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# **General Writing Tips**

## *Structuring Your Writing*

1. Keep your audience in mind so that documents are understandable on the first reading.
2. Language should be:

* Clear.
* Plain.
* Concise.
* Professional.
* Active voice.
* Jargon free.
* Reader focused.

1. Group related ideas together.
2. To the extent possible, keep sentences, paragraphs, and sections brief.
3. Consider dividing a long document into short sections with informative headings.
4. Consider whether a graphic or table is the best way to convey the story. Introduce a graphic or table before it appears in the document.
5. When responding to a written inquiry, begin the letter, “Thank you for your (month, day, year) letter concerning . . . .”

**Note:** Do not type a comma after the year.

1. With a series:

* Put short items first.
* Use bullets for long series.
* Use standard bullet symbols only (e.g., ○, ●, ■,✓).
* Put simple items before complex ones.
* Put the longest item last unless there is a reason not to, such as chronology.

**Example:** He responded to the senator, the governor, and the Huntington’s Disease Society of America.

1. If you refer to a series later in a document, put the items in the same order as the original series.

## *Format*

1. Use the [letter](#letter) format when writing to the public or sending condolences, commendations, and retirement greetings within the agency.
2. Use the [memorandum](#memoranda) format for formal correspondence within the agency.
3. Do not right justify text (“Align Text Right” in Microsoft Word).
4. Use the header function in Microsoft Word to insert header-related information (e.g., titles, dates). Do not place header information into the body of the document.
5. Use the header function to insert “Draft” in red to indicate a document is a draft. Do not use a “draft” watermark.
6. Use the Word 508 Accessibility Toolbar to ensure official documents in electronic format (e.g., webpages) are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

**Note:** See link to 508 Accessibility on menu on the left side of the Writing Center homepage.

1. Show *my* Social Security as:

*my*:

* Italics
* No bold
* No capitals
* Custom color - Red 209, Green 34, Blue 41

Social Security:

* No Italics
* No bold
* Space after “Social”
* Capital S in “Social” and “Security”
* Custom color - Red 0, Green 84, Blue 166

For webpages, use Georgia 11 point font.

## *Sentence Structure*

1. Use present tense whenever possible.
2. Write in the first person whenever possible.
3. Place words carefully. Avoid large gaps between the subject, verb, and object.
4. Do not misplace modifiers. Place modifiers near the word or phrase modified.

**Examples:**

Not: We sent our letter explaining that we denied the claimant benefits on July 1, 2012.

But: On July 1, 2012, we sent our letter explaining that we denied the claimant benefits. (The intent is to tell the reader the date we sent the letter, not the date we denied the claimant benefits.)

Not: The prosecutor sought indictments of four people for alleged voter registration fraud one week before the 2012 election.

But: One week before the 2012 election, the prosecutor sought indictments of four people for alleged voter registration fraud. (The intent is to tell the reader when the prosecutor sought indictments, not when the alleged voter registration fraud occurred.)

1. Avoid dangling modifiers. An introductory phrase or clause modifies the subject of the main clause. A modifier dangles if the introductory phrase or clause does not name a subject and the subject of the clause that follows is not the actor.

To correct a dangling modifier:

* name the subject in the introductory phrase or clause; or
* name the subject in the clause that immediately follows the introductory phrase or clause.

**Example:**

Not: When tackling the quarterback, my collarbone broke. (In this sentence, “my collarbone” tackled the quarterback.)

But:

* When I tackled the quarterback, my collarbone broke. (We added the subject “I” to the introductory phrase.)
* When tackling the quarterback, I broke my collarbone. (We added the subject “I” to the main clause).

## *Word Choice*

1. Words matter. Remember your audience and carefully choose words appropriate for your readers.
2. Unless there is a specific reason to use passive voice (e.g., there is no actor, or the actor is unknown or unimportant), use active voice to make it clear who performs the action. Passive voice makes the subject the recipient of an action instead of the actor.

Not: New policies were implemented. (passive voice)

But: We implemented new policies. (active voice)

**Note:** Passive voice sentences generally include a form of the word “to be” (e.g., is, was, could be, has been) plus a past tense form of the verb.

1. Do not confuse passive voice with past tense. Voice relates to “who, whom, or what,” and tense relates to “when.”

**Examples:**

* By Tuesday, the policy had been approved by the Acting Commissioner. (past tense and passive voice)
* By Tuesday, the Acting Commissioner had approved the policy. (past tense but active voice)

1. Omit needless words. For example, “the fact that” is nearly always unnecessary. Remember Mark Twain’s motto: “When in doubt, strike it out!”
2. Use specific, familiar words.
3. Make sure the pronoun agrees with the noun it replaces.

**Example:** We base a beneficiary’s Social Security benefit amount on his or her (not “their”) lifetime earnings.

**Note:** For more information on pronouns, see the Writing Tips in Motion video, [Pronoun Tips.](http://quicc.ssahosttest.ba.ssa.gov/PronounTips/PronounTips.htm)

1. Avoid nominalizing verbs (i.e., transforming verbs into nouns). Put the action in the verb to make writing stronger, specific, and more concrete. Common endings for nominalized verbs and examples of how to rewrite sentences with nominalized verbs include:

* –ance (performance, inheritance).

Not: Her inheritance was one million dollars.

But: She inherited one million dollars.

* –ence (difference, correspondence).

Not: There was a significant difference of opinion.

But: Their opinions differed significantly.

* –ity (intensity, instability).

Not: The instability of the motor housing did not preclude the completion of the field trials.

But: Even though the motor housing was unstable, the research staff completed the field trials.

* –ion (discussion, investigation).

Not: Our discussion concerned a tax cut.

But: We discussed a tax cut.

* –al (denial, refusal).

Not: We issued a denial of her claim.

But: We denied her claim.

* –ure (failure, departure).

Not: Her failure was complete.

But: She failed completely.

