ArchiAssist 'Specification Writing Tips'

These 'Specification Writing Tips' are provided by ArchiAssist,
Australia's EASY and FAST to create, **full-version** but **very concise** Master Specification for architects, building designers, interior designers and landscape designers.

The ArchiAssist Master Specification covers, in a positive and supportive way,
all the issues of concern relating to content in this 'Specification Writing Tips' document.

This document does not cover all Specification writing issues,
however the actual Master Specification does.

For more Specification detail, download the
FREE sample Specification at www.archiassist.com.au

What to do Before Buying a Specification

This Tip looks at the selection process for your Master Specification.

At time of writing, there are only three full version master's available on the market.

Never use a short-version Spec for construction...it is bound to let you...AND your clients, down.

Specs need to be easy and fast to create, consistently and predictably formatted, concise (short in length), and have quality reliable content.

A Spec should not take longer than a day to produce - for ANY size, type or class project.

Computer generated Specs may seem easy, but you lose the very important audit capability of doing the Specification yourself...and you lose some control.

Editing is best (and faster) if all you must do is delete out of the document what is NOT in your project, and you put project specific selections on your drawings or in your schedules. Adding things to a Specification increases Spec writing difficulty and duration and allows for more mistakes.

Cost is important. The initial price needs to be compared to update fees and also to how long it takes to write a Spec (the cost of hours of labor). And a reliable Spec cost much less later with less time dedicated to fixing on-site problems.

Does the Spec provider have a fast on-call (phone and email) help and assistance service during editing and construction?

This is a basic list. You will have your own Spec requirements. Take your time with it.

What a Specification Should NOT Have in It

This Tip looks at what your Specification should NOT have.

Specifications should NOT contain the word "Tender". The Tender process is separate from the contract. If you have reference to "Tender" in the Spec needs to be removed for the contract.

Specifications should NOT have a 'Preliminaries' Section AND a 'General Requirements' Section. Put everything in the 'Preliminaries' Section...keep it simple.

Specifications should NOT have product manufacturers detail other than that required for the builder to order the product. Specify only that the builder is to obtain and work to the manufacturer's detail...that is all you need.

Specifications should NOT have products or materials NOT in the work specified "just in case" it is needed.

These are some basics of what you should NOT specify. There are more and the sample Specification available from the website has more detail.

The more accurate your documents, the more the builder will give respect and have confidence in the project. Don't forget the builder also talks to your client.

Specifying Product Warranties

This Tip looks at how to document and specify warranties to avoid confusion, frustration, and construction underperformance.

If you are happy with a standard product warranty, you don't need to mention it, but if you want to, this does no harm.

A Specification Preliminaries warranty clause should say that all products are to have warranties, and they are to be provided to the owner in the owner's name, the warranty period commencing at Practical Completion, and warranties are to extend to new owners if the property is sold.

Warranties should cover all rectification work to replace a defective product, including disassembly and reassembly of building elements to access and make good around the defective product.

Making up your own warranty periods without negotiating this with the product manufacturer is unadvisable as nomination of an unrealistic period could cause some disruption to construction.

Specifying Dilapidation Reports

This Tip looks at dilapidation reports and how, properly specified, can save you a lot of unnecessary work and save you big dramas at the end of the contract.

Dilapidation reports are an essential part of the Preliminaries of any Specification, and how well they are written will either cause you trouble or make life a breeze.

Their purpose is to record the physical state of the existing site and surroundings, before any work is started on site, so that anything damaged by building work is fixed by the builder. They must be submitted to the superintendent even before this work starts. They are one of the first things for the builder to do.

By far, the easiest way to specify them, is that it is up to the builder as to what the quality of the record is to be, and anything that is damaged needs to be fixed by the builder if the record can't show otherwise. That's it...done!

Don't fall into the trap of having to be on site when it is done, or worse still, having to drag the site owner (your client) and neighbouring owners there to accompany you accompanying the person doing the inspection.

