U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

STYLE GUIDE

January 2020

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This Style Guide sets forth the general rules the Office of the Executive Secretariat (ES) of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) follows in editing documents.

All USAID documents, internal and external, will adhere to this Style Guide. The drafter is responsible for learning and following its rules to ensure consistency in all USAID written products and messages. Adherence to the Style Guide will also reduce errors and strengthen USAID's ability to communicate our vital mission to the world. **ES will return materials that do not adhere to the Style Guide to the drafter for revision.**

When the guidelines set forth in this Style Guide contradict the document-specific guidelines found on the ES website, the document-specific guidelines prevail.

This Style Guide is based on the *Chicago Manual of Style* (*CMS*), 17th edition, and *Merriam-Webster*, online edition.

I.   FORMATTING

Formatting guidelines can change in accordance with a new Administrator's preferences. Please check this section regularly to ensure documents follow the correct formatting guidelines.

Standard Fonts:
Action Memos: Times New Roman 14
Briefers: Times New Roman 16
Info Memos: Times New Roman 14
Letters from the Administrator: Times New Roman 12
Meeting Talking Points: Times New Roman 14
State Department Documents, including Funding Memos: Times New Roman 12
Remarks: Times New Roman 18

Standard Margins:
One-inch left and right, non-justified; one-inch top and bottom.

Indents:
Paragraphs are indented five spaces (1/2 inch).

Classification:
Include the highest level of classification in the header and footer of the document and the classification authority block at the bottom of the document's first page. Every paragraph must have a classification marking, unless the entire document is unclassified. Classified documents must be marked in accordance with the Information Security Oversight Office's Marking Classified National Security Information Handbook and protected in accordance with Executive Order 13526 and ADS 568.

Spacing:
Drafters and correspondence analysts should click on the "Show/Hide" icon in the toolbar so that formatting is visible and the correct spacing can be confirmed. (See below.)
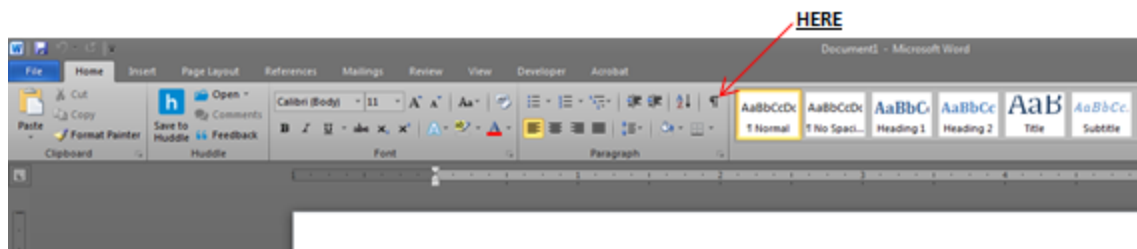
Ensure single-line space throughout the document. Double-space between paragraphs and bullet points. Use 1.5 spacing within bullet points in briefers.

Avoid "widows and orphans." Do not end a page with a single line that begins a new paragraph. Do not begin a page with the final line of a continuing paragraph from the preceding page. Two or more lines of text must appear beneath a heading. Do not allow a heading to appear at the bottom of a page while all of its text appears at the top of the following page.

Leave two spaces after periods and colons and before Zip Codes:
> See Jane run. See Dick fall.
> Items will include: (1) x; (2) y.
> Arlington, VA 22201

Leave one space between the abbreviations "FY" or "CY" and the year:
> FY 2009; CY 2009

Leave two spaces after a period when it follows a number or letter that indicates enumeration (agenda items, numbered paragraphs, *etc*.):
> I. Agenda Item 1
> A. Funding Source

Pagination:
Do not use page numbers.
Exception: Documents or reports submitted as attachments may contain page numbers if submitted as such.

Line Wrapping:
Keep proper names (and their titles) together on one line. Also do not allow line breaks within numbers or within "Fiscal Year (FY) XXXX" or "Calendar Year (CY) XXXX."

The material within quotation marks in the following must always appear on <u>one</u> line in the text:
> "Mary Jane Doe"; "Ambassador John Doe"
> "one million"; "$11 million"
> "Fiscal Year 2016"; "CY 2015"

II.   CLEAR WRITING

State your point clearly and up front. Be concise. Choose words with care, to craft the strongest message throughout the document. A reader should not struggle to understand the text at hand. Do not burden your sentences with too many clauses or bury your subject in unnecessary phrases. Be mindful that overly complicated sentences can be confusing and will distract from your message.

Sentence and Paragraph Structure:
Documents should be written at a sixth-grade level (referring to readability, with simple sentence structure, not simple concepts). The more complicated the information, the simpler the sentence structure should be. Write with analytical logic, not emotional appeal. Put key information first.

The following three factors affect reading comprehension:
1) The number of words in each sentence;
2) The number of sentences in each paragraph; and
3) The number of big words (three or more syllables) in a paragraph.

Note: ES receives many documents that have sentences ten to 15 lines long. Divide them into two or three shorter sentences of no more than five lines each. Delete extraneous words.