1. When referring to a single component or committee, use a singular pronoun and verb.

**Example:** We will brief you on the task force’s efforts when *it* completes its work.

1. When discussing a person, use as specific a noun as possible.

**Example:** Instead of referring to an “individual,” use “beneficiary,” “applicant,” “claimant,” or “customer.”

1. When referring to persons, use “who” rather than “that” or “which.”

**Example:** Please advise your employees who work flextime that I am cancelling it on Monday.

1. Use “that” and “which” correctly. “That” defines or restricts. If the subordinate clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence because it helps to define the noun, use "that," and do not separate the clauses with a comma. “Which” does not define or restrict. If the subordinate clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence because it only adds clarifying information, use "which" and separate the clauses with a comma.

**Examples:**

* + - We deliver services that meet the changing needs of the public.
    - We want to create a new system thatwill consistently support our business processes.
    - We administer the Supplemental Security Income program, which is a means-tested program.
    - We recently opened the National Hearing Center, which will allow us to capitalize on new technologies.

1. Use “who” and “whom” correctly. “Who” is the subject of a verb. “Whom” is the object of a verb or preposition.

**Note:** To determine whether to use “who” or “whom,” substitute "he" or "him." If "he" would be correct, use "who." If "him" is correct, use "whom."

**Examples:**

* Who wrote the letter? (You would say, “He wrote the letter,” instead of, “Him wrote the letter.”)
* The letter is for whom? (You would say, “The letter is for him,” instead of, “The letter is for he.”)

1. In correspondence, generally refer to SSA as “we,” “us,” and “our.” In situations where it is more appropriate to refer to SSA as “agency,” use a lowercase “a.”

**Note:** While many sources capitalize “agency,” the Acting Commissioner (ACOSS) prefers a lowercase “a.” Follow the ACOSS’ preference when writing agency correspondence. Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements.

1. In text, spell out “percent.” Use the percent symbol (%) in document areas (e.g., charts) without enough space for the word “percent.”
2. Avoid “shall.” If you require an action, use “must.”
3. Avoid “impact” as a verb to mean “influence” or “affect.”
4. Use “assure,” “ensure,” and “insure” correctly.

**Examples:**

* The salesperson assured us we would not lose data.
* We tested the generator to ensure it operates properly.
* We bought a backup generator to insure against power outages.

**Note:** For more information, see the Writing Tips in Motion video, [Assure, Ensure, and Insure.](http://quicc.ssahosttest.ba.ssa.gov/AssureEnsureInsure/AssureEnsureInsure.htm)

1. Use “affect” and “effect” correctly. As a verb, “affect” means “to influence;” as a noun, it means “disposition.” As a verb, “effect” means to “produce a result,” as a noun it means “result.”

**Examples:**

* We found that his medical condition affected his ability to work. (When used as a verb, it is usually “affect.”)
* We discussed the legislation’s effect on our policy. (When used as a noun, it is usually “effect.”)

1. “Data” is plural; “datum” is singular.
2. Do not use “this” without a subject.

**Example:**

Not:He explained how we will implement this.

But: He explained how we will implement this policy.

1. Avoid contractions in formal correspondence (e.g., don’t, they’re, I’ll, it’s).
2. Do not confuse “they’re/their/there,” “it’s/its,” and “you’re/your.”
3. Do not use “his/her” or “and/or.” Instead of “his/her,” use “his or her” or reword the sentence to use the plural pronoun “their.” Instead of “and/or,” use the word that is more appropriate for your sentence.

**Examples:**

Not: A claimant may request an appeal if we deny his/her claim.

But: Claimants may request appeals if we deny their claims.

Not: To move the equipment, we need vans and/or trucks.

But: To move the equipment, we need vans or trucks. (You may want to add “or both.”)

1. Do not use "since" to indicate cause. Use “therefore,” “because,” “accordingly,” “as a result,” etc.

**Example:**

Not: We will follow the policy since the President requires it.

But: We will follow the policy because the President requires it.

1. Avoid “because” at the beginning of a sentence.

**Example:**

Not: Because I have responsibility for personnel issues, I am responding.

But: I am responding because I have responsibility for personnel issues.

1. Use compound words correctly.

**Examples:** followup (noun or adjective), follow up (verb), full-time, website, workyear, timeframe, nationwide, worldwide, agency-wide, government-wide.

1. Use people-first language, which describes what a person “has” instead of what a person “is.”

**Examples:**

* Write “suffered a brain injury,” not “brain injured.”
* Write “person with a disability,” not “disabled person.”

## *Acronyms and Abbreviations*

1. Define the acronym the first time you refer to the subject and follow with the acronym or abbreviation in parentheses without quotes around the acronym.
2. If the word or phrase is plural the first time it appears in the document, show the acronym in the singular form in parentheses. However, when using the acronym later in the document, use the plural form if applicable. The same applies to possessives.

**Examples:**

* We conducted more continuing disability reviews (CDR) this year than we did last year. The frequency of CDRs depends on the likelihood that a recipient’s medical condition will change.
* We appreciate the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) assistance with this matter. Our representatives will continue to work closely with OPM’s contacts.

1. Do not use the acronym or abbreviation if you refer to the subject only once.
2. Be judicious with the use of acronyms in documents for the public.
3. If you use an acronym in both a cover document and in an attachment or enclosure to that document, spell out the acronym the first time it appears in both the cover document and in the attachment or enclosure. Follow the assumption that the cover document and the attachment or enclosure could be separate documents. In a large document that consists of several independent sections, treat each section as a separate document and spell out the acronym the first time it is used.
4. When you use an acronym or abbreviation beginning with the letter a, e, f, h, i, l, m, n, o, r, s, or x (each having a vowel sound), use the indefinite article “an” unless the acronym or abbreviation starts with a consonant and is pronounced as a single word.

**Examples:** an FCC ruling, an RFP, an OSHA employee, a FEMA trailer, a HUD regulation.

1. United States

* Spell out United States when using it in a sentence containing the name of another country.
* Use the abbreviation “U.S.” when using it as an adjective, but spell it out when using it as a noun.

**Examples:** U.S. Government, U.S. Congress, U.S. Army, U.S. foreign policy, U.S. citizen, United States Code (official title), foreign policy of the United States, temperatures vary in the United States.

1. Use “e.g.” and “i.e.” correctly: “i.e.” means “that is,” and “e.g.” means “for example.”

**Examples:**

* Dispose of water bottles in the proper container (i.e., the brown bin).
* Do not place recyclable items (e.g., cans, paper, water bottles) in the trash.