Don't review the report when it is submitted. Don't get back to the builder with any comments. With the easy way described above, you don't even need to look at the report.

The builder can choose not to do one, in which case they need to fix everything that is damaged, including things that were damaged before they got on site.

Your workday is hard enough without having to do anything other than just receive the dilapidation report...period…and your Specification should cover you in this regard.

Inspections and Notifications in the Specification

This Tip looks at some issues with specifying when inspections are to be done and how to avoid creating problems for yourself.

There can be many times when the superintendent (ie the owner's representative for the construction contract) needs to go to site to do physical inspections.

How these inspections are covered in the Specification is important.

Some specifiers put in the Specification 'hold' and 'witness' points. These terms get thrown about in the industry without much regard for what they mean. These terms don't need to be used, but if they are, the conditions surrounding them should be defined in good detail.

It can be a lot simpler and better, with less confusion, to not use them at all and just specify for the builder to notify the superintendent for an inspection, along with a notification period before the inspection, for example 10 business days.

There are two big things to avoid with inspections.

First is to put the contractual onus on the superintendent to always decide when to inspect. This should never happen, and it should be the builder that notifies the superintendent with plenty of time to prepare for it.

Second, never specify that construction work can't proceed until the superintendent has done their inspection (something the 'hold' and 'witness' point system can allow). There should be some way for construction to proceed if the superintendent can't make the inspection for some reason which is out of their control.

Specifying Preferred and Nominated Subcontractors

This Tip looks at some issues with preferred subcontractors and nominated subcontractors, how they are presented in the Specification and how it can be best not to use them at all.

Subbies make up a big part of the work on a building or landscape project and often are regular subbies of the head contractor.

So, straight away tenderers or a selected builder might resist, simply because they are being put out of their regular work routine (ie not being in control of the subbies they want to use).

Preferred or nominated subbies need to be checked out by the builder, which is some effort. Maybe the builder has worked with these subbies before and experienced some trouble with them.

With nominated subbies, it is necessary to give the work scope and price that the nominated subbie has already given to you. If not, the nominated subbie might be tempted to over-price the work due to lack of competition.

The work scope that you give for the nominated subbie could cause some friction because the builder may have a different scope for that sort of subcontract, so they need to do some re-jigging of other subbie work scopes to fit it in with their work.

Overall, it is best to let the builder do their job without too much interference. Building is what they are good at and it can be taken by them as a sign of some disrespect to start telling them who their subcontract team will be.

Specifying Owner Supplied Items

This Tip looks at how to best document owner supplied items and present their conditions in the Specification.

Many projects have some items supplied by the owner. This can happen because the owner can get a good price, or the owner knows the supplier, or other such reason.

But the reason for the owner supplied items is not relevant. It is how it is all documented that can mean the difference between a straightforward process or complications which can cost extra money.

Ideally, there should be no owner supplied items because it always puts some risk on everyone including the designer. Common risks include the owner not delivering the items on time, and damage to the items upon delivery.

It must be documented (usually in the Specification) the following:

- Agreement as to when the items will be delivered,
- Who delivers and who unloads the items,
- At what point does the builder take responsibility for the items,
- Builder is to inspect for defects at point of delivery,
- Who is responsible for defects at point of delivery and after that,
- The builder is to provide for connection of services (if applicable to the item).

Without these sorts of things covered clearly in your documents, there is bound to be some argument if things don't run smoothly with the owner supplied items, usually resulting in someone paying (it might be you) for the muck-ups that might happen.

Provisional Allowances in the Specification

This Tip looks at provisional allowances and the big trap with them.

Provisional allowances are a common thing and useful way to document the price of things into the tender or contract when these things are not fully resolved in the design.

Provisional allowances often come in the form of 'prime costs' and 'provisional sums'.

While they are useful, this usefulness can quickly turn to liability when they are misused. The greatest misuse is assuming a contractor's definition of them matches your definition of them.

