Clarity

How does one write good specifications? How does one tell another how to write good specifications? The goal in good specifications is to be clear and concise in the information conveyed to the vendor community. That way everyone has the same details, there is no ambiguity in the product needed.

Simple example of specifications is below:

- What do you need? Paper
- What type of paper? Copy
- What weight, 16 lb., 20 lb., 24 lb., etc.? 20 lb.
- Do you want recycled content? How much? Yes, 50% post-consumer waste
- Size? 8-1/2” x 11”
- Color? White
- How much? 20 cases
- Define case? 5000 sheets /case,
- Loosely packed or ream wrapped? Wrapped 500 sheets/package, 10 pkg / case.
- Delivered where? KSU Purchasing, 21 Anderson Hall, Manhattan, KS
- Is there a dock? No, delivery person needs to bring into the office.
- This will cost extra! Need to include shipping & delivery in bid price.
- Payment is due on delivery University pays in 30 days, after product is r’cv’d.

What did we forget? Perhaps the paper is to be used in a color printer, so high contrast is desired. Then brightness of the paper may be a necessary specification. When do you need it delivered? Two days or two months?

Even items that seem simple & straight-forward, like copy paper, have a multitude of points to consider. As a writer and reviewer of specifications, my personal advice is – Once the specifications are written, step away. Go take a walk, get a drink, whatever. Let your brain slip out of spec-writing mode and think about something else. After ten to twenty minutes, come back and read the specifications again. Are they clear? Do they make sense? In writing specifications, a person knows what they want to say and that is what they see when proof reading their own work. There is pressure to process paperwork quickly, but heartburn and amendments could be averted if time was taken to review the information in the beginning rather than after it has been publicly posted.

The Post will cover specifications for equipment and services in future issues.