1. When you refer to the Social Security Act throughout the document as the “Act,” establish the acronym as “Social Security Act (Act)” not “Social Security Act (the Act).”

## *Punctuation*

1. Commas

* If there are three or more items in a list, use a comma after the next to last item.

**Example:** pens, pencils, and markers

* Do not use a comma after a date unless another comma rule applies.

**Examples:**

* + January 23, 2010 was a cold, snowy day.
  + The June 13, 2007 court decision was surprising.
  + On January 13, 2010, we received 24 inches of snow. (Use a comma because “On January 13, 2010” is an introductory phrase.)

**Note:** While many sources use a comma following a complete date, the ACOSS prefers no comma following a complete date unless another comma rule applies. For a more complete discussion of the use of commas when writing a date, refer to our preferred standard writing guide, *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.  B. White.

**Exception:** Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements.

* Use a comma between independent clauses unless the clauses are very short.
* Use a comma to set off parenthetic words, phrases, or clauses.

**Examples:**

* + Fortunately, Congress has understood our challenges.
  + This past year, we increased the number of field office staff.
  + The agency, after extensive testing, found that the tool was not suitable for disability evaluation.

1. Watch punctuation (semicolon or comma) with the words “however” and “therefore.”

**Examples:**

* The pages, however, are blank. (one complete thought)
* The report, therefore, is overdue. (one complete thought)
* You are finished; however, I have more to accomplish. (two complete thoughts)
* The report was due yesterday; therefore, it is now overdue. (two complete thoughts)

1. Watch punctuation with the word “and.” Do not use a comma before “and” unless an independent clause follows it, except as discussed previously for items in a series.

**Examples:**

* Please review the memorandum and the attachment.
* We agree and will consider your proposal. (compound verbal clause)
* We agree with your suggestion, and the committee is reviewing the proposal carefully. (two complete independent clauses)

1. Consider using dashes (two hyphens) to emphasize a point. However, using this tool too often in a document lessens the effect.
2. Use a hyphen to:

* Write fractions.
* Form some compound words.

**Note:** Refer to the dictionary or the [Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?granuleId=&packageId=GPO-STYLEMANUAL-2008&fromBrowse=true) to determine how to write a compound word. Compound words can be two words (time zone), one word (timekeeper), or hyphenated (cross-examine).

* Divide a word at the end of a line.
* Form words ending with the suffix “-elect.”
* Write numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.
* Connect two or more words functioning as an adjective immediately before a noun.
* Write agency-wide and government-wide.
* Form words with the prefixes “all-,” “ex-,” and “self-.”

**Exceptions:** Do not hyphenate selfish and selfless.

**Examples:** self-help, ex-mayor, one-fourth, president-elect, well-known writer

1. Use one space after commas or semicolons.
2. Use two spaces after colons and between sentences.
3. In the salutation of a letter, use a colon following the surname, not a comma.
4. Punctuation with quotation marks:

* Place periods and commas inside the quotation marks.
* Place colons and semicolons outside the quotation marks.
* Place question marks:
  + Inside the quotation marks if the question is part of the quotation.
  + Outside the quotation marks if the question is not part of the quotation.

1. Punctuate between the day and the year, not between the month and the year.

**Examples:** January 2009 and January 7, 2009, not January, 2009

## *Capitalization*

1. Capitalize “federal” when using it as a synonym for United States or another sovereign power.
2. Capitalize “government” when using it as part of a proper name or as the proper name.

**Example:** The Federal Government provides a wide variety of benefits to its citizens.

1. Do not capitalize “government” when referring to governments in the general sense.

**Example:** Federal, State, and municipal governments have taxation authority.

1. Capitalize “state” when using it with a proper noun and when using it alone to refer to a specific State or to a group of States.

**Examples:** New York State, the State, State of Illinois, State rights, State and local coverage, Maine State Agency.

1. Do not capitalize “state” when using it as part of a compound word or when it has a general meaning.

**Examples:** tristate, upstate, statewide, state of the art, church and state.

1. Capitalize the acronym “FY” for fiscal year.

**Example:** fiscal year (FY) 2010

**Note:** While some sources use FY without a year (e.g., “…in each FY, we budget….”), the ACOSS prefers spelling out “fiscal year” when not followed by a specific year(s). Follow the ACOSS’ preference when writing agency correspondence. Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements.

1. Do not capitalize these words: spring, summer, winter, fall, autumn (i.e., names of seasons), national, federally, congressional, governmental, fiscal year.
2. Generally, capitalize these words: Congress, Federal Government, Internet, Intranet, Nation (when used as a synonym for United States).
3. Unless you are referring to a specific office, do not capitalize such terms as disability determination service, hearing office, regional office, field office.

**Examples:** the Baltimore Hearing Office, the Albuquerque Field Office, a field office in Georgia.

1. Unless part of an official name, do not capitalize such terms as office, division, branch, headquarters, main complex.
2. Capitalize “administrative law judge” only if you are referring to a specific individual by name.
3. Do not capitalize medical terms except for conditions that contain a proper noun.

**Examples:**

* Her grandmother has Parkinson’s disease.
* You said this child has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and a learning disability.

1. The ACOSS prefers that we capitalize “Title” when referring to titles in the Social Security Act (e.g., Title II, Title XVI, Title XVIII). Follow the ACOSS’ preference when writing agency correspondence. Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements.

## *Numbers*

1. Spell out all numbers that appear at the beginning of a sentence.

**Example:** Twenty-nine people attended the meeting.

1. Use Roman numerals when referring to titles in the Social Security Act (e.g., Title II, Title XVI, Title XVIII) in our correspondence.
2. Spell out numbers under 10, except when expressing money or measurement. However, if 2 or more numbers appear in a sentence and 1 of them is 10 or more, use numerals (i.e., number symbols, such as 7, 22, 1500) for each number.

**Note:** While many sources use numerals when expressing time, the ACOSS prefers we spell out numbers under 10 (e.g., one o’clock, not 1 o’clock).

**Exception:** Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements.

## *Separation of Words at the End of a Line*

1. Do not separate a number from the item to which it refers (i.e., ensure that the number and the item are on the same line).