Just documenting a thing as a 'prime cost' or a 'provisional sum' is not enough. The terms need to be documented in the Specification with a thorough definition of these terms.

It is not only the contractor who has a different definition of them, but also most players in the building industry who each have a different definition of them.

The ArchiAssist Specification does not use the terms 'prime cost' or 'provisional sum', instead it uses 'provisional allowance' accompanied by the EACH item's price allowance and a thorough description of EACH item (including who orders it and who is responsible for delivery, unloading, on-site storage, and installation) thereby removing the item completely from the terms 'prime cost' and 'provisional sum' trap.

Specifying Default Pathways

This Tip looks at the types of defaults a Specification should contain.

Specs are for the builder to follow throughout construction. They present a lot of common construction micro-detail that people don't want to think about twice.

There are thousands of things to be done in construction, so the Specification must have a lot of detail to cover this to help produce a good construction outcome.

Specification defaults instruct the builder if the documents don't give a direct solution. In simple terms, it is like saying "If ABC happens, immediately notify the designer (or superintendent) and allow XYZ" (allow needs to be defined generally as "organize and price to include").

Here are 3 quick examples (they all should come with "immediately notify the designer/super" also):

1_If the site and the documents (including the site survey drawing) don't match, allow the site.

2_If a colour of a fixture is not documented, allow a colour from the standard manufacturers range closest matching the surrounding colours.

3_If a documented size is not available, allow the next size up.

There are many more, including what to do on finding a discrepancy between the various documents and also what to allow if this happens between the Specification and other documents.

A good Specification should have all these little 'dispute savers' because they are invaluable.

Trade Package Specifications – Why They Should Not Be Used

This Tip looks at the trade package Specifications – their danger.

Regards Trade Package Specifications: No Master Spec exists for Trade Package Specifications as they can vary greatly in content from job to job and from Builder to Builder.

Trade Package Specs are used where a 'fast-track' procurement is employed, where packages can be issued to Subbies doing earlier work while the work for later packages is being documented.

The only way to produce Trade Package Specifications is to construct them (according to what content individual Builders stipulate) from a reliable lump-sum Master. This is a very time-consuming process and is also it is dangerous as something can be inadvertently left out.

The cost to produce them is also very high. I must charge 8-10 times the fee for a Trade Package Spec compared to a lump-sum Spec.

I always recommend the best way to document this sort of thing if the Builder asks for it, is to just do a lump-sum Spec (it needs however to be concise and easily navigated and readable - like ArchiAssist) and have the Builder do up a one-page summary of the work included in the Package. The Subbie just goes then and access those parts of the lump-sum Spec he needs (this is where the concise and easily navigated and readable Spec comes in).

The Specification and the NCC (National Construction Code)

This Tip looks at the trade package Specifications – their danger.

ArchiAssist has been asked many times lately, especially by NSW architects and designers, a particular question coming from building certifiers.

That is...is the Specification you have NCC compliant?

There is really no such thing as an NCC compliant Specification. If there was, it would be repeating the NCC. The Spec can only provide good quality construction detail (that's it job) that does not contradict the NCC, and refer to the NCC for the builder, all of which ArchiAssist does.

NSW certifiers are caught in the panic response of the NSW government over past building failures which brought us the now infamous NSW Design & Building Practitioners Act which is causing a lot of angst.

ArchiAssist is up to date with the latest NCC, other regulations, and also the Australian standards. These 'referenced documents' are referred to in the Spec, but no detail from them is repeated, which is not necessary because all the detail is in those referenced documents, and the Spec has nothing in it to contradict the referenced documents.

Please remember...The Specification is NOT the NCC. The two are very different things fulfilling different functions.

The Spec is a contract document for use during construction, to describe that construction. The NCC is mainly a design document, mainly used before construction, its detail translated by the designer into the drawings and schedules.

