

WORK INSTRUCTION

How to Use AI Tools to Draft a First SOP

The capture-draft-verify method for turning an undocumented process into a verified procedure

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1. Purpose and scope

This work instruction shows how to turn one undocumented process into a reviewed, first-version standard operating procedure (SOP) in a few working sessions, using an AI assistant for drafting and people for every fact. The AI speeds up the writing. It never decides what the process is.

1.1 Use it when

- A process lives in one person's head, in scattered notes, or in an outdated document.
- You need a first SOP that is accurate enough to train someone on and to put under document control.
- You have access to an approved AI tool (for example Claude, ChatGPT, or Microsoft Copilot) and at least one person who does the work.

1.2 Not covered

Regulated content that your quality system bars from AI tools, final legal or safety sign-off, or migrating a whole document library. For those, follow your organization's quality procedures and use this method only where they allow it.

1.3 Outcome

An SOP draft that the process owner has verified line by line, that a new user has walked through without help, and that carries a revision number, an owner, and a review date.

2. Before you start

Assign four roles, gather the inputs, and settle the data rules before any text goes into an AI tool. One person can hold two roles, but the verifier should not be the only source of the facts.

2.1 Roles

Role	Responsibility
Writer	Runs the capture session, prompts the AI, edits the draft, and tracks open questions
Process owner (SME)	Performs the work, supplies the facts, and verifies every step
Test user	Someone who does not normally do the task; follows the draft to prove it works
Approver	Signs off and releases the SOP under document control (often a manager or quality lead)

2.2 Inputs to collect

- A recording or detailed notes of the process being performed, ideally on a real case
- Existing artifacts: old procedures, checklists, email instructions, forms, screenshots
- Your organization's SOP template and style guide, if one exists
- Names of the systems, forms, and records the process touches, spelled exactly as they appear

2.3 Data-handling rules

IMPORTANT These rules are non-negotiable.

1. Use only an AI tool your organization has approved for this kind of information.
2. Remove or replace names, customer data, account numbers, controlled technical data, and anything marked confidential before pasting. Use placeholders such as [Customer] or [System A].
3. If you are unsure whether content may go into the tool, it does not go in. Ask your security or quality lead first.
4. Keep the source recording and notes; they are the evidence that each step is real.

3. The method at a glance

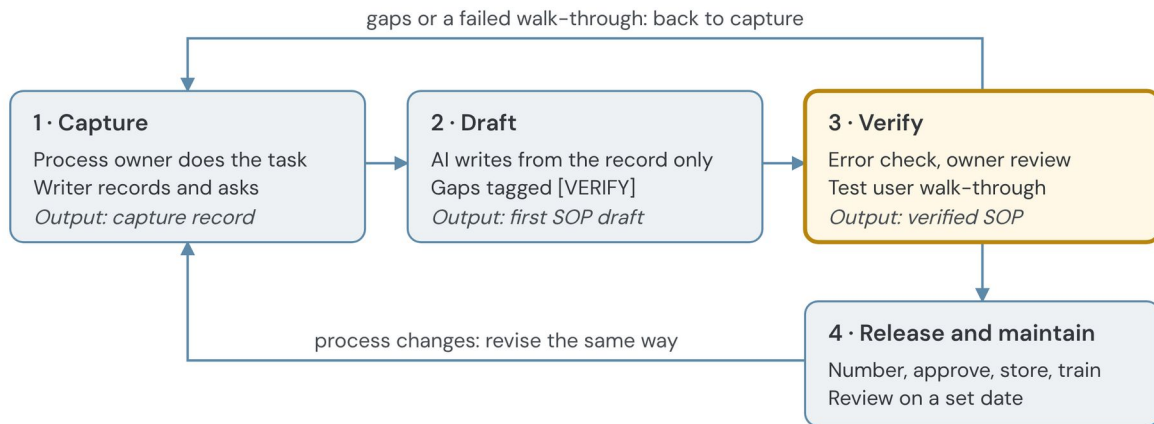


Figure 1. The capture-draft-verify cycle

The AI only works in Step 2, and only from what people captured in Step 1. Anything unclear goes back to the process owner, never to the AI to guess, and a change to the process restarts the same cycle.

4. Step 1: Capture the process as it is really done

Capture is the step AI cannot do for you: the draft can only be as accurate as what you record here. Plan 45 to 90 minutes with the process owner for a typical process.

4.1 Capture procedure

1. **Watch the work, don't just hear about it.** Ask the process owner to perform the task on a real or realistic case while sharing their screen or narrating aloud. Record it with permission, or take time-stamped notes.
2. **Ask the five capture questions** at each step:
 - a. What starts this task, and how do you know it's time?
 - b. What do you do next, exactly, and in which system or form?
 - c. What decision do you make here, and what happens on each answer?
 - d. What can go wrong, and what do you do when it does?
 - e. What record or output proves the task was done?
3. **Collect the artifacts** mentioned along the way: forms, templates, screenshots, system names, and any rule or standard the person cites.
4. **Transcribe and clean the record.** Use the meeting tool's transcript or your notes. Remove sensitive details as section 2.3 requires.
5. **Write an open-questions list** for anything unclear, skipped, or contradicted. These go back to the process owner in Step 3, never to the AI to guess.

4.2 Capture checklist

- ☐ Trigger and end point of the process are stated
- ☐ Every step names who does it and in which system
- ☐ Every decision point has all its outcomes
- ☐ Exceptions and common errors are recorded
- ☐ Required records and outputs are named
- ☐ Sensitive data is removed from the transcript
- ☐ Open questions are listed

5. Step 2: Draft with the AI assistant

Give the AI the cleaned capture record and a fixed structure, and tell it to flag gaps instead of filling them. Three prompts, run in order, produce a usable first draft in under an hour.