**Examples:** 700 claims, not 700 (next line) claims.

1. Do not separate a person’s title from the surname.

**Examples:** Mrs. Jones, not Mrs. (next line) Jones.

1. If necessary, separate components of a person’s name after the middle initial.

**Example:** Mr. John A. (next line) Smith.

1. Do not separate the month and day of the month. If necessary, type the year on the next line.

**Example:** January 1, (next line) 2009.

1. Do not separate figures, letters, or symbols from their accompanying words when used as a group.

**Example:** section 505, not section (next line) 505.

1. Do not divide a two-part city or State name on two lines.

**Example:** Rhode Island, not Rhode (next line) Island.

## *Edit, Edit, and Edit Again*

We cannot stress enough the importance of editing. Once you complete your document, whether it is a short email, a memorandum to an executive, or a letter to someone outside the agency, edit, edit, and edit again. Review the document for format, content, spelling, grammar, and plain language usage. Incorporate your changes and review again. Repeat as many times as necessary to produce a well-written document. Consider asking a colleague to review your document. Often a fresh set of eyes will pick up minor errors you may overlook after reviewing the document numerous times.

# **Business Email Guidelines**

## *General*

1. Use formal language, punctuation, complete sentences, and correct grammar.
2. Use spelling and grammar checks.
3. Avoid using stationery backgrounds.
4. Do not use all CAPITAL letters. An email in all capital letters is hard to read and may appear to the recipient that you are shouting.
5. Tone

* Keep in mind that you cannot easily convey tone in an email; therefore, select your words carefully.
* When in doubt, leave the humor out.
* Do not compose an email you would not want your manager or coworkers to read.
* Cool off before composing an email. If you are angry when you compose your email, save it as a draft and come back to it later.
* [Stop and review your email before you send](http://www.businessemailetiquette.com/135/stop-reread-and-think-before-you-send). You may want your manager or a co-worker to review the draft message.

1. Read Receipts

If you use read receipts, keep in mind:

* Read receipts are not always reliable because users can decline them.
* Read receipts irritate many recipients because they view them as an invasion of privacy.

## *Email Message Format*

1. General

* Use rich text or HyperText Markup Language (HTML) instead of plain text. Rich text and HTML allow you to use formatting options, such as bolding, bullets, colored fonts, etc.
* Exception: Use plain text if you know the recipient’s email application does not support rich text or HTML.
* Use an easy-to-read font and font size.

**Examples:** Arial 12-point font, Times New Roman 12-point font

* Use an easy-to-read font color, such as black or dark blue.

**Exception:** It is acceptable to use a font color other than black or dark blue when you want to emphasize text.

1. To

Carefully consider whom to include as a recipient. Make sure you send or reply to the correct person.

1. Subject Line

* Use clear and meaningful words so the recipients can quickly determine the purpose of the email.
* Begin the subject line with words such as “ACTION,” “REPLY,” and “INFO” when appropriate.

1. Professional Signature

* If you add a signature to your email, keep it short and simple. The signature should include your name, title, component, and phone number.
* If you add quotes or messages after your signature, keep them professional (i.e., avoid silly, inappropriate, or offensive messages).

# **Letter Guidelines**

1. *General*Control/Work Request Numbers

Do not show Control/Work Request numbers on documents for release outside the agency. Control/Work Request numbers should appear only on memoranda.

1. Commissioner’s Priority Correspondence (CPC) Letters

* CPC letters are usually from Members of Congress and determined to be a priority or urgent in nature.
* The Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Legislation and Congressional Affairs (DCLCA) prepares most of the draft responses to CPCs. DCLCA sends draft responses to the Office of Executive Operations (OEO) through the agency’s Assignment Correspondence and Tracking (ACT) system, for the Office of the Commissioner’s (OC) review process. (DCLCA obtains input and clearances from involved components through ACT before submitting the draft to OEO.)
* Responses should include pertinent information and any necessary background to facilitate processing.

## *Templates*

1. Use the letter template format for external correspondence when writing to the public; Members of Congress; Federal, State, and local government officials; and advocacy groups. Also, use the letter format for condolences, commendations, and retirements within the agency.

**Click on:** [Sample Letter](#Sample_Letter).

1. Use the blank electronic templates of letterheads for the COSS’, Deputy Commissioner’s (DCOSS), and component Deputy Commissioners’ correspondence.
2. For letters for the ACOSS’ signature, use the Commissioner [Letterhead Baltimore](http://quicc.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov/QUICCStationeryTemplates/COSS_Letterhead_Balt_v01.11.dotx) that has “The Commissioner” printed at the top under the heading “SOCIAL SECURITY.”

## *Letter Format*

1. General

* Prepare letters in Microsoft Word using Times New Roman 12-point font. If you need to use another font or font size, please contact OEO.
* Left justify the text (i.e., “Align Text Left” in Microsoft Word).
* Left and right margins are at least 1 inch and not more than 1¼ inches.
* Bottom margin is at least 1 inch.

1. Date

Leave the date blank; when signed, OEO will date the letter.

1. Address

* In general, begin the address five lines below the last line of the letterhead (i.e., five lines below “The Commissioner”); adjust as needed to center the letter on the page.
* If the address is not included in the letter (e.g., for courtesy copies) provide the address to OEO separately.
* Use the addressee’s appropriate title. Refer to [Examples of Forms of Address](#Examples_of_Forms_of_Address) and the [GPO Style Manual](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?granuleId=&packageId=GPO-STYLEMANUAL-2008&fromBrowse=true) as needed.
* If titles or names of organizations go beyond the center of the page, place the remaining text on the next line and indent two spaces to indicate a continuation.
* Do not abbreviate Street, Avenue, Place, Apartment, Road, etc.
* Do not use a period in the abbreviations NW, SW, NE, and SE for sections of a city or in a street address. Spell out North, South, East, and West at all times.

**Examples:** West 49th Street, 1026 Utah Avenue, NW

* Use the [U.S. Postal Service](https://www.usps.com/send/official-abbreviations.htm) official two-letter abbreviation for the State/possession. Capitalize each letter of the abbreviation.

**Note:** Do not use a period after the D and C in Washington, DC

* Leave two spaces between the State and ZIP Code.
* Attention Line

If the incoming letter requests we address our response to someone’s attention, include an attention line on the envelope. Do not include it in the letter.