Many building certifiers are getting designers to document some specific references to the NCC, which I think is a 'cover-your-ass' type thing.

Nominating references to the NCC is never good documentation practice and could even leave the designer liable if something is missed...and the NCC is now such a massive document, the chances of missing something is likely.

Additionally, it does create an inconsistency issue and an unwanted importance hierarchy whereby a reader of the documents will see these referenced clauses and perhaps wonder why other clauses are not referenced, maybe thinking that the referenced clauses are more important that others, which should not be the case - everything is important.

So, if you refer to a part of a 'referenced document', to be consistent, you need to refer to everything, which is, of course, impractical. Don't do this...just refer to the document (ie the NCC).

If your drawings and schedules have been completed to be compliant with the NCC, through the design process, the ArchiAssist Spec just gives the back-up construction detail of that which has been drawn and scheduled, and the project will comply with the NCC.

What the Specification Should NOT Contain

This Tip looks at Specifications and what they should not contain.

The contract documents, in essence, just present detailed information to enable the builder to build the project, theoretically without question.

Each document has a different role in presenting detail. Basically, the drawings show arrangements, elements, materials, extents, dimensions, and other things of a general nature.

The schedules are lists of materials and products with options (such as colour and trim).

The Specification should have the back-up detail of all that is drawn and scheduled, being the detail that what you don't want to think twice about, but it needs to be there to complete the picture of the work the builder is to do, without surprises and describing good quality.

A material, element or product may be presented in all 3 documents, but otherwise, no document should repeat what is in another document.

For example, there may be 3 different types of floor tiling. Extent is shown on the drawings, selections shown in the schedules (without giving extent), and installation described in the Spec (without giving extent or selections).

If documentation codes are used on the drawings, these will be presented in the schedules, but there is no need to have these codes in the Specification because the Spec detail deals with all the tiling, regardless of any code labelling used.

Simplicity is the key, while presenting all the information needed to successfully build the project.

Specifications in Relation to Different Size and Type Projects

This Tip looks at Specifications and selecting one for a particular size project.

The long and short of this subject is...it is totally un-necessary to have different Master Specs for different size projects. A good Master Spec will have everything necessary in it for all size projects.

When you think about the detail of what goes into a small project and a large project, there is actually very little difference.

Much of the big stuff is structure and the Structural Consultant documents that. There are a few elements particular to large projects, like curtain walls, but these things should be simple clauses in the Master Spec which can be easily deleted for smaller projects.

There are some construction procedural and administrative things also particular to large projects, and again, these should be simple clauses which can be easily deleted for smaller projects.

Nearly all other construction is the same between large and small projects, for example, tiling is the same, roofing is the same, hanging doors is the same, brickwork is the same, and on and on ad nauseum.

Don't be fooled by slick marketing that says you need different Master Specifications for different size projects. This is just not true and leads to unnecessary complexity.

Specifying Manufacturers Proprietary Products

This Tip looks at Specifications and nominating specific manufacturers' products.

Nominating a specific manufacturer for a specific product is the most direct form of specifying a thing.

You need to have a good alternative products Spec clause making it onerous for the builder to chase alternatives so they can get a better deal (they need to present you with all the alternatives detail and costings).

Another way to specify a manufacturer's product is to document it as setting the standard of what you want, allowing the builder to use a 'similar to' (defined as equal or better quality) product, after your review (not approval) of that product alternative.

Lastly, if you document a significant amount or a large item from one manufacturer, think of getting a price for the product/s and document that price (stipulating exactly what that price allows for) which helps the builder with pricing and avoids the manufacturer rising their price later (when the builder orders) because they know their product/s are specified.

Every Builder Needs to Use a Specification

This Tip looks at why every builder (every construction project) needs a Specification.

Many designers rely on the builder to do everything on-site in an acceptable way, and consequently no Spec is done.

Often, these designers have several builders that they usually work with. Apparently both parties know each other well and know what the other needs and wants. It's almost a friendship arrangement.