Active/Passive Voice:
Use the active voice. Active verbs eliminate ambiguity about responsibilities. The passive voice uses some form of the verb "to be" ("am," "is," "are," "was," "were," "being," or "been") plus the past participle of the main verb.
> Passive: The form must be completed.
> Active: You must complete the form.

> Passive: The Agency was notified by the Office of Management and Budget
>   (OMB).
> Active: OMB notified the Agency.

By eliminating the helping verb, a sentence written in the active voice uses fewer words:
Passive: Mr. Doe was told by the bank official that he would need to provide additional
        documentation. (16 words)
Active: The bank official told Mr. Doe he would need to provide additional documentation. (13
        words)

Active voice more closely resembles spoken language. When we speak, we generally use the active voice without thinking:
> Passive: Breakfast was eaten by me this morning.
> Active: I ate breakfast this morning.

To convert passive sentences to active sentences:

(1) <u>Lead with the subject</u>. Turn the clause or sentence around to put the subject first.

          Passive: The proposed rule was published by the General Counsel in the
               Federal Register.
          Active: The General Counsel published the proposed rule in the *Federal
               Register*.

(2) <u>Change the verb to eliminate the helping verb "to be</u>."

Passive: We must consider how our resources will be used to deliver high-quality services.
Active: We must consider how to use our resources to deliver high-quality services.

(3) <u>Rethink and streamline the sentence</u>.

Passive: Although Mr. Doe was found to be eligible for this position, all of the openings had
        already been filled by our personnel office prior to receiving his application.
Active: Though we found Mr. Doe eligible for the position, our personnel office had filled all
        openings before we received his application.

"Cut Passive":

Cut passive is a form of the passive voice that never identifies the doer of the action:
Cut Passive: New requirements were introduced to strengthen the banking system.
Active: The Banks Act of 1985 introduced new requirements to strengthen the banking system.

Note: The cut-passive form is appropriate when the doer of the action is unimportant or cannot be identified. If adding the name of the person or organization that performs the action would make the document stronger, identify the doer if at all possible.

Nonspecific Subject:

Avoid starting a sentence with, "This was/is," "This," "It," or "That." Instead, combine the clause with the preceding sentence in which the subject is identified.

Poor: On December 9, 2016, the Office of Lilac Affairs joined the Office of Lavender Affairs in
      the new Office of Purple Affairs. This will centralize the responsibility for all purple
      matters in one office.
Better: On December 9, 2016, the Office of Lilac Affairs joined the Office of Lavender Affairs
      in the new Office of Purple Affairs, the central authority for all purple matters.

Parallel Structure:

Ensure all elements in a series are parallel and consistent in grammar and structure.
A parallel series can be a numbered or bulleted list or contained within a sentence. In bulleted lists, choose to start each item with either a noun or a verb and do not mix them. If starting items with a verb, choose either the infinitive (starting with "to") or the gerund (ending in "ing"), and do not mix them.

      Areas of leadership include the following:
      1. Reviewing processing metrics;

2. Using resources effectively; and
3. Increasing staff training.

Note that all three items begin with the same verb form.

Poor: He volunteers at the elementary school, packs groceries at the food pantry, and his favorite charity receives monthly donations.

Better: He volunteers at the elementary school, packs groceries at the food pantry, and donates to his favorite charity each month.

Excess Words:
Omit needless words. Excess or elaborate words make a document weaker.

Excess Words	Plain-Language Alternatives
as a means of	to
at a later date	later
at the present time	now
for the purpose of	to, for
in accordance with	under
in order to	to
in the event that, to the extent that	if
notwithstanding the fact that	although
on a monthly basis; on an ongoing basis	monthly; continually
pertaining to; related to; with regard to	of, about
so as to	to
until such time as; up to now; when and if	until; formerly; if
at a time when	when

Unnecessary Qualifiers:
Avoid using extra adjectives and adverbs, because they do not add meaning to a sentence.

Unnecessary	Sufficient
Their claim was totally unrealistic.	Their claim was unrealistic.
We are completely convinced.	We are convinced.
Work in partnership with…	Work with…
Additional requirements needed to…	Requirements needed to…
Maintain successful bilateral agreements.	Maintain bilateral agreements.

Jargon:
Jargon is the specialized language of a trade, profession, or similar group. Avoid jargon and "development speak" because it can be a barrier to communication with non-specialists.

Multiple Negatives:
Multiple negatives muddle the meaning of a sentence. Convert negative statements to positive ones whenever possible:

Negative: No changes will be made unless the supervisor reviews the regulations and concludes that they are not lacking important information.

Positive: Changes will occur only if the supervisor reviews the regulations and concludes that they lack important information.

Address the Reader:
When appropriate, address the reader directly, by using the pronoun "you":
Poor: After the meeting, an adjournment for lunch will be permitted.
Better: After the meeting, you may adjourn for lunch.

Idiomatic Expressions:
Agree with/agree to
Agree with: Use to concur with a person or idea:
        I agree with John.

Agree to: Use to show acceptance of another person's plan:
        We agree to the terms.

Part from/part with
Part from: Use when referring to a person or people:
        I parted from Joe.

Part with: Use when referring to an object:
        I parted with my favorite sweater.