**Example Envelope Address:**

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski

United States Senator

Attn: Ms. Kristen Soper

1629 Thames Street, Suite 400

Baltimore, MD 21231

1. Salutation

* Leave one blank line between the address and salutation.
* Use the addressee’s appropriate title. Refer to [Examples of Forms of Address](#Examples_of_Forms_of_Address) and the [GPO Style Manual](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?granuleId=&packageId=GPO-STYLEMANUAL-2008&fromBrowse=true) as needed.
* Use the addressee’s surname, not first name, in the salutation (e.g., Dear Senator Baucus).
* Use a colon after the surname.

1. Body of Letter

* Leave one blank line between the salutation and body of the letter.
* If responding to an incoming letter, include in the first sentence: “Thank you for your (month, day, year) letter . . . .”

**Note:** Do not type a comma after the year.

* When responding to an inquiry on behalf of the ACOSS, include a statement in the opening paragraph, such as, “I am responding on Acting Commissioner Colvin’s behalf because . . . .”
* If responding two or more months after the inquiry, add the following statement to the first paragraph: “I regret the delay in responding.”
* In the introductory paragraph, briefly restate the major issues raised in the incoming inquiry.
* The letter should respond to all points raised in the incoming inquiry and in the same order to the extent possible.
* Answers to questions should be, direct, to the point, and free from ambiguity.
* The letter should “tell our story,” (i.e., put the response in context).
* Letters should be succinct⎯one page in length if possible.
* For lengthy technical issues (e.g., chronologies) enclose a fact sheet or report (e.g., instead of a seven page letter, write a one page cover letter with a six page report).
* Unless needed for clarification, avoid detailed explanations.
* Use smooth, clear transitions between paragraphs and ideas.
* For succeeding pages of letters, use headers to insert the name of the addressee and the page number at the top of the page at the left margin.

**Examples of page 2 header for letters:**

Page 2 – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel  
Page 2 – Mr. David Mosso

1. Closing Paragraph

Use a closing paragraph to thank the writer for sharing ideas and concerns, offer additional assistance, provide an agency contact, etc., as applicable.

**Example:** If you have further questions, please contact me or have your staff contact Scott Frey, our Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030.

1. Complimentary Close/Signature Block

* Leave one blank line between the last sentence of the letter and the complimentary close.
* Type the complimentary close and signature block at the center of the page.
* Type the signing official’s name on the fourth line (four returns) below the complimentary close.
* Use the following signature block for ACOSS letters:

Sincerely,

(three blank lines)

Carolyn W. Colvin

Acting Commissioner

1. Enclosures and Courtesy Copies (cc)

* If you send materials with a letter, leave one blank line after the signature block and type “Enclosure” or “Enclosures” at the left margin. (Use “Attachment” for memoranda.)
* Do not tab enclosures.
* Show the name of the addressee and the page number at the top left margin of the enclosure.

**Examples:**

* + For one enclosure that is one page long:

Enclosure – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

* + For one enclosure that is two pages long:

Enclosure – Page 1 – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

Enclosure – Page 2 – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

* + For two enclosures where the first enclosure is one page and the second enclosure is two pages:

Enclosure 1 – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

Enclosure 2 – Page 1 – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

Enclosure 2 – Page 2 – The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

* Ensure that enclosed photocopied material is complete and of professional quality.

**Note:** You may need to use a color copier to accurately display color-coded material (e.g., charts, graphs).

* For courtesy copies:

If sharing courtesy copies of the letter, type “cc:” at the left margin two lines below the signature block or, if applicable, two lines after “Enclosure” as follows:

Carolyn W. Colvin

Acting Commissioner

Enclosure

cc:

Arnold Dunn (Full Name)

**Exception:** For letters to Members of Congress, indicate in the last paragraph that we are also sending the information to Senator or Representative (last name).

**Note:** Do not include agency employee names as recipients of courtesy copies even when the ACOSS, DCOSS, or other staff will receive copies of the letter.

The Social Security Administration Logo

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

## Sample Letter

The Honorable Mike Kelly  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Kelly:

Thank you for your June 11, 2008 letter regarding the differences in the amount beneficiaries with disabilities may earn and still receive monthly cash benefits. We also received a June 16 letter from John Smith clarifying that he is asking that we remove the monthly earnings cap. We are sending a copy of this response to Mr. Smith.

The Social Security Disability Insurance program provides monthly cash benefits to workers who are blind or disabled and to their dependents. Applicants must establish that they are disabled or blind based on a medical impairment and that they are unable to perform work activity above the substantial gainful activity (SGA) level. Statute establishes SGA levels, which adjust annually based on increases in the national wage index.

Before 1977, there was a uniform SGA level for beneficiaries regardless of whether their disability was blindness or another condition. In the Social Security Amendments of 1977, Congress established a higher SGA level for beneficiaries who receive disability benefits based on blindness. Because statute mandates SGA levels, we have no authority to eliminate those levels, as Mr. Smith suggested.

I hope this information is helpful. If I may be of further assistance, please contact me, or your staff may contact Scott Frey, our Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030. Mr. Frey is available to meet with your staff if requested.

Sincerely,

Carolyn W. Colvin

Acting Commissioner

cc:

John Smith

# **Memorandum Guidelines**

## *General*

We use memoranda to communicate officially within our agency. Use letters, not memoranda, to correspond with the public, Members of Congress, State or other Federal government agencies, and external organizations.

## *Templates*

1. Use the electronic [Formal Memorandum](http://quicc.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov/QUICCStationeryTemplates/Formal_Memorandum_v01.11.dotx) template for memoranda addressed to the ACOSS or DCOSS.

**Click on:** [Sample Memorandum](#Sample_Memorandum).

1. Although we use email for most internal communications, the [Informal Memorandum](http://quicc.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov/QUICCStationeryTemplates/Informal_Memo_v01.11.dotx) template is available for communications between components below the ACOSS and DCOSS levels.

## *Memorandum Format*

1. General

* Prepare memoranda in Microsoft Word using Times New Roman 12-point font.
* Do not right justify (“Align Text Right” in Microsoft Word) the text.
* For succeeding pages, show the page number at the bottom center or right of the page. Be consistent in page number placement throughout the document. Use a footer to insert the page number.

