SHOWHOW · SOP

Standard Operating Procedure Template

Use this template when one task keeps getting done three different ways. It suits any small business with a team: a café closing out the register, a cleaner turning over a rental, a salon opening the front desk. Fill it in for one task at a time, from the moment someone starts to the moment they can walk away. A good SOP is short enough to read on a phone and clear enough that a new hire can follow it on day one without asking you.

What you'll need

- The task you want to write down
- 15 minutes with the person who does it best
- A phone to take photos

Steps

01 **Name the task in plain words, starting with a verb.**

"Close the espresso machine" works better than "Espresso machine closing procedure". Staff search for what they need to do.

02 **Write down who does it and when.**

For example: "Closing barista, after the last customer, before mopping." This stops two people doing it, or nobody.

03 **List what they need before they start.**

Tools, products, keys, codes. If they have to walk to the back halfway through, the list is missing something.

04 **Watch the best person on your team do the task once without interrupting.**

Take a photo at each point where something changes: a switch, a setting, a finished result.

05 **Write one action per step, in the order it happens.**

Start each step with a verb: wipe, check, count, lock. If a step has the word "and" in it twice, split it.

06 **Add numbers wherever someone could guess.**

How long, how many times, which setting, how full. "Rinse for 10 seconds" beats "rinse well".

07 **Mark the steps where a mistake costs money or hurts someone.**

Add a short "watch out" note to those steps only. If every step has a warning, nobody reads them.

> **Watch out:** Keep warnings to the steps that matter, or staff learn to skip them all.

08 **Attach a photo to every step where seeing beats reading.**

A photo of the right setting on a dial or the finished shelf saves a paragraph of text.

09 **Describe what "done" looks like.**

The last step should let someone check their own work: "Counter is empty, dry and nothing is plugged in except the fridge."

10 **Hand it to someone who has never done the task and watch them follow it.**

Every time they stop or ask a question, fix that step. This test matters more than anything else on this list.

11 **Put the SOP where the work happens.**

A QR code at the station or a link in your team chat. A binder in the office doesn't count.

12 **Set a date to review it and write it at the top.**

Every 6 months, or whenever equipment, products or the menu change.

How to adapt it

- Start with the task that causes the most mistakes or questions, not the easiest one.
- Write for someone on their first day. If a word needs explaining, use a simpler one.
- Keep each SOP to one task. "Opening" and "closing" are two SOPs.
- Ask the person who does the task best to check your draft before you share it.