In my opinion, this is a risky approach to construction and relies on luck too much. The Spec covers all the micro-detail that just must be documented to cover the project. It's like an insurance policy.

When something goes awry on-site, even a small thing, it usually is costly to fix. That is the nature of construction. A 'friendship' type arrangement between a designer and builder will be put to the test when significant money is at stake, and it will likely be the money that will lead to a fix.

This can lead to bitterness and an unhappy client who perhaps may come to see how unprofessional the designer/builder relationship was.

Having a good Specification, plus comprehensive drawings and schedules, is the best way to avoid on-site conflict that is hard and painful to resolve. Clients also will go on to tell others how smoothly the project went.

Why You Need to Get Specifications Done Fast

This Tip looks at why it's important to get Specifications written and out fast.

An obvious response to this is that, well...life is just too short to spend more than a day writing a Spec for one project. But let's be less cynical and look at this logically.

It is true, you should not have to spend more than a day on any full-version Spec. Even though the Specification is a very important document, there are so many other things to be done too.

And often, Spec writing is done late in documentation because of all those other things to do. When you have a good Master Spec that enables you to get a Spec done in one day, you can leave it to the last without additional stress.

And leaving the Spec writing to nearly the last is advantageous because all the decisions have been made and there will be less Spec related questions to decide on.

The quickest form of full-version Specification writing that allows fast editing is the 'Read & Delete' principle, where the writer simply reads the Master and deletes what is not wanted in the project, without adding anything to the Spec.

The only way to achieve this 'Read & Delete' system is for the Master to have only common/universal construction content, while project specific detail (selections, products, colours, arrangements, etc) go on the drawings or into the schedules. Adding anything to the Spec takes too much time.

The General Conditions of Contract (GCC) and the Specification

This Tip looks at the relationship between the Specification and the General Conditions of Contract (GCC - the terms the owner and builder agree to).

There is a good rule to help understand what content should be in each of these very important, but very different documents.

The GCC should have content only dealing with the administrative aspects of that contract. The Specification should have all the micro-detail that applies to construction. The two content types are very different.

A good way to think of the content is thinking from the perspective of a subcontractor on the job. GCC content should not interest a subbie at all. The Specification content should interest a subbie a lot.

For the original authors of both these types of documents, this is a good rule to follow as it saves a lot of confusion about what is in which document.

Unfortunately, many of the industry GCC's and the industry Specification masters, are not completely coordinated in this way, and each can have content that should be in the other.

Fortunately, users can have control over the Specification master, searching to find one that only deals with construction. Having such a master, it is relatively easy then, with an industry standard GCC, to cross-out any construction detail it contains, leaving it to just deal with the administrative aspects of the contract.

This all makes for clearer documentation.

Specification Defined Words

This Tip looks at how the Specification defined words can really support the rest of the Specification.

Defined words are extremely important in larger wordy legal documents. They are designed to make Spec wording succinct, clear, watertight, and they prevent readers making their own interpretations.

And here is another thing that is really important; defined words must be written in *italics*, so a reader knows immediately they are looking at a defined word.

The NCC and all the Industry General Conditions of Contract use *italicised* defined words. It's super-important! Not doing it for a Spec is, in my opinion, a failing of that document.

Defined words do the heavy lifting with the writing of Spec text.

Following is a great example from the ArchiAssist Spec (and a little stand-out because of the size of the definition and the impact it has on the text). The word is *'Provide*' and it is what the contractor is to do. One word used in context says it all...here is the definition (with other *italicised* defined words being part of the definition) ...

Provide: Contractor to perform the following in relation to the *Work* (from Contract start to completion): plan, instigate, construct, demolish *if required*, administer, supervise, co-ordinate, comply with all applicable Statutory & Regulatory controls, order, check, services survey, program, pay fees/costs/wages/taxes, purchase, design *if required*, *supply*, confirm materials/*Work* compliance, transport, store, secure, protect, manoeuvre materials & personnel, fabricate/install, commission, clean/maintain, *Work* to complete & fully operational condition, *allow* for overhead & profit costs.