Different from/identical with
Different from: (not different than):
Your idea is no different from mine.

Identical with: (not identical to):
Your situation is identical with mine.

Between/among
Between: Refers to two people, places, or things:
        There is agreement between the two of them.

Among: Refers to three or more people, places, or things:
        The memo was circulated among five people.

All/all of

All: Use when "all" refers to a noun:
      All the developers went on vacation.

All of: Use when "all" refers to a pronoun:
      All of them are gone.

III.   STYLE

Numbers:
Write numbers one through ten as words and express numbers 11 and above as numerals:
> Four adults and five children attended.
> The two teachers brought all 40 of their students to the zoo.
> At least 12 people have registered.
> More than 5,000 requests are pending.

Write out the words "million," "billion," and "trillion." Do not use "M" or "B." Combine numerals and words for amounts greater than 999,999:
> 100 million people
> $13.045 billion.

Always spell out a number that begins a sentence:
> Three thousand people attended.

Always use numerals for decimal fractions:
> 2.5 inches of rain.

Spell out stand-alone fractions:
> More than two-thirds of the staff were absent.

Use numerals for ratios:
> A 5:1 ratio.

Always use numerals for currency:
> $975
> $3.2 million

The symbol $ is assumed to refer to the U.S. dollar. Use US$ for clarification if context requires:
> Canada contributed $100,000 to the initiative (approximately US$75,000).

Always use numerals in tables and spreadsheets.

Symbols:
Always spell out "percent." Never use the "%" sign:
> One percent; 15 percent.

Always spell out "and":
Only use the ampersand in proper names (*e.g.*, Johnson & Johnson), even in tables and spreadsheets.

Dates:
Use the month-day-year sequence and include a comma between the day and year:
>She was born on May 6, 2000.

When the date appears in the middle of a sentence, also include a comma after the year:
>On May 31, 2010, I plan to retire.

When only using a partial date (month and day or month and year), no comma is needed:
>November 1945 was a historic month.

Do not write dates by using all numerals (12/25/2018).

Do not place the day in front of the month (25 December 2018).

Phone Numbers:
Enclose the Area Code (or Provincial/City Code) in parentheses. Leave one space before the prefix:
>(202) 712-0700

Time:
Use numerals. Include periods in "a.m." and "p.m.," and do not capitalize them:
>4 p.m.; 8:45 a.m.

Foreign Words:
Use the English equivalents of foreign words or phrases whenever possible. When foreign words have no English equivalent, italicize them, including abbreviations that come from Latin:
>"That's life" instead of "*C'est la vie*."
>Ethiopia's short rainy season is called *belg*.
>He loved all desserts, *e.g.*, cakes, cookies, ice cream, *etc*.

Include correct accent marks (*e.g.*, tildes [ñ, ā], umlauts [ü, ï], cedillas [ç], *etc*.) in proper nouns and other foreign words that that carry them. Do not include special characters in documents that will be transmitted as cables.
>Guantánamo, Cuba; Haïti; Curaçao; Cúcuta, Colombia; Perú

Country Names:
Use a country's name, not the adjective, as a subject, except when modifying the word "Government":
>We hope France will sign the resolution.
>OR We hope the French Government will sign the resolution.
>(<u>Not</u>: We hope the French will sign the resolution.)

Use both country names when referring to two countries.

U.S.-India relations
(<u>Not</u>: U.S.-Indian relations)

Use the pronoun "it" and the relative pronouns "which" or "that" for a country, not "he" or "who."

We value our partnership with Australia, which has long been an important ally.
(<u>Not</u>: We value our partnership with Australia, who has long been an important ally.)

"Country" *versus* **"Government":**
Do not use "country" when you really mean "government":

USAID works closely with governments to improve their tax-collection systems.
(<u>Not</u>: USAID works closely with countries to improve their tax-collection systems.)

IV.   TROUBLESOME TERMS

Materials sent to ES for clearance often misuse or misspell the following terms. Please review this list carefully and note the subtle nuances and not-so-subtle differences that can affect the meaning of your text:

Access (noun):
The act of coming toward; a way or means of approaching; the right or ability to enter.
Do not use "access" as a verb.

Affect (verb) *versus* Effect (noun). *See also* impact.
affect: (verb) To influence, change, or assume.
effect: (noun) A result or an impression.

Amount *versus* Number (nouns):
Amount refers to things that cannot be counted. Number refers to things that can.
> The amount of pollution.
> The number of power plants.

Any time *versus* Anywhere (nouns):
Any time is two words.
Anywhere is one word.

Assure/Ensure/Insure (verbs):
assure: Applies only to people:
> I assure you, it will be fixed.
ensure: To make certain. It applies only to inanimate objects:
> I will ensure that we fix it.
insure: What insurance companies do:
> My firm insures homeowners.

Bilateral:
This term is not hyphenated.

Capacity-building:
Always hyphenate "capacity-building."

Complement *versus* Compliment (nouns or verbs)
complement: something that fills up or completes; a completing or integral part or group (noun)
> The European complement arrived for the summit.
>   to fill in; to complete; to enhance (verb)
> The safety office complements the occupational hazards office.
compliment: praise or flattery (noun)
> Thank you for your compliment on my new hairstyle.

to provide praise (verb)
She complimented the hostess on the beautiful table arrangements.