1. Date

Leave the date blank; when signed, OEO will date the memorandum.

1. To

* Show the name, title, and organization of addressee(s) (e.g., Executive Staff; Senior Staff). Show "See Below" for more than two addressees.

**Click on:** [Sample “See Below" Memorandum](#Sample_See_Below_Memorandum).

* If titles or names of organizations go beyond the center of the line, bring the remaining text to the next line and indent two spaces to show a continuation.

1. From

Show the name, title, and organization of the sender.

**Note:** Do not show the sender’s name at the end of the memorandum.

1. Subject

* Indicate the subject and purpose of the memorandum (e.g., ACTION, DECISION, INFORMATION, REPLY, INVITATION).
* When a memorandum is in response to an incoming memorandum, repeat the subject of the incoming memorandum and refer to its date.

**Example:**

SUBJECT: Executive Assurance Statements for fiscal year (FY) 2012 (Your Memorandum Dated 07/30/12)⎯REPLY.

1. Reply Requested

If a reply is requested by a certain date, leave one blank line space after the SUBJECT and type the following, centering on the page:

REPLY REQUESTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Attachments and Courtesy Copies (cc)

* If you send materials with a memorandum, leave one blank line after the last paragraph and type “Attachment” or “Attachments” at the left margin.
* Use tabs for two or more attachments and identify the contents of each.

**Example:**

Attachments:

Tab A – Fact Sheet

Tab B – Background

* For courtesy copies, type “cc:” at the left margin two lines after the last paragraph or two lines after “Attachment” if applicable.

1. Decision Line

For a DECISION memorandum, include a decision line for the addressee to indicate approval or disapproval. Type the DECISION line after the last line of the memorandum and before “Attachments” or “cc:.” If applicable, include a space for the ACOSS or DCOSS to provide comments.

The Social Security Administration Logo

Social Security

## Sample Memorandum

Memorandum

Date: Refer To:  
20131007-0130726

To: Carolyn W. Colvin  
Acting Commissioner

From: John Smith  
Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review

Subject: Establishing a Permanent Remote Site in Bemidji, Minnesota--DECISION

ISSUE

The Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) requests your approval to establish a stand-alone permanent remote site (PRS) in Bemidji, Minnesota.

DISCUSSION

The Bemidji hearing site is currently a temporary remote site (TRS) for the Fargo Hearing Office (HO). We currently hold hearings in the Bemidji District Office (DO) conference room. A stand-alone permanent remote hearing site would increase efficiency through the use of the Electronic Folder and video teleconferencing.

We consider three factors for establishing a PRS: distance traveled from the HO, workload volume, and the cost of establishing a PRS. The proposed PRS is approximately 151 miles from the Fargo HO, which exceeds the distance requirement of 75 miles.

To establish a PRS, the workload must be sufficient to support at least one docket of 25 to 30 cases per month. While the proposed site does not meet the workload criteria, the harsh winters in this area make travel difficult and at times virtually impossible from November through March. In fiscal year (FY) 2008, the Bemidji service area received 239 cases, an average of 20 cases per month. So far in FY 2013, from October 2012 through March 2013, the service area has received approximately 188 cases, an average of 19 cases per month. In FY 2012, the Fargo HO incurred $16,598 in travel costs (including rental costs, vocational and medical experts, and claimant/representative travel costs) for the Bemidji service area. So far in FY 2013 the Fargo HO has incurred approximately $20,901 in total travel costs to service the Bemidji area. We project that administrative law judges (ALJ) from the Fargo HO will make 14 trips annually, and ALJ travel costs alone will amount to $10,654, or an average of $761 per trip. The proposed PRS would be more cost-effective because there would be no travel costs for expert witnesses and representatives. The total first-year cost to establish the PRS, including rent, equipment, furniture, and guard service, would be approximately $179,190. If approved, we would request the necessary funds in our FY 2014 President’s Budget submission.

In addition to workload, distance, and cost considerations, a TRS presents security and service delivery concerns. The DO conference room is not ideal for holding hearings because it requires us to escort the claimants, representatives, witnesses, and vocational and medical experts through the DO’s secured space to get to the conference room. This creates an obvious security issue.

We considered collocating the TRS with the Bemidji District Office, but that office did not have available space.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend the establishment of a stand-alone PRS in Bemidji, MN.

DECISION

I grant ODAR approval to establish a stand-alone PRS in Bemidji, MN.

Approved\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Comments\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Attachments:

Tab A -- Request for Space (SF-81)

Tab B -- Space Computation Sheets (3)

cc:

Deputy Commissioner for Operations

2

The Social Security Administration Logo

Social Security

## Sample "See Below" Memorandum

Memorandum

Date: March 1, 2013 Refer To:

To: See Below

From: Katherine Loo

Assistant Regional Counsel

Subject: How to Address a “See Below” Memorandum

The body of the memorandum goes here. Make sure you always show the addressees on the first page.

Please let me know if you have questions.

ADDRESSEES:

Jane Smith, Regional Commissioner, Region IX

Mary Jones, Executive Officer, ORC, IO

Gary White, Director, Center for Disability

John Doe, Chief, CCPRB1, Appeals Council

# **The EMAC System**

We use the EMAC system to track assignments and correspondence, and to maintain copies of agency correspondence and responses.

## *Component Submissions*

1. Forward all materials prepared for the ACOSS, DCOSS, or others in OC to “OC Controls” through EMAC.
2. Include due dates for controls submitted for OC clearance. Follow these guidelines in setting due dates: 15 business days for documents of 15 or fewer pages; 20 business days for documents of over 15 pages.
3. If the draft document is intended for an external recipient, do not include any reference number on the document. Include an EMAC control number on memoranda only.
4. If a document is time sensitive or needs quick handling, include a note in the Description or Assignment Instructions field in EMAC explaining its urgency. Consider alerting OEO by phone to any special circumstances.
5. Include pertinent information and necessary background with draft letters and decision memoranda.

**Examples:**

* Fact sheets provided by components other than the drafting component.
* Any Program Operations Manual System (POMS) references or statutes other than the Social Security Act cited in the document.

