

# Writing and Organizing the Promotion & Tenure Application

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The Promotion & Tenure application process can feel a bit daunting. Our graduate programs prepared us to teach and write within our disciplines, but most of us haven't been trained to write materials like these. Below, I've outlined a few guiding principles based on advice I received and my own academic training in technical communication. These principles helped me prepare my own portfolio, and I hope they will help you prepare yours.

## **Identify the criteria you have met, and organize each narrative around those criteria.**

This was one of the most helpful pieces of advice I received when I started working on my portfolio. I went through the P&T criteria in the contract and copied/pasted the criteria I met into a document. This outline became the structure for my application.

## **Use topic sentences and supporting details to construct effective paragraphs.**

Remember that your promotion and tenure application is an argument. Arguments are made of claims and evidence. Start each body paragraph in your narrative with a topic sentence that makes a claim; this claim should center on how you have met one criterion for promotion and tenure. Then, in the rest of the paragraph, provide supporting evidence that proves the claim you are making. Concrete examples are better than abstract descriptions of your accomplishments.

## **Use plain language principles in your writing.**

A promotion and tenure application is a large and complex document. It is challenging to compose, but it is also challenging to read. Take pity on your readers and make your document easy to read and navigate. You might be surprised to learn that the U.S. government has established a set a guidelines for writing in plain language (language that is accessible to a wide range of readers), and I have found these guidelines quite useful in my own writing. Visit [plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/](https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/) and use the navigation menu on the left-hand side to view their advice—it is a great resource.

## **Use Styles in Word to create headings, subheadings, and sections.**

If you aren't already familiar with the Styles feature in Microsoft Word, now is the time to learn! Using Styles will allow you to easily create a table of contents, and it will also automatically generate a navigation outline for the PDF document you will eventually create. There are many tutorials available online for using styles in Word, and they come in a variety of formats, so take some time to learn this useful tool.

## **Label all your files clearly and consistently.**

It's tedious, but it saves a lot of time and frustration if you label each file that you will be placing in the portfolio in a clear, consistent way. I started my file name with the section of the portfolio, followed by other information that would help me decide where to place it. For example, I labeled teaching evaluations with the semester and type of evaluation data included within it ("Teaching\_Eval\_Fall2016\_MultipleChoice"). Taking this step will make it easier for you to combine files into a single PDF at the end of the process.

## **Save a new file every time you work on your narratives.**

Each time you work on your narratives—especially when you're revising—save a new document every time you work on it with the date or revision number included ("Teaching\_Narrative\_04.18.2020"). Doing this allowed me to return to earlier drafts if I accidentally deleted something or was unhappy with a revision I'd made.