Aim to eliminate, as much as possible, gaps in documentation that can lead to contractual error or variation.

The Specification Dealing with Excessive Builder Questioning

This Tip looks at how the Specification can protect you from excessive builder questioning.

Builders will have questions, no matter how good our documentation is. This normally is not a problem and we should have fees available for the odd builder questions that come our way.

It only becomes a problem when the questioning becomes excessive and results in an excessive drain of our time and fees.

If your documentation is sloppy, you are going to get (and probably deserve) more questions, but most of us work hard to have good documentation.

But sometimes, builders might get lazy or maybe are understaffed and instead of studying the documents, they just ask the designer. This is a problem, but one that the Specification can solve.

Up the front of the Preliminaries specify a hourly rate for remuneration of your time consumed by unnecessary questions that can be answered by looking at the documents.

Even if this clause is not enacted during construction, at the project end, when tidy-up of all the bits-n-pieces is happening, the accumulation of your hours answering unnecessary questions can be a great incentive to get your way with other prickly issues.

How the Specification Starts is Very Important

This Tip looks at how the start of a Specification is extremely important.

On the first page is the Table of Contents (a concise Spec will only need the Sections displayed…nice and simple). Under that is the list of Appendix items (separate documents in the Spec folder or bound into a hard copy Spec, such as Schedules and Reports - this is not needed if there are no separate but bound-in documents). Then the Revision Table (dates and reason for issue).

The first Spec Sections should be common Sections (such as Preliminaries, Fixing & Sealing, and Metalwork) and it must be clear the following and remaining technical Sections of the Spec are to be read with these common Sections, so you won't need to repeat a lot of this common detail in the technical Sections.

The start of the Preliminaries Section connects the Spec to the contract work and states that the content of the Spec is directed to the builder. Other introductory things in the Prelims include resolving Spec/other document discrepancies, treatment of referenced documents in the Spec, and definitions.

The Preliminaries then goes on to cover site issues, materials, execution, administration issues, and submissions.

Starting the Spec in a good clear and concise way sets the tone for the remainder of the document which needs to maintain that clarity and conciseness throughout.

How to Make Your Own Office Master Specification

This Tip looks at the easiest way to have your own office Specification.

ArchiAssist is all about getting your Specs done easily and fast.

The main tool for doing this is the 'Read & Delete' system, where you just read through the master Spec and delete what you don't want in your project. What is left over is your Spec.

Put your project specific selections (products, colours, arrangements, sizes, etc) on the drawings or in the schedules. The Spec is not the place for these things as they get buried and putting them in the Spec just takes too much time and effort.

The Spec becomes your back-up document, while the drawings and schedules are the 'go-to' documents for fast immediate answers.

Another time saver is making your own office master from the ArchiAssist master. Copy the ArchiAssist Master to become your new 'office master'. In this new master, edit out all the detail that you will never use. When updates come through, copy over any updates that apply to your office Master.

There are other ways to make Spec writing easy and fast and it's all in 'The Guide', which you should be reading anyway for your first Spec or as a refresher before doing your next Spec.

When you are used to the ArchiAssist system, writing a Spec for any project should not take longer than a day.

Specification Discrepancies with Other Documents

This Tip looks at how a Specification should deal with Specification discrepancies with other documents.

This is not 'order of precedence' which is usually a clause in the General Conditions of Contract which gives the legal importance order of the different documents (usually the Spec is at the top...No.1 document).

How a Specification deals with discrepancies with other documents is a different thing, dealt with at the start of the Prelims, that spells out what document is to be followed in case of a discrepancy between the Spec and another contract document.

This may sound like an acceptance of documentation mistakes, and it is! No set of documents is going to be perfect, no matter how hard we try.

