

Proposals ≠ Statements of Work

A Statement of Work (SOW) is a binding contract—not a brochure. Avoid using proposal-style language or content. This guide outlines what does and does not belong in a SOW.

What to Leave Out of a SOW

- Marketing fluff (e.g., “industry-leading,” “state-of-the-art”)
- Capabilities or background info (“we have expertise in...”)
- Hypotheticals or options (“we could do X or Y...”)
- Reused boilerplate that doesn't fit the project
- Vague timelines or undefined deliverables

What to Include Instead

- Clear scope and defined tasks
- Specific deliverables starting with action verbs
- Concrete timeline with milestones
- Roles and responsibilities for each party
- Acceptance criteria tied to payment

Words and Phrases to Avoid in a SOW:

These are red flags that signal vague, proposal-style, or non-binding language:

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| ✗ “may” | ✗ “assist/work/partner with” | ✗ “we recommend” |
| ✗ “could” | ✗ “industry standard” | ✗ “we are capable of” |
| ✗ “should” | ✗ “to be determined” | ✗ “this document is confidential” |
| ✗ “best effort” | ✗ “at vendor’s discretion” | ✗ “pending agency input” |
| ✗ “as needed” | ✗ “proposed” or “tentative” | ✗ “see attached marketing materials” |
| ✗ “for discussion” | ✗ “we have experience with” | |