Comprise *versus* Compose (verbs):
comprise: To include, contain; to consist of:
The whole comprises the parts.
The working group comprises members from around the world.
Avoid the nonstandard construction "is comprised of."

compose: To form in combination; make up; constitute:
The parts compose the whole.
Members from around the world compose the working group.
Composed of members from around the world, the working group will meet
next month.

Contingent (noun or adjective) *versus* Contingency (noun):
contingent: (noun) a share or quota, as of troops or delegates; a group that forms part of a whole:
The Israeli contingent arrived on December 3.

(adjective) tangential; possible; conditional:
Today's outdoor meeting is contingent upon good weather.

contingency: (noun) something whose occurrence depends on uncertain conditions:
Prepare for any contingency, including relocating the outdoor meeting in case of rain.

Data:
The word "data" is plural and takes a plural verb form. The singular term is "datum":
The latest data show a significant improvement in graduation rates.

Dialog *versus* Dialogue:
Dialog refers to text, as in a dialog box.
Dialogue is an exchange of ideas or conversation.

Direct-Hire. *See* Non-Direct-Hire and U.S. Direct-Hire.

Disburse *versus* Disperse (verbs):
disburse: to spend or allocate
The program will disburse the funds next week.
disperse: to break up; to scatter
The wind dispersed the pile of leaves.

Disproportionate.
Do not use "disproportional."

Follow-up *versus* Follow up.
Follow-up is a noun or adjective.
>The follow-up meeting is scheduled for tomorrow morning.

Follow up is a verb.
>Please follow up with the office for more information.

Forego *versus* Forgo:
forego: to precede
>The meeting was a foregone conclusion.

forgo: to do without
>The office will forgo ordering business cards to provide additional funds for food relief.

Fund/Finance *versus* Support:
Use "fund" or "finance" when USAID provides money for a program/event/activity. Do not use the word "support" when the Agency is investing money.

G-
Include a hyphen in G-77 and G-8 (not G77 or G8).

Health care:
Use the term "health care," not "health services."

Impact (verb). *See also* affect.
As a verb, impact means to hit with force, or to press together firmly:
>The meteorite impacted the ground.

Use "affect" as a verb, not "impact," when you mean to describe a consequence:
>The program affected flu-vaccination rates.
>(Not: The program impacted flu-vaccination rates.)

Impactful:
Do not use "impactful" at any time.

Imply *versus* Infer (verbs):
imply: to suggest:
>The document implies that the homeowner knew of the damage before the sale.

infer: to assume or reach a conclusion:
>I can infer from your description that the meeting did not go well.

Lay *versus* Lie (verbs):
Substitute the verb "place" for the word in question. If it fits, use lay; if it does not, use lie:

lay: Lay it on the sofa.
lie: I am going to lie on the sofa.

Long term *versus* Long-term:
Long term is a noun.
>   In the long term, we will reduce infant mortality.
Long-term is an adjective.
>   The office's long-term goal is to reduce infant mortality.

Non-Direct-Hire (NDH):
Always hyphenate and capitalize Non-Direct-Hire.
>   The office employs three Non-Direct-Hires (NDHs).

Non-governmental
Always hyphenate "non-governmental":
>   The program invited five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to attend.

Non-permissive:
Always hyphenate "non-permissive."

Principal (adjective or noun) *versus* principle (noun):
principal: (adjective) first, highest, or foremost:
>   The principal rule when canoeing is "Always wear a life jacket."

principal: (noun) senior official or decision-maker:
>   Our first responsibility in ES is to protect the principal.

principle: (noun) basic truth, law, or assumption; moral or ethical standard:
>   We support the principle that all children deserve a good education.

Quality (adjective):
As an adjective, "quality" never stands alone:
>   This high-quality program will improve lives.
>   The poor-quality umbrella fell apart in the rain.

Since:
Since refers to time, not causation. Use "because" for causation.
>   We have been planning this meeting since last week.

United States *versus* U.S.:
Spell out United States as a noun. Use U.S. as an adjective:
>   The United States remains committed and asks that our U.S. partners share our resolve.

U.S. Direct-Hire (USDH). *See also* Non-Direct-Hire (NDH).
Always capitalize and hyphenate "U.S. Direct-Hire":
> She was a U.S. Direct-Hire.
> The meeting of U.S. Direct-Hires will take place on Tuesday.

Whether *versus* If:
Use "whether" to express a condition with two or more alternatives.
> We will hold the meeting whether the Ambassador attends or not.
Use "if" to express a condition with no alternatives.
> We will hold the meeting if the Ambassador agrees to attend.

Words/Phrases to Avoid:
and/or;
either/or
These devices muddy a sentence's meaning. Usually, the drafter means one or the other, but not both. Decide which conveys the correct meaning and delete the other.

Child prostitution
Use the term "child sex trafficking," not "forced child prostitution" or "child prostitution." Use "forced prostitution" in reference to adults only.