Good documentation will inevitably have a few discrepancies…and there needs to be a mechanism to quickly resolve them.

Here are examples of the common sources of discrepancies between the Spec and other documents:

1. Principal designer drawings/schedules/other designer documents - allow these over the Spec (the designer has thought long and hard about the content of what goes into these documents),
2. The General Conditions of Contract (GCC) - allow the GCC (it would be foolish to do otherwise),
3. Consultant documents - allow the consultant documents, they are the experts in their fields, don't argue with them,
4. Manufacturer's written instructions - allow the manufacturers instructions, again they are the experts in their fields (but have an 'out' if the instructions are low quality),
5. Referenced documents (eg Australian standards, statutory regulations, etc) - allow the higher quality, more expensive option while still being NCC compliant, because the designer may want that option.

And with ALL of these...FIRST...the Spec needs to state that the contract administrator is to be notified at the time of finding the discrepancy.

These are the main sources of discrepancy between the Spec and other documents. If a solution is not specified, all sorts of arguments and interpretations will arise which leads to trouble.

The Aim of the Specification

This Tip looks at Specification provider (or author, or marketer) content decisions that can affect you.

ArchiAssist knows of only three Australian providers of full-version Master Specifications. ArchiAssist is one of them. Never use a short-version Specification; you will not receive adequate protection if things go awry.

Also, be wary of 'own office' created Master Specs, which usually are created piecemeal, inconsistently (with many different contributors each with their own bias and language), and incompletely (without full-time professional maintenance).

Each provider, author and marketer of a Master Specification, and also each designer that uses the Master, all have their own ideas about what actually should go into their Specification. Therefore, each completed Specification is different in some way from another.

ArchiAssist has its own documentation expectations, experience, and needs as an author of a Master Spec made to cater for many designers, covering all project sizes, classifications and types across Australia.

However, there are some fundamental basics that any good Specification should address, which are:

1. Ease and speed of Spec production (how ArchiAssist does this convincingly; you can quickly discover this in the short preamble to the sample Specification available for free download from the website).
2. Text should generally present only 'hands-on' construction descriptions which occur day after day on building sites across Australia (kind of thinking like an intelligent tradie). These descriptions should be back-up info to the project specific detail to be shown on the drawings & schedules.
3. Contractual administrative detail should not be mixed up in the Spec and should be in the General Conditions of Contract.
4. Mention of 'Tender' should not exist in the Spec because Tender ceases to exist at the time of contract.
5. The Spec should be aligned with, but not repeat or refer to, specific content from other 'outside' TECHNICAL documents (from which relevant content should be designed/documented into the project), and includes regulations (including the NCC), standards.
6. The Spec should be aligned with but not repeat specific manufacturer recommendations (the builder should source these).
7. The Specification should not contain the materials/finishes schedules. These are started (and almost finished) long before the Spec is started. Also, everyone is comfortable with the drawings and schedules, and the Spec is used irregularly only for back-up detail.

There are more things but that is a good basic list.

Specifying How the Builder Presents Alternative Products

This Tip looks at what the Specification should say about your builder proposing alternative products to those documented.

This is a situation that happens often. It can come about for many reasons and if the Specification does not have things covered adequately, it can consume a lot of time for you, the designer.

You nominate specific products, not because they just fell into your lap, but through a lot of research work and through valuable experience. These products suit your purposes perfectly. They are documented for good reason.

It takes a lot of time and effort to build up a list of preferred products. This fact needs to be respected.

If your Specification does not present rigid rules about how the builder proposes alternative products to those documented, you can spend an unacceptable amount of time dealing with them. This adds to your stress, leaves you with less time to work on other important things, and will chew up fees.

