White Paper

A white paper is a report that analyzes a situation or a problem for company decision-makers or clients. Precise definitions vary, but a white paper generally treats its subject in depth (perhaps 8 to 12 pages in length) and in an analytical way.

1. **Types of White Paper:**
   A. Technical White Paper**:** This type of white paper is created to provide technical data to a technical audience.
   B. Marketing White Paper: This type of white paper provides information about a product in order to educate the audience and to convince the audience that the product or service is right for his or her needs.

Although the ultimate purpose may be to persuade a client or a manager to adopt a position or to buy a product, a white paper leads its audience to the desired conclusion by means of a logical argument backed by factual evidence. Overt marketing or sales language, such as the type of language that might be found in a brochure, would violate the more sober tone of a white paper. A white paper makes its case dispassionately, with facts, not with emotional appeals.

White papers often address technical topics of interest to a business. For instance, a white paper might assess ways that intermodal freight service could reduce delivery costs for a client, or how radio-frequency-identification technology (RFID) could control inventory in a particular industry.

2. **The Six Basic Elements of a White Paper:**
   A. Identification of a need or problem
   B. Evidence that a need or problem exists
   C. Direct consequences of the problem or need
   D. Indirect consequences of the problem or need
   E. Solution to the problem
   F. Expanded solution to the problem or need—your specific provisions that will not only eliminate the direct problem but will also eliminate the indirect consequences

A white paper generally begins with an introduction followed by a survey of the problem or opportunity. Only after surveying the situation in some depth—with statistics, examples, and quotations from experts—does a typical white paper present its recommendation.

3. **Typical Components of a White Paper:**
   A. A table of contents (TOC) or an index is always helpful, so that the reader will not need to look for information. TOC are always created last.
   B. An introduction to present a brief interview for busy readers—an explicit explanation of the problem or need.
   C. A body section that surveys the problem or opportunity using statistical and case-study evidence, expert testimony, and fact-based reasoning.
      I. This is your proof that the problem exists. You will rely upon logic to provide the research that provides your proof.

      II. You will also discuss the indirect consequences of the problem. Again, you will point the problem out and provide proof through logical presentation and ethical research.

     III. After convincing your reader that there exists a direct and indirect problem or need, you will provide the solution.

     IV. Now you will narrow the solution down to your own company's product. You will provide specific information that sets your product apart. Also, here you would include graphics and any evaluative information that might rely upon specific data or popular opinion.

D. A conclusion that may do the following: 1) lead into the recommendations, 2) repeat some of the key points, and 3) remind the audience about the problem—both direct and indirect—and the solution.

E. A recommendation presented in a low-key way, not a sales pitch. It is important to maintain a formal style and a professional tone. Once you have provided your reader with all of the information for him or her to make an informed decision, you have met your goal.

F. Visual elements—such as graphics, section headings, bulleted items, charts, and pull quotes—are important elements that assist you in organizing your information for audience readability.