## *Component Clearances*

1. Forward all clearances electronically via EMAC.
2. Where appropriate, reflect any component concurrences to draft responses and memoranda and explain why you did not adopt a particular comment.

# **Examples of Forms of Address**[[1]](#footnote-1)

| ***ADDRESSEE*** | ***ADDRESS ON LETTER & ENVELOPE*** | ***SALUTATION & COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE*** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| THE WHITE HOUSE |  |  |
| The President | The President The White House Washington, DC 20500 | Dear Mr./Madam President:  Respectfully,  *or* The President:  Respectfully submitted, |
| Spouse of the President | Mr./Mrs. (full name) The White House Washington, DC 20500 | Dear Mr./Mrs. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Assistant to the President | The Honorable (full name) Assistant to the President The White House Washington, DC 20500 | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Former President | The Honorable (full name) (local address) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| The Vice President | **Formal:**  The Vice President  The White House  Washington, DC 20501  **Informal:**  The Honorable (full name) The Vice President   of the United States Washington, DC 20501 | Dear Mr./Madam Vice President:  Sincerely, |
| Former Vice President | The Honorable (full name) (no title) (local address) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Director, Office of Management and Budget | The Honorable (full name) Director, Office of Management  and Budget Washington, DC 20503 | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY |  |  |
| The Chief Justice | The Chief Justice The Supreme Court Washington, DC 20543 | Dear Chief Justice:  Sincerely, |
| THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY (cont’d) |  |  |
| Associate Justice | Justice (surname) The Supreme Court Washington, DC 20543 | Dear Justice (surname):  Sincerely, |
| The Clerk of the Supreme Court | The Clerk of the Supreme Court The Supreme Court Washington, DC 20543 | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| THE CONGRESS |  |  |
| President of the Senate | The Honorable (full name) President of the Senate Washington, DC 20510 | Dear Mr./Madam President:  Sincerely |
| President of the Senate Pro Tempore | The Honorable (full name) President Pro Tempore  of the Senate  Washington, DC 20510 | Dear Senator (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Speaker of the House of Representatives | The Honorable (full name) Speaker of the House   of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Mr./Madam Speaker:  Sincerely, |
| Majority Leader United States Senate | The Honorable (full name) Majority Leader United States Senate Washington, DC 20510 | Dear Mr./Madam Leader:  Sincerely, |
| Minority Leader United States Senate | The Honorable (full name) Minority Leader United States Senate Washington, DC 20510 | Dear Mr./Madam Leader:  Sincerely, |
| United States Senator | The Honorable (full name) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510  or The Honorable (full name) United States Senator (Home State office address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Senator (surname):  Sincerely, |
| THE CONGRESS (cont'd) |  |  |
| Majority Leader House of Representatives | The Honorable (full name) Majority Leader House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Mr./Madam Leader:  Sincerely, |
| Minority Leader House of Representatives | The Honorable (full name) Minority Leader House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Mr./Madam Leader:  Sincerely, |
| United States Representative | The Honorable (full name) House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515  *or* The Honorable (full name) Member, United States House   of Representatives (local address) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Committee Chairman | The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Committee on (name) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510  *or* The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Committee on (name) House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Mr./ Madam Chairman/ Chair: Madam Chairwoman:   Sincerely, |
| Subcommittee  Chairman | The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Subcommittee on (name) (name of parent Committee) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510  or The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Subcommittee on (name) (name of parent Committee) House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Mr./Madam Chairman/Chair:  Madam Chairwoman:  Sincerely, |
| Joint Committee  Chairman | The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Joint Committee on  (name) Congress of the United States Washington, DC (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Madam Chairman/Chair:  Madam Chairwoman:  Sincerely, |
| THE CONGRESS (cont'd) |  |  |
| Senator-elect Representative-elect | The Honorable (full name) United States Senator-elect (address, if given) or  Care of the United States Senate Washington, DC 20510  or The Honorable (full name) Representative-elect (address, if given) or  Care of the House   of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Senator-elect (surname):  Sincerely,     Dear Congressman/Congresswoman-elect (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Office of a Deceased Senator   or Representative | Office of the late Senator (full name) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510  or Office of the late Representative (full name) House of Representative Washington, DC 20515 | Sirs/Dear Mr./Ms. (name of contact):  Sincerely, |
| LEGISLATIVE AGENCY |  |  |
| Comptroller General | The Honorable (full name) Comptroller General  of the United States Washington, DC 20548 | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS & INDEPENDENT AGENCIES |  |  |
| Cabinet Members | The Honorable (full name) Secretary of (Department) Washington, DC (ZIP Code)  *or* The Honorable (full name) Attorney General Washington, DC 20530 | Dear Mr./Madam Secretary:  Sincerely,   Dear Mr./Madam Attorney General:  Sincerely, |
| Deputy Secretaries Assistant Secretaries Under Secretaries | The Honorable (full name) Deputy Secretary of (name of Department) Washington, DC (ZIP Code)  *or* The Honorable (full name) Assistant Secretary of (name of Department) Washington, DC (ZIP Code)  *or* The Honorable (full name) Under Secretary of (name of Department) Washington, DC (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Postmaster General | The Honorable (full name) Postmaster General Washington, DC 20260 | Dear Mr./Madam Postmaster General:  Sincerely, |
| EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS & INDEPENDENT AGENCIES (cont’d) |  |  |
| Head of a Federal Agency, Authority, or Board | The Honorable (full name) (title) (agency name) (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Chairman of a Commission (or Board) | The Honorable (full name) Chairman, (commission name) (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Madam Chairman/Chair:  Madam Chairwoman:  Sincerely, |
| STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS |  |  |
| Governor of State | The Honorable (full name) Governor of (State) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Governor (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Lieutenant Governor | The Honorable (full name) Lieutenant Governor of (State) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| State Senator | The Honorable (full name) (State) Senate (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| State Representative Assemblyman Delegate | The Honorable (full name) (State) House of Representatives (City) (State) (ZIP Code)  *or* The Honorable (full name) (State) Assembly (City) (State) (ZIP Code)  *or* The Honorable (full name) (State) House of Delegates (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Mayor | The Honorable (full name) Mayor of (City) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mayor (surname):  Sincerely, |
| PHYSICIANS & LAWYERS |  |  |
| Physician | (full name), M.D. (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Dr. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Lawyer | Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (full name) Attorney at Law (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| MULTIPLE ADDRESSEES |  |  |
| One Woman and One Man | Mrs./Miss/Ms. (full name) and Mr. (full name) (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname) and Mr. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Two or More Men | Mr. (full name) and Mr. (full name (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mr. (surname) and Mr. (surname):  Sincerely,  *or* Dear Messrs. (surname) and (surname):  Sincerely,  *or*  If same-sex couple with shared last name: Dear Mr. and Mr. (surname):  Sincerely, |
| Two or More Women | Mrs./Miss/Ms. (full name) and Mrs./Miss/Ms. (full name) (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname) and Mrs./Miss/Ms. (surname):  Sincerely,  *or*  If same-sex couple with shared last name: Dear Ms./Mrs. and Ms./Mrs. (surname):   Sincerely, |
| OTHER |  |  |
| Unknown Gender | Leslie Smith (address) (City) (State) (ZIP Code) | Dear Leslie Smith:  Sincerely, |

