a specific audience

The defined deliverables for an RSSB project should have identified target audiences. These are the groups of people whom you expect to read your report and to use or act upon the information contained in it. They may, or may not, include the project's RSSB client/stakeholder group.

Your report should be written at a level where it is easily understood by the primary target audience without reference to glossaries or other explanatory texts. Information should be provided at the appropriate level and in the appropriate places to support secondary audiences in their understanding of the material.

Generally, reports are made available on the RSSB website and so should be written in a style that makes them accessible to a global audience, which may include readers with English as a second language.

Defining information needs

When you start to plan a document for publication by RSSB you will need to determine the information needs of the audience(s) you are writing for. This should manifest itself as a list of audience groups, an indication of their current knowledge and expertise in the subject area, an idea of what they will do with the information you provide, and a list of questions to which they will need answers in order to fulfil their duties or responsibilities, or to make decisions.
In practical terms this should have been done for the work package specification document. If it has not, you should contact the RSSB research manger responsible for the project while developing your response to the tender document.

It is our aim to provide our target audiences with the most effective documents possible. That means giving them only the information they need, and no more. If your research brings to light other important information that should be recorded, that should be produced for RSSB as a separate document.

**Information typing**

It should be a feature of all RSSB deliverables that the information they contain is easily found and retrieved. To facilitate this, you should avoid mixing information types. This means that, for example, information about research results should not be mixed in with (hidden among) details of the methods used.

You should be very careful to distinguish between results, findings, and conclusions. Each is different and should be reported in different sections of the deliverable.

If your RSSB research manager has provided a definitive list of questions that audiences need to have answered, just answering these questions should take you some way towards best practice in information typing. When answering a question you should provide only the information needed by the target audience, which should include some context for the response. How much background or contextual information is needed will depend on the assumed level of existing knowledge for that audience.

When you feel that the amount of context or background needed is actually answering a question other than the one you set out to answer, it should probably be written as a separate answer to a new question. Any list of questions developed by the RSSB research manager will not be exhaustive, because their knowledge of the subject area will not be as great as yours. When you identify new or unforeseen information as important, simply phrase a new question that it would answer and use this as a new sub-heading. Always remember to provide enough context for the target audience to be able to understand what you have written.
When a document has been specified that has two or more target audiences, each with different information needs this requires a slightly more sophisticated approach. The ‘primary’ information which forms the bulk of the main flow of the text should answer most of the questions or information needs that are common to a specified level of understanding. That level need not be the lowest common denominator. Time spent planning what information is and isn’t needed will be time well spent, and should reduce the amount you actually need to write.

The base level of knowledge that you have assumed for your main text flow will determine what additional information you also need to provide. The additional information may need to provide more technical detail that subject matter experts would want, or it may be background information that those with less understanding of the subject will need to make sense of the main body of the text.

Should you find yourself writing for three levels of audience, you may need to provide both types of additional information. This may make your document excessively complex, in which case you may need to discuss providing more than one final deliverable.

If you have any feedback about this document, do not understand what it proposes, or would like to discuss suitable ways of developing or presenting the information from your research please contact the senior technical communicator, Ant Davey.

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