# **University of Exeter executive level papers – some key tips**

## Understand the process and people involved

1. Engage those servicing the Committee for advice early on, preferably before you begin your paper proper, so you know: what you should be doing; when your paper might be read; who is going to read it; paper formats and so on.
2. You will most probably have to clear your paper first with more senior staff in your area of work. Use this as an opportunity to get advice and help from them. If you aren’t sure, ask them!
3. Similarly, most Senior Committees will require you to have a Sponsor for your paper. Establish who this is and what they think about your paper once you have your initial ideas clear in your mind or drafted out. They might well be someone in your own area of work, in which case engage them right at the start.
4. Think about your audience and who might need to know what you are proposing BEFORE the meeting so there are no surprises.
5. Consider who will read your paper and might be a champion (how might they help you?) and who might be a detractor (how can you address what might be their concerns?).

## Write your paper

1. Senior Committees will usually have a cover sheet that needs completing for your paper to be accepted for submission. This cover sheet will be a good place to start to see the topics your paper should cover and for you to decide what your paper is trying to achieve, typically, is it:
   1. **For information** – not for discussion
   2. **For discussion** – issue for discussion not for decision
   3. **For discussion and assurance** – issue for discussion and assurance, but no decision
   4. **For endorsement** – the committee is asked to recommend a proposal to a more senior committee for further endorsement or final decision/approval
   5. **For approval** – recommendations for decision/approval

Note each Committee may have a slightly different description, given the level of Committee and context.

1. Your paper itself needs to be as short as possible while conveying the message/ information/ proposal that you wish to present. Some tips on creating effective business documents can be found in these two videos:
   1. [Top tips for better business writing](https://app.goodpractice.net/#/e-develop/s/q7fbnj29lc)
   2. [How to improve your business writing skills](https://app.goodpractice.net/#/e-develop/s/2sxn7itmyu)
2. You can still have ANNEXES to your paper that gives more detail and context.

## Focus on the detail

1. Format your paper in the same way as other papers that go to this Committee – check with the administrator responsible for servicing the Committee what this format looks like. Pay attention to:
   1. The title of your paper
   2. Size of margins
   3. The heading and sub-heading hierarchy (size and typeface used, including the colour of the text)
   4. Spacing between text and paragraphs and headings
   5. Page numbering (style and position)
   6. Use of footnotes/endnotes
   7. Styles (eg for referencing, proper names and so forth)
   8. Abbreviations (always give the full title first before using shortened versions)
2. Try and get the grammar and spelling as accurate as possible, especially peoples’ names and their titles and job titles. Spelling mistakes will seriously detract from your main message.
3. Get a colleague you trust to read and re-read your drafts as often as possible to sense-check and spell-check!