Congressman
Use the titles "Representative" or "Senator" when naming an individual. The phrase "member of Congress" is also acceptable.
> Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
> Senator Mitch McConnell

Dependent
Use the term "eligible family member (EFM)," not "dependent" or "trailing spouse."

Thru: Always spell out "through."

The Hill
Use the term "Congress," not "The Hill." If possible, be specific as to what part of Congress or which Members of Congress are responsible for the opinion or action. Do not ascribe to the whole institution the views or actions of one person.

Space
Avoid terms such as "the economic space" or "the counter-terrorism space." Provide specific examples or name specific programs and their primary goals.

V.   GRAMMAR

Conjunctions:
Do not begin a sentence with the conjunctions "and," "but," or "or."

Contractions:
Avoid contractions, except in direct quotes:
> USAID did not support the initiative.
> The candidate bragged that he "didn't owe anything to anybody."

Correlative Conjunctions:
Correlative conjunctions are a pair of conjunctions that connect two parts of a sentence and are not used adjacent to each other. The most common pairs are the following:
> both…and;
> either…or;
> neither…nor; and
> not only…but also.

Sentences that contain correlative conjunctions are internally <u>un</u>punctuated.
> He has changed neither his style nor his ethics nor his attitude.
> She agreed to bring not only coffee but also tea.

Be mindful when placing correlative conjunctions; their construction must be parallel and consistent in grammar and structure:

1. If the first conjunction precedes a verb, the second must as well:
    He not only promised to be home on time but also swore he would call if he ran late.

2. If the first conjunction precedes a prepositional phrase, the second conjunction must also precede a prepositional phrase:
    She went either to the grocery store or to the pharmacy.
    He sat neither on the front step nor under the awning.

Modifiers:
Place adjectives and adverbs next to the noun or verb they modify to avoid confusion:
Poor: He spoke of a new trade agreement with the Europeans in the strongest possible terms.
Better: He spoke in the strongest possible terms of a new trade agreement with the Europeans.

Phrasal Adjectives/Compound Modifiers:
When placed before a noun, a phrasal adjective takes a hyphen:
> She purchased a single-family home.

When two phrasal adjectives end with a common element, the ending element appears only with the second phrase. A suspended hyphen follows the unattached word:

> The neighborhood contains single- and multi-family homes.

Compounds formed by an adverb that ends in "ly" do not take a hyphen when they precede or follow a noun:

> That was a hastily arranged meeting.
> The comedian was mildly amusing.

Nonrestrictive Clause:
A "nonrestrictive" clause is one that will not affect the meaning of a sentence if eliminated. Precede and follow such a clause with commas:

> The burglar, who had entered through the patio, went straight to the silver chest.

Restrictive Clause:
A "restrictive" clause is one that is essential to the meaning of the sentence. Do not precede and follow such a clause with commas:

> The burglar who had entered through the patio went straight to the silver chest; the other burglar searched for the wall safe.

Which *versus* That: "Which" introduces a nonrestrictive or nonessential clause:

> The report, which I sent you last week, should be useful.

"That" introduces a restrictive or essential clause:

> This chapter outlines the basic policies that underlie the Agency's security program.

Note: "Which" is preferable to "that" in the following circumstances:

> (1) When the same sentence contains two or more parallel essential clauses:
> She is taking courses which will earn her a high salary and which will qualify her for higher-level jobs.

> (2) When you have already used "that" in a sentence:
> That is a movie which you must not miss.

> (3) When "this," "that," or "those" introduces an essential clause:
> We need to enforce those rules which we presented in earlier chapters.

Avoid the above awkward situations by rewriting the sentences:

> She is taking courses to quality for higher-level jobs and earn a higher salary.
> You must not miss that movie.
> We must enforce the rules presented in earlier chapters.

Prepositional Phrases:

Avoid multiple prepositional phrases:

Poor: You must begin hiring within a period of 18 months after the date of receipt of the grant.

Better: You must begin hiring within 18 months of receiving the grant.

Pronouns:

Address the reader directly by using the personal pronoun "you" whenever possible:

> As a voucher examiner, you must review and process the documents within a set period of time.

Singular Possessives: Use "his" or "her" if the subject is singular, not "their":

> The Director, or her designee, will sign.
> (<u>Not</u>: The Director, or their designers, will sign.)

Note that an agency or government entity takes the pronoun "it," and possessive "its," not "they" or "theirs":

> The Agency confirms that it supports the new flu vaccine because of the strong advice of its experts.
> (<u>Not</u>: The Agency confirms that they support the new flu vaccine because of the strong advice of their experts.)

"Its" is a possessive adjective, while "it's" is the contraction of "it is."

Plural Possessives: Use "their" if the subject is plural:

> Employees must submit their forms for clearance.

Try to reword sentences to avoid the awkward "his or her" by using plurals or other forms:

> An assistant tries to anticipate the needs of the boss.
> (<u>Not</u>: "the needs of his or her boss.")

The following pronouns are always singular:

anyone	everyone	someone	no one
anything	everything	something	nothing
each	every	either	one
each one	many a	much	neither
anybody	everybody	somebody	nobody

> Everyone is going to the concert.

The following are indefinite pronouns and are always plural:

many	few	several	others	both

Few people have received training in PowerPoint.

