



Knowledge for Creating & Sustaining the Built Environment
CSI*Net* - Home of The Construction Specifications Institute

Feb 07 The Importance of Specifications to CSI Membership

[Home](#) - [Chapters](#) - [CSI Leader](#)



By: Jonathan M. Miller, FCSI, CCS, CCCA, SCIP, AIA, NCARB
CSI Vermont Chapter
Membership Chair - Vermont Chapter CSI
Membership Chair - Northeast Region CSI
Member - Institute Membership Committee

C – S – I...Hmmm, that “S” must stand for something important. Need a clue? It’s an adjective for the “C” word – construction. “S” is for Specifications. I wonder how many people write specifications as a profession? CSI has approximately 6% of its members who identify themselves as specification writers or consultants, and I am one of them. With such top billing in our organization’s name, one would think that there would be more of us. However, we still serve as the linchpin to bring together all of the members of the project team.

So just what are these “Specifications” everyone talks about? Well, they are the written portion of the Contract Documents that complements the Drawings. Sounds legal.... and they are! Those Drawing and Specification documents can be used to bid and then construct anything from a birdhouse to a billion dollar high-rise. Drawings show where materials are in relation to one another, where the joints are, and how big everything is through dimensioning. Specifications tell you exactly what each material is, how it is made and to what quality standards or performance criteria, how it is manufactured, assembled and installed, what regulations apply to it, how it is held in place, what those fasteners or adhesives are made of, and how many fasteners or how much adhesive in what pattern or thickness is needed per unit of material, what tests are needed to prove the material or assembly can perform as needed, tests to ensure that it is made properly and more tests to control the installation quality, and..... well... I think you are starting to get the idea on why a few thousand words are needed to explain the pictures.



Jonathan Miller

But why... you ask... go to all the trouble of writing all of that? It’s because they ARE Contract Documents and they need to be: complete to cover the scope of the project; clear to prevent misunderstandings and make it easy for different people to bid on the exact same unit of work and for the Contractor to build the Owner’s intended and Architect’s envisioned facility; concise to cover everything necessary but not too exhaustively; and correct as humanly possible in the time allotted to avoid misinformation and the resultant costly corrective changes.

One could ask how one benefits from having or using Specifications? Well, because a good set of coordinated Specifications will save you time and money by: eliminating over-notation on your Drawings; defining and providing clear documentation of the exact quality of materials and systems used; clearly defining the bid scope allowing for tighter, more realistic bids; forcing the designers to more thoroughly think about using the proper materials and systems, and by properly using them for specific Project conditions. Specifications can also be a handy reference on the Project Site. Providing Specifications is also the industry standard of care.

Like any good reference resource, the project document manual has a Table of Contents and each Section (chapter) is organized to present information in a similar manner. Many people are daunted by the manual’s thickness and depth of technical detail...but all one needs to do is use it like a dictionary or encyclopedia and look up the terms that directly concern you.

It may have crossed your mind and you might be asking yourself... How can anyone know so much about the incredible breadth of material knowledge? Another related question is why are so many different people in the construction industry members of CSI – contractors, suppliers, owners, project managers, engineers, lawyers, manufacturers, product representatives, architects and so on? One answer to both is that we specifiers need to

regularly communicate with each member of the industry to stay current and knowledgeable by tapping into that depth of knowledge and experience that all of you possess. We also need that broad perspective at the table when standards are written or modified. Membership is also a great way to find out about upcoming work or hear what does not perform or fails from non-competing and impartial sources. And perhaps best is that CSI presents many opportunities to make lasting relationships with diverse people from many different places.

For more information, contact the author at: jmillerfcsi@shoreham.net

February 2007

©2003-2007, The Construction Specifications Institute

99 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 300, Alexandria VA 22314

Phone: 1-800-689-2900, Local: 703-684-0300, Fax: 703-684-8436, Email: csi@csinet.org