

# Workflow definitions

**Workflow** is based on work items in a business process that are acted on by people (or systems) in roles. Typically the purpose of workflow is to support processes with automation. A **workflow definition** states the sequential or parallel steps, decision points, and participants that make up a process.

A **workflow solution** uses software to execute workflow definitions; it records the status of each workflow as it's completed and may notify human participants, authorize and record their decisions, route forms or documents for review, make automated decisions, and interact with other systems. See our [workflow solution components](#) page for more details on what makes up a workflow solution.

Other terms that we've used in discussing workflow:

- An **enterprise workflow** solution supports many workflows, for different business purposes, and integrates with business systems in the organization. This approach treats support for workflow as an infrastructure resource along the lines of authentication and authorization.
- A **standalone** workflow solution may support many workflows, but doesn't integrate with other business systems. It relies on human participants in workflow to perform tasks such as keying information into a business system.
- The participants in workflow are usually assigned to **roles**, so that more than one participant can easily be authorized to perform the same tasks.
- Standards such as [BPEL](#) and [BPMN](#) attempt to make workflow definitions **portable** between workflow solutions.
- Some workflow is **internal** in that it operates within just one system, to support just for one type of business process, and typically isn't portable to other systems.
- Some workflows are **document-centric**, that is, the process consists primarily of routing a document between actors for completion or review.
- Workflow is analogous to the SOA [orchestration](#) concept, which defines how services will be called to complete a business process.

See Wikipedia for a more general discussion of [workflow](#) and [workflow patterns](#).

Feel free to add other definitions to this page!