The following could be singular or plural, depending on the subject:

all	none	any	some	more	most

Is <u>any</u> money left in the contract? <u>Are</u> there <u>any</u> bills to be paid?

Split Infinitives:
Do not split infinitives by interposing an adverbial element between "to" and a verb form:
   The aim is **to examine** the evidence carefully.
   (<u>Not</u>: The aim is **to carefully examine** the evidence.)

Verbs:
A verb is the life of a sentence. Avoid the common mistake of turning strong verbs (*e.g.*, recommend) into nouns (*e.g.*, recommendation) and substituting a weak verb that supplies little information (*e.g.*, make) and lengthens a sentence unncessarily:
   Weak example: We are asking everyone to make a recommendation for a solution.
   Strong example: We are asking everyone to recommend a solution.

Weak Verbs	Smothered Verbs	Strong Verbs
get	Get the room reservations.	Reserve the rooms.
come	Come to a conclusion by noon.	Conclude by noon.
hold	Hold the meeting in your office.	Meet in your office.
conduct	Conduct an examination of the data.	Examine the data.
make	Make an effective suggestion.	Suggest something effective.
give	Give them an answer to their question.	Answer their questions.
do	Do the work assigned to you.	Work on your assignment.
is	She is knowledgeable about careers.	She knows about careers.
feel	I feel appreciation for your hard work.	I appreciate your hard work.
perform	Perform the research on these subjects.	Research these subjects.
has/have	He has hope that he will win.	He hopes he will win.

Who *versus* Whom; Whoever *versus* Whomever:
Use the following steps to decide whether "who" or "whom" is correct:
1) Isolate the who/whom clause from the rest of the sentence;
2) Delete the word "who" or "whom"; and
3) Fill the gap with "he or she" or "him or her."

If "he/she" completes the thought, then "<u>who</u>" is correct.
If "him/her" completes the thought, then "<u>whom</u>" is correct.

Examples:
The person (who/whom) does the best work will win the promotion:
1) who/whom does the best work;
2) ____ does the best work;
3) She does the best work =
4) "<u>She</u>" completes the thought, so "<u>who</u>" is correct.

This candidate is the one (who/whom) I will promote:
1) who/whom I will promote;
2) I will promote _____;
3) I will promote him =
4) "<u>Him</u>" completes the thought, so "<u>whom</u>" is correct.

Ask (whoever/whomever) is in charge to provide an opening statement:
1) whoever/whomever is in charge:
2) _____ is in charge:
3) She is in charge =
4) "<u>She</u>" completes the thought, so "<u>whoever</u>" is correct.

Give the information to (whoever/whomever) you want to write the report:
1) whoever/whomever you want to write the report;
2) you want ____ to write the report;
3) you want him to write the report;
4) "<u>Him</u>" completes the thought, so "<u>whomever</u>" is correct.

VI.   PUNCTUATION

Apostrophes:
Always use curled apostrophes, rather than straight ones: '
> Secretary's (NOT Secretary's)

Form the possessive of singular nouns by adding an apostrophe plus "s":
> James's book is available on the Internet.
> USAID's budget is growing.

Form the possessive of plural nouns by adding an apostrophe plus "s." If the plural noun ends with "s," add the apostrophe only:
> The children's toys are everywhere.
> The buses' parking spaces are over there.

"Its" is a possessive adjective, while "it's" is the contraction of "it is."

Use an apostrophe after each name for individual possession/authorship, if the people or things each own, or are each responsible for, something different:
> Mary's and Peter's reports are both due tomorrow.

Use only one apostrophe after the last of two or more nouns in a series for joint possession, if the people or things own, or are responsible for, the same thing:
> Mary and Peter's report was due this morning.

Commas:
Use a comma before the word "and" and "or" in a series of three or more (often known as the "serial" or "English" comma):
> apples, bananas**,** and oranges; men, women**,** or children

Use a comma before the title of a publication named in a sentence:
> More information is available in the report, *Technology in the Twenty-First Century*.

Use a comma in a compound sentence when a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet) connects two independent clauses:
> There is a difference between the novels of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and it is a
> difference worth noting.
> Tom checked out many books on aviation, and he created space for them on his shelf.

You may omit the comma in short compound sentences, but you may choose to keep it for purposes of emphasis, especially in text meant to be read aloud, such as a speech:
> I understand your argument but I do not agree.
> I understand your argument, but I disagree strongly.

Note: Do not use a comma before a coordinating conjunction in a two-part compound predicate, except for purposes of emphasis, especially in text meant to be read aloud, such as a speech:
> Tom checked out many books on aviation and created space for them on his shelf.

Use a comma between two or more adjectives that modify the same noun if you could use "and" between them without altering the meaning. Omit the comma if you cannot use "and":
> Argon is a rare, heavy gas.
> I inherited a polished mahogany dresser from my grandmother.

Use a comma after "Washington, D.C.," in a sentence or address:
> The conference will be in Washington, D.C., in May.

