

Gordon Graham's 3 Types of White Papers — for B2B

By: Jen Adams

Yesterday, we talked about bait pieces ... and I promised to tell you all about one of the most popular varieties on the market right now. Turns out, it's white papers, and [Gordon Graham](#) is our resident expert.

Gordon, for those of you that don't know him, is an award-winning white paper writer with over 30 years of experience. He also has a unique perspective on the process since he worked as VP of Marketing for a software startup before going freelance to write for companies like Cisco, Ericsson, and Sprint.

His background made understanding white papers simple for everyone in his session — and with the ice cream tie-in he used, I know I won't forget!

Here's the scoop:

White papers, at their hearts, are persuasive essays using facts and logic to promote a product, service, technology, methodology, or viewpoint, according to Graham.

And 80% of all [white papers](#) are made in one of three flavors.

There's plain vanilla, which covers the product background kind of white paper.

It has just four parts:

1. The executive summary,
2. An introduction,
3. A section on the technical, financial, and other unique benefits of the product,
4. And the conclusion/call-to-action.

Super simple, right? You can use this "flavor" to launch new products or services, such as announcing a redesigned widget or bringing a new consulting group to a region.

Next up is strawberry, which covers numbered lists.

You use numbered list white papers when you want to move quickly to attract attention, stand out from the competition, channel your partners, and nurture prospects along the path to a complex sale. You can use them for selling things like new point-of-

sale systems to retailers or logistics tools to manufacturers.

Strawberry-flavored white papers have just three parts. The introduction and conclusion/call-to-action are sandwiched around your main set of key points, list of questions, or checklist of concerns.

And then there's chocolate, the problem/solution-flavored white paper.

There are six parts when you're working in chocolate. There's the executive summary, presentation of the serious problem, presentation of some possible solution, the "new, improved" solution (your client's solution), and the conclusion/call-to-action. And the sixth part (proof points) is spread throughout the body copy like so many delicious little chocolate chips.

Now I'll admit — this presentation tickled my sweet tooth. But it also sunk in — Gordon had us do an "Identify the Flavor" exercise after he explained the main types and I tell you, we nailed it!

You probably could now, too — and that's important for B2B writers. Gordon explained that when you know what flavor is on the table, you can lay out the project efficiently, wrap it up fast, and maximize your profits.

So what do you think? Which flavor of white paper would appeal to you? Let me know in the comments, or tell me about the best white paper you've ever read.

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2 Responses to "Gordon Graham's 3 Types of White Papers—for B2B"

"Here's the scoop:" Classic Jen.

Dale Sims--freelance copywriter--web content cons – over a year ago

Great article!

My excitement for adding white papers & case studies to my arsenal has been kicked up a notch by today's article. Earlier this week, I invested in Gordon's White Papers For Dummies. From what I've seen so far, it's no wonder he's such an expert.

Thanks again!

markunderdahl – over a year ago

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