5.1 Standard SOP structure

Use your organization's template if it differs.

1. Purpose
2. Scope
3. Roles and responsibilities
4. Definitions
5. Prerequisites (access, tools, forms)
6. Procedure (numbered steps, one action each)
7. Exceptions and troubleshooting
8. Records
9. References
10. Revision history

5.2 Prompt A: Draft from the capture

PROMPT A · Copy and paste

You are helping me write a standard operating procedure. Use ONLY the capture record below. Do not add steps, tools, rules, or details that are not in the record.

Write the SOP using these sections: Purpose, Scope, Roles and Responsibilities, Definitions, Prerequisites, Procedure, Exceptions and Troubleshooting, Records, References.

Rules for the Procedure section:

- One action per numbered step, starting with a verb.
- Name who does the step and in which system or form.
- Show every decision as "If ___, go to step __. If ___, go to step __."

Wherever the record is unclear or missing information, write [VERIFY: your question] instead of guessing.

Audience: [describe the reader, e.g. a new team member with basic system access]

Capture record:

[paste the cleaned transcript or notes]

5.3 Prompt B: Gap check

PROMPT B · Copy and paste

Review the SOP draft against the capture record. List:

1. Any statement in the draft that is not supported by the record.
2. Any step in the record that is missing from the draft.
3. Any decision point missing an outcome.
4. Every [VERIFY] item, as a numbered question list I can send to the process owner.

5.4 Prompt C: Plain-language edit

PROMPT C · Copy and paste

Edit the procedure for clarity without changing its meaning or order:

- Sentences under 20 words; active voice; present tense.
- Use the exact system, form, and button names from the record.
- Keep every [VERIFY] tag.
- Flag any term a new employee may not know and add it to Definitions.

5.5 Writer's checks before moving on

Read the draft against the capture record yourself, remove anything Prompt B flagged as unsupported, and merge the [VERIFY] questions with your open-questions list from Step 1.

6. Step 3: Verify before anyone relies on it

No AI-drafted SOP is released until a person who does the work has confirmed every step and a person who doesn't has followed it successfully. Verification has three passes.

6.1 Pass 1: Writer's AI error check

AI drafts fail in predictable ways. Look for each one:

Common AI error	What it looks like	Fix
Invented step	A reasonable-sounding step nobody performed	Delete it, or confirm it with the process owner
Smoothed-over decision	"Review the request" with no criteria or outcomes	Ask what is checked and what happens on each result
Wrong or generic names	"The system" or a renamed form or button	Replace with the exact name from the capture
Missing exception	Only the happy path is written	Add the errors and workarounds from the capture
Confident filler	Vague lines like "ensure quality"	Cut it, or turn it into a specific, checkable action
Lost [VERIFY] tag	A question quietly answered by the AI	Restore the question for the process owner

6.2 Pass 2: Process owner review

Send the draft with the numbered [VERIFY] questions. Meet for 30 minutes and walk the procedure line by line. Record each correction in the draft, then remove every [VERIFY] tag only after it has a confirmed answer.

6.3 Pass 3: Walk-through test

The test user performs the task using only the SOP while the writer watches and stays silent. Note every hesitation, question, or wrong turn: each one marks a step that needs rewriting. Repeat until the test user completes the task without help.

6.4 Release criteria

- ☐ No [VERIFY] tags remain
- ☐ Process owner has confirmed every step and decision
- ☐ Test user completed the task using only the SOP
- ☐ Formatting matches the template and style guide
- ☐ Approver has signed off

7. Release and maintain

An SOP is only useful while it matches the work, so release it under control and give it a review date on day one.

1. **Assign a document number and revision.** Use your organization's scheme; otherwise start at Revision A.
2. **Store one master copy** in the controlled repository (for example a SharePoint document library with version history). Link to it rather than emailing copies.
3. **Record the approval** in the revision history: date, approver, and summary of change.
4. **Train the users** on the released version and note who was trained.
5. **Set the review trigger:** a scheduled review (12 months is common) or sooner when a system, form, role, or regulation changes.
6. **Revise with the same method.** For a change, capture only the affected steps, draft with Prompt A, verify with the process owner, and issue the next revision.

Keep the capture record, the [VERIFY] question list with answers, and the walk-through notes with the revision. Together they show how each step was confirmed, which auditors and new owners both value.

8. Appendix

8.1 One-page quality checklist for any SOP

- ☐ Title states the task; purpose fits in one or two sentences
- ☐ Scope says where the procedure starts, where it ends, and what it excludes
- ☐ Each step is one action, starts with a verb, and names who and where
- ☐ Every decision shows all outcomes
- ☐ Exceptions and troubleshooting are covered
- ☐ System, form, and button names match what users see
- ☐ Terms a new employee may not know are defined
- ☐ Required records are named, with where they are kept
- ☐ Document number, revision, owner, and review date are present

8.2 Glossary

Term	Meaning
SOP	Standard operating procedure: the approved, repeatable way a task is done
Work instruction	Detailed, step-level directions for one task within a procedure
SME	Subject-matter expert; here, the process owner who performs the work
Capture record	The cleaned transcript or notes of the process as actually performed
[VERIFY] tag	A marker the AI inserts where the capture record is unclear; resolved only by a person
Document control	The practice of numbering, approving, storing, and revising documents so only the current version is used

8.3 Revision history

Revision	Date	Description	Author
A	October 14, 2026	Initial release	Deborah K. Nurnberg