Use a comma in numbers of four or more digits:
> 11,000

Always include a comma after *i.e.* and *e.g.* In the context of a sentence, include a comma before *i.e.* and *e.g.* Omit the preceding comma when parentheses enclose the clause:
> This policy applies to Regional Bureaus, *i.e.*, AFR and E&E.
> This policy applies to Regional Bureaus (*i.e.*, AFR and E&E).

Dashes:
Use the "em" dash, which is longer than the "en" dash and the hyphen, to separate clauses or parenthetical comments in a sentence. Do not leave a space before or after the dash and use a true dash, not two hyphens:
> He tried once—at age nine.
> *Incorrect:* He tried once — at age nine.
> *Incorrect:* He tried once--at age nine.

Use the shorter "en" dash between ranges of numbers:
> 2010–2015

Use the "en" dash in place of a hyphen in a compound adjective when one of its elements is an open compound:
> The post–Cold War era.

Ellipsis Marks:
Leave one space before and after an ellipsis within a sentence to signify missing information, especially in a quotation:
> "During the past forty years … we have been witnessing a change in buying habits."

In general, do not include leading and trailing ellipses. No ellipses are necessary in the following: "…we have been witnessing a change in habits…"

Include a period before an ellipsis to indicate the omission of the end of a sentence, or to indicate the omission of material that immediately follows the period. Include other punctuation marks (comma, colon, semicolon, question mark, exclamation point) before or after the ellipsis, depending on whether the omitted material precedes or follows the punctuation mark:

> "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation.… Now we are engaged in a great civil war.… We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field,… for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live."

Hyphens:
Include a hyphen in a compound modifier that precedes a noun:
> The police chief described the high-profile case during the press conference.

Use multiple hyphens in multi-part compounds:
> His over-the-counter cold medication made him drowsy.

Use a suspended hyphen followed by a space (or a comma if in a series) when omitting the second part of a hyphenated expression:
> She compared gold- and nickel-plated finishes.
> The restaurant offered mocha-, hazelnut-, or amaretto-flavored cappuccinos.

Refer to *Merriam-Webster's* and *CMS* Section 7.89's hyphenation guide for the correct spelling of compound words. As language evolves, an open compound becomes hyphenated, then becomes a closed compound (smart phone/smart-phone/smartphone). First, check the dictionary for the term, then refer to *CMS* Section 7.89.

Idiosyncratic Key Terms:
Capacity-building:
Always hyphenate "capacity-building."

G-
Include a hyphen in G-77 and G-8 (not G77 or G8).

Non-governmental
Always hyphenate "non-governmental."
> USAID funds the Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organization (KVAO), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that supports returnees upon their arrival in Cambodia.

U.S. Direct-Hire (USDH)
Always capitalize and hyphenate "U.S. Direct-Hire":
> She was a U.S. Direct-Hire.
> The meeting of U.S. Direct-Hires will take place on Tuesday.

Parentheses:

Use parentheses to set off part of a sentence, but be aware that they often de-emphasize the material enclosed. When a complete sentence is enclosed in parentheses, the terminal punctuation appears inside them:

(More details are contained in the full report.)

Otherwise, terminal punctuation belongs at the end of the sentence, outside the parentheses:

USAID must build core teams within a size range of five to ten members (the generally accepted size range for effective teams).

When a parenthetical phrase falls within another parenthetical phrase, enclose the interior phrase in brackets.

(See Automated Directive System [ADS] Chapter 565, Physical Security Programs [Domestic].)

Periods:

Use with "a.m." and "p.m." (which are always lowercase).
Use with "U.S." as an adjective.
Use in "Washington, D.C.," both in a sentence and within an address.

Use periods in academic degrees:
Associates Degree (A.A.)
Bachelor of Arts Degree (B.A.)
Bachelor of Science Degree (B.Sc.)
Doctor of Dental Surgery (D.D.S.)
Doctor of Medicine (M.D.)
Doctoral Degree (Ph.D.)
Juris Doctor (J.D.) or Doctor of Jurisprudence (D.J. or J.D.)
Master of Arts Degree (M.A.)
Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)
Master of Science Degree (M.Sc.)

Quotation Marks:

Always use curly quotation marks: "

Periods and commas always go <u>inside</u> the closing quotation mark:

John said, "The proof is in the pudding."

Periods and commas always go <u>inside</u> the single closing quotation mark:

Please let me see all orders marked "Rush: 'For Administrator only.'"

Semicolons and colons always go <u>outside</u> the closing quotation mark:

You said, "I will mail it Monday"; it has not arrived.

A question mark or exclamation point goes <u>inside</u> the closing quotation mark when it applies only to quoted material; it goes <u>outside</u> when it applies to the entire sentence:
The question John posed was, "When will it be ready?"
John's statement is true for everyone: "I want it now"!

Capitalize the first word in a quoted passage:
According to the Administrator, "All employee contributions are important."

In certain legal contexts, use brackets to indicate that capitalization within a quotation has changed.
"[A]ll homes must be painted orange," according to Ordinance 10.

Use quotation marks around titles that represent only part of a published work:
The chapter on "Foreign Assistance" was useful.

Use quotation marks around the titles of <u>individual</u> poems (versus epic poems cited above):
A favorite poem is "A Red, Red Rose."