**What’s New**

**When we update the QUICC handbook, we will provide a brief description on the chart below. The Appendix provides more details about the changes.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Version** | **Changes** | **Date** |
| Version 2, October 2013 | ACOSS preferences updated on Appendix (pages 37 - 39)  To establish version control, we added the version number and date to the bottom of each page  Added “What’s New” page | October 2013 |
| Version 2, March 2014 | ACOSS prefers to hyphenate agency-wide and government-wide  ACOSS provided guidance for salutation for same-sex couples sharing last name | March 2014 |
|  | ACOSS provided guidance for *my* Social Security.  Replaced ACT references with EMAC references |  |

**[Appendix](#contents)**

**QUICC Handbook Change Summary**

Listed below are the changes made to the QUICC Handbook following the passage of the Plain Writing Act of 2010. In addition, to establish version control, we added the version number and date to the bottom of each page.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Version & Date | Changes | Author |
| Version 1  11/22/10 | Made several non-substantive changes to the handbook. Changes include aligning the handbook to the guidelines, formatting updates, and adding a “QUICC Handbook Change Summary.”  Added the “Business Email Guidelines” section.  Added an “Edit, Edit, and Edit Again” section. | Sheri Lesher |
| Version 2  5/13/13 | Overall changes   * Table of Contents expanded * Reorganized material * Hyperlinks added throughout the document as appropriate   Specific Item Changes   * When responding to a written inquiry, we should always begin with “Thank you for your (month, day, year) letter . . . .” Previously, used only on congressional responses * Added the following information about a series of items:   + - * + Use bullets for long series.         + Use standard bullet symbols only (e.g., ○, ●, ■,✓) * Use the Word 508 Accessibility Toolbar to ensure official documents in electronic format (e.g., webpages) are accessible to individuals with disabilities.”   + - * **Note:** See link to 508 Accessibility on menu on the left side of the Writing Center homepage. * Added the phrase, “Write in the first person whenever possible.” * Expanded the definition of passive voice with “Unless there is a specific reason to use passive voice (e.g., there is no actor, or the actor is unknown or unimportant), use active voice to make it clear who performs the action. Passive voice makes the subject the recipient of an action instead of the actor.” * Added instructions not to use “his/hers.” * Added the following instructions, “Do not use "since" to indicate cause. Use “therefore,” “because,” “accordingly,” “as a result,” etc. * Added the following instructions, “Use “e.g.” and “i.e.” correctly: “i.e.” means” “that is,” and “e.g.” means “for example.” * Clarified punctuation with quotation marks with the following: * Place periods and commas inside the quotation marks. * Place colons and semicolons outside the quotation marks. * Place question marks: * Inside the quotation marks if the question is part of the quotation. * Outside the quotation marks if the question is not part of the quotation. * Punctuate between the day and the year, not between the month and the year.” * Fiscal year: **Note:** While some sources use FY without a year (e.g., “…in each FY, we budget….”), the ACOSS prefers spelling out “fiscal year” when not followed by a specific year(s). Follow the ACOSS’ preference when writing agency correspondence. Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements. * Unless part of an official name, do not capitalize such terms as office, division, branch, headquarters, main complex, disability determination service, regional. * The ACOSS prefers that we capitalize “Title” when referring to titles in the Social Security Act (e.g., Title II, Title XVI, Title XVIII). Follow the ACOSS’ preference when writing agency correspondence. Documents written for formal publications that have their own rules, such as the Federal Register, are exempt from this standard, and you should follow the publication’s requirements. * Consider asking a colleague to review your document. Often a fresh set of eyes will pick up minor errors you may overlook after reviewing the document numerous times. * Do not compose an email you would not want your manager or coworkers to read. * [Stop and review your email before you send](http://www.businessemailetiquette.com/135/stop-reread-and-think-before-you-send). You may want your manager or a co-worker to review the draft message. * Do not show Control/Work Request numbers on documents for release outside the agency. Control/Work Request numbers should appear only on memoranda. * When responding to an inquiry on behalf of the ACOSS, include a statement in the opening paragraph, such as, “I am responding on Acting Commissioner Colvin’s behalf because …” **Note**: Use of this statement is appropriate when the signature is an individual not the plural signature of “Social Security Administration.” * **Note:** Do not include agency employee names as recipients of courtesy copies even when the ACOSS, DCOSS, or other staff will receive copies of the letter * For succeeding pages of memos, show the page number at the bottom center or right of the page. Be consistent in page number placement throughout the document. Use a footer to insert the page number. * Do not use a period after the D and the C in Washington, DC * Minor changes made under Salutation & Complimentary Close | ACOSS Staff |
| Version 2  10/18/13 | Added the “What’s New” page | OPI Staff |
| Version 2  3/20/14 | * Added ACOSS preference to hyphenate agency-wide and government-wide * Added guidance for salutations of same-sex couples sharing the same last name * Added typing instructions for *my* Social Security * Replaced ACT references with EMAC references | OPI Staff |

1. Sources: U.S. Government Correspondence Manual 1992; U.S. Department of State Correspondence Handbook. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)