The Specification should have in the Preliminaries Section, a clause specifying these rules. The following is not an unacceptable list of requirements:

- Sufficient timings to allow making an informed decision without rushing,
- Sufficient information to make an informed decision on the alternative's appropriateness including full comparison data to the documented product with costings,
- No contract variations given for work delay due to the review of alternatives,
- Builder to pay for the time you, or any other person required, to review the alternative.

Presenting alternatives should be an onerous process for the builder to discourage them from submitting random, excessive alternative proposals.

Remember, you have worked hard to be satisfied with the products that you have selected. Don't take this lightly.

Specifying Proprietary Products

This Tip looks at the implications of specifying the various types of proprietary products.

Proprietary products are those products that are mass-manufactured in a factory environment, then delivered to site ready for installation.

Many of these products come with publicly published manufacturer instructions on how to handle, store, install and maintain them and they usually have a standard warranty.

There are 3 levels of proprietary products and how each is dealt with in the Spec is different.

The first is that product that is totally reliant on the manufacturers publicised instructions. Specifying these is easy. They are simply scheduled and the Spec deals with proprietary products in a Preliminaries clause.

Repeating manufacturer instructions in the Spec is not advised as things can get missed and you get 'double-up' information which can lead to confusion and chance of discrepancy. Also, for the sake of consistency, if you repeat manufacturer instructions in the Spec once, you need to do it for all products, which is totally impractical.

The second is that product that, depending on the manufacturer, may come with instructions, or may not. Weatherboards are a good example, with fully manufactured weatherboards (eg fibre cement boards) coming with full instruction, while timber weatherboards have none. In the latter example, full Spec detail is required.

Finally, there is that proprietary product that comes with no manufacturer instruction. A good example is bricks. Again, full Spec detail is required.

You want to be sure your Master Spec has all this covered.

The Specification and Builder Submissions

This Tip looks at submissions the builder needs to make to you and how these can be handled efficiently in the Spec.

Builder submissions can include product manufacturer advice, certificates, test results, authority notices, samples, prototypes, shop drawings, work as executed drawings, warranties, and operation and maintenance manuals.

This is a big list and if not documented well, can easily get out of hand.

The Preliminaries should spell out how submissions are done (e.g. minimum timings, formats, numbers of submitted items, procedures for non-compliant submissions, designer reply procedures, etc).

The appropriate place in the body of the Specification (ie the trade or element Section) should state what is to be submitted and give any specific detail about the submitted item, eg sample size and number, what at minimum to be shown on shop drawings for an item, specific timings if different to the minimum timings called up in the Prelims, special content.

Specific items in the body of the Spec (in the Sections) need to stand out so they CAN'T BE MISSED. ArchiAssist uses the word "***SUBMIT***" (all-capped, bolded, italicised) and this word is defined in the Preliminaries to avoid any confusion about what it means.

It is easy to see how even one missing piece of information about submissions can lead to disruption and disagreement, none of which anybody wants, especially the owner who is not paying you to argue.

How the Specification Handles Development Authority Conditions

This Tip looks at how to easily and efficiently document conditions that the builder needs to be responsible for during the contract that are listed in the development approval (DA).

This applies to any authority conditions that have multiple, multi-party requirements that affect construction.

These approvals list a lot of conditions that affect the owner, the designer, and the builder...and they are never set out in a neat order of responsibilities...it's usually all mixed up, sometimes with one condition affecting the responsibilities of all three parties.

You can't just put the DA into the contract documents and expect the builder to price then build their responsibilities...there is just too much open to interpretation.

You could painstakingly set out the builder's responsibilities on a separate document...but that is just too hard and time consuming.

The easiest way is to make a copy of the conditions and on it, identify clearly (by circling with a pen or highlighting in a specific colour) the items for the builder to be responsible for. This can even be done for builder items that are mixed up with other parties' responsibilities in one paragraph.

Put a note on the first page stating that items marked are for the builder to build and have priced into the contract price.

Finally, scan the document as a PDF and hey presto...you have a contract document which you add to your list of contract documents.

This is simple, fast and accurate.