But: Italicize titles of books, <u>epic</u> poems, magazines, movies, musical compositions, newspapers, paintings, pamphlets, plays, radio and television programs, reports, sculpture, *etc.*:
To Kill a Mockingbird

Italicize names of newspaper and magazine publishers.
Washington Post Company

Semicolons:
Use semicolons to separate clauses that contain commas or to separate statements that are too closely related in meaning to write as separate sentences:
The project aims to develop, distribute, and translate training materials; provide technical assistance; and build classrooms, training centers, and libraries.
The project will end March 31, 2009; all activities must be complete by that date.

Do not use a semicolon when a comma will suffice.

VII. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviations:
An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase used to represent the full form.
> "approx." for approximately; est. for estimated

Do not use abbreviations in executive documents.

Acronyms:
An acronym is an abbreviation that can be pronounced as a word:
> NATO (for North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

Spell out any acronym when it first appears in a document, including <u>internal</u> USAID documents. The acronym should immediately follow in parentheses. If an acronym occurs infrequently in a long document, you might need to spell it out again. When in doubt, spell an acronym out.

Articles with Acronyms:
Use the indefinite article "a" or "an" according to how the acronym is pronounced.
> An RFP; a SOAG; an MOU.

Plural Acronyms:
Add a lowercase "s" to acronyms in capital letters, even if the abbreviation ends in an "s." Do not use an apostrophe before the lowercase "s."
> ERSs; SOAGs; CTOs

<u>Exception</u>: Do not add an "s" for the plural of acronyms when the acronym contains a word that can be either singular or plural.
> Administrative Management Staff (AMS)—"staff" can be either singular or plural.

Acronyms for non-English names and terms:
Provide the non-English proper name in italics, followed by its acronym. Use a translation only if the proper name is unknown.
> *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD)
> <u>Not</u>: The French Agency for Development (AFD)

Citations:
Abbreviate in-line with the following conventions after their first use in a document:

Code of Federal Regulations   22 CFR 114-116

Executive Order   E.O. 13157

Foreign Affairs Handbook	3 FAH-1
Foreign Affairs Manual	12 FAM 530
Federal Acquisition Regulations	FAR 32-2
Office of Management and Budget	OMB Circular A-34 or OMB A-34; OMB Bulletin 01-02
Public Law	P.L. 102-511
U.S. Code	32 U.S.C. 3726

VIII. CAPITALIZATION

Always capitalize official titles:
> Administrator; Deputy Secretary; Mission Director; Prime Minister.

Administration:
- General Services Administration;
- The Trump Administration; and
- The Administration (the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government as headed by the President and in power during his or her term of office).

Agency:
- Central Intelligence Agency;
- The Agency (if referring to USAID or another, specific Federal or international unit); **but**
- An agency, the agencies, the interagency.

Ambassadors:
- Ambassador John Smith;
- Ambassador-at-Large;
- The Ambassador (if referring to a specific ambassador); **but**
- An ambassador may bring his family when he relocates.

Bureaus:
- Federal Bureau of Investigation;
- Bureau for Africa;
- The Bureau/A Bureau; and
- Bureau contacts.

Cabinet:
- The Cabinet; **but**
- cabinet-rank.

Chargé d'Affaires *ad interim*:
- Chargé John Smith; and
- The Chargé.

Chief of Mission:
- The Chief of Mission of Embassy XYZ; and
- Chief of Mission authority.

Congress:
- Congress of the United States;
- The Congress (if referring to the national legislative body of the United States);

- a member of Congress; **but**
- **Not** The Hill.

Consuls/Consuls General:
- Consul John Smith/Consul General John Smith;
- The Consul/Consul General (if referring to a specific consul/consul general); **but**
- A consul/a consul general.

Consulates/Consulates General:
- Consulate XYZ/Consulate General XYZ;
- The Consulate/the Consulate General (if referring to a specific consulate/consulate general); **but**
- A consulate/a consulate general holds important responsibility.

Embassies:
- Embassy XYZ;
- The Embassy (if referring to a specific embassy); **but**
- An embassy may hire local citizens.

Executive Branch:
- The Executive Branch of the U.S. Government.

Federal:
- Federal Reserve Board (capitalize when part of a proper noun);
- Federal Government (capitalize both words as an official title); and
- Federal employees.

Governments:
- The Government of the United States; the U.S. Government; the Government of Denmark (formal);
- The Danish Government; and
- The Government of Prime Minister XZY.

The Internet:
- **Not** "the net" or "the web."

Ministries:
- The Ministry (if referring to a specific Ministry, *e.g.*, Ministry of Health); **but**
- A ministry must be mindful of its budget.

Missions:
- The USAID Mission in Burkina Faso;
- USAID Missions around the world;

- Mission Director John Doe; and
- The Mission Director/A Mission Director.

Post (when used as a noun):
- Post (if referring to a specific overseas post); **but**
- At post.

Parliaments:
- The Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and
- Member of Parliament.

Presidents:
- President John Smith;
- The President (if referring to a specific president of a country); **but**
- The presidential elections; presidential candidates; presidential appointees.

States:
- She is from the State of Iowa; **but**
- Federal, state, and local law.