ADS Style and Format Guide

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 501

ADS Style Guide

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Part 1: ADS Style Guide

This Part outlines the required writing style for the ADS. While this ADS Style Guide is mainly based off the *United States Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual*, some of the ADS Style standards may differ from GPO style.

1.1 Plain Language Points

In accordance with ADS 501, all ADS material **must** be written in **plain language.** Therefore you must

- Write clearly, using common, everyday words.

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short.

- Use the active voice when appropriate. You can recognize the passive voice by the use of some form of the verb "to be" plus the past participle of the main verb. An example of passive voice is, "the form must **be completed**." An example of active voice is, "the employee must **complete** the form."

- Think of your audience.

- Avoid jargon and foreign phrases.

- If you are listing more than three items, use vertical lists to improve readability.

For more information on plain language, please consult the following Web site: **http://www.plainlanguage.gov**

shall/will or must/should

Do not use **shall**. Use the more specific term **must** to signify **mandatory action**, or write your sentence in a directive manner using phrases such as **requires** or **is required**.

Example: Teams **must** have a means of assessing progress.

Use **will** to signify **future tense**.

Example: After the unions have completed the appropriate review, HCTM **will forward** the package to GC, which **will classify** and process the USDH positions required and input them into the automated personnel system.

If you use **should**, you need to recognize that it is a nonmandatory term. In the ADS, non-mandatory procedures are identified with use of the words **should, recommended, might, are encouraged to, encourages**, or other clear designation. (See table below)

Example:

To the extent practicable, you **should** separate operations to reduce the risk of error, waste, and wrongful acts. For example, you **should** assign different responsibilities for automated systems to computer operations personnel, software maintenance specialists, and users. The head of the paying office must ensure that disbursing operations are separated from such operations as purchasing, receiving, collections, and accounting.

Avoid using the word **"may"** as it can be left open to interpretation.

must	should
• Mandatory	• Not mandatory
• Command, directive	• Not a requirement
• There will be adverse consequences for not complying	• There may be adverse consequences for not complying
	• Recommended course of action

shall	will
• Do not use! See www.plainlanguage.gov	• Signifies future action
	• Can be used to indicate mandatory action in the future

2.1　List of Common ADS Language and Grammatical Questions

This section explains how to handle common language and grammatical questions that arise when creating or updating ADS material.

Acronyms/Abbreviations
An acronym is an abbreviation that can be pronounced as a word, e.g., NATO. Spell out all acronyms/abbreviations when you first use them, immediately followed by the acronym/abbreviation in parentheses. Example: At the Ronald Reagan Building (RRB). After that, just use the acronym/abbreviation, unless it occurs infrequently, in which case you may want to spell it out again.

Articles with acronyms/abbreviations: Choose the indefinite article **a** or **an** according to how the abbreviation is pronounced: an RP, a STU-III, a LAN.

Plural acronyms/abbreviations: Add a lowercase **s** to abbreviations in capital letters, even if the abbreviation ends in an S. Examples: ERSs, URLs, CORs.

AMS: No need to add an **s** for the plural of Administrative Management Staff (AMS), since *staff* can be used in the singular or plural sense.

USAID: (not AID)

Do not start a sentence with an acronym/abbreviation unless absolutely necessary.

Active Voice
Write your sentences using the active voice whenever possible. Active verbs eliminate ambiguity about responsibilities. Reword passive sentences; you can recognize these by the use of some form of the verb "to be" plus the past participle (e.g., "notified") of the main verb.

Example: *The Office must be notified by the employee.*

Reword as follows: *The employee must notify the Office.*

Example: *The Office was notified by OMB.*

Reword as: *OMB notified the Office.*

and/or
Reword your sentence to avoid using the expression **and/or** whenever possible.

Capitalization and Spelling

Agency: Use initial caps when referring to USAID or when using the term "Agency Notices," otherwise use lowercase.

Bureau: Always use initial caps.
etc: Use one period after usage.

federal: Lowercase unless used with the word "government".

Federal Government: Always initial caps when used together.

Government: Initial caps when referring to the Government as a noun or when using the term Federal Government.

Examples: *The Federal Government issued a new policy. The Government will pay for associated costs. Employees must return their government-issued badges.*

Mission: When referring to a USAID Mission, always use initial caps. When referring to the mission of a company, organization, etc., use lowercase.

notice(s): Use initial caps when using the term "Agency Notices," otherwise use lowercase.

Operating Unit: Always use initial caps.

Shall: Do not use this word. Use "must" or "will".

Web site and Web page: Always capitalize the "W". Always use as two words.

Citations

Abbreviate in line with the following conventions:

Code of Federal Regulations	22 CFR 114-116
Executive Order	EO 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	Pub. L. 102-511
U.S. Code	32 USC 3726

Dates
Insert a comma between the date and the year: March 6, 2000. Do not insert a comma between the month and year if a specific day is not included.

Insert a comma after the year of a complete date when you use it in a sentence such as the following: Applications submitted before September 15, 1998, will be honored.

You may cite dates using all numerals. Example: 03/06/2000 (mm/dd/yyyy).

Measurements
Use numerals: 5 lb, 12 cm, 8 inches. Use the same abbreviations for the singular and the plural of weights and measures: km, oz, in, lb, ft (these abbreviations do not have periods).

Numbers
Spell out numbers zero through nine. Use numerals for 10 or more. If you have 2 numbers in the same sentence and 1 of them is 10 or more, use all numerals. Always spell out a number that begins a sentence.

Fractions: Spell out any fraction standing alone: two-thirds of the Missions. Use numerals for mixed numbers: 4 ½ inches in diameter.

Million, billion, trillion: Use numerals, and spell out million, billion, and trillion: 23 million.

Thousands: Use a comma if the number has four or more digits: 3,500.

Percentages
Use numerals, and spell out percent: 5 percent.

Prefixes
As a general rule, do not use a hyphen (-) to set off prefixes.

Exception: Except for the prefixes **co, de, pre, pro,** and **re**, which generally require no hyphen, use a hyphen to avoid doubling a vowel or tripling a consonant:

cooperation, reengineering, reinvention, anti-inflation, micro-organism, shell-like.

The prefixes **ex** and **self** always take a hyphen: *ex-president, self-control.*

Words beginning with "**non**" are not hyphenated, unless the word is capitalized (non-American) or already is hyphenated (non-civil-service position). Examples: nongovernmental organization, nonexpendable property.

Pronouns

Singular: Use **his or her** if the subject is singular. Example: The Administrator, or **his or her** designee, issues a certificate for the amount of each expenditure.

Plural: Use **their** if the subject is plural. Example: Employees must submit **their** forms for clearance.

Try to reword your sentence to avoid the awkward "his or her" by using plurals or other forms if possible. Example: An assistant tries to anticipate the needs of the boss.

Proportions/ratios
Use numerals: a proportion of 1 to 4, a 5:1 ratio

Punctuation

Colon: Insert one space after a colon.

Commas: Use serial commas when listing three or more items. Example: Bureaus, Offices, and Missions. Use a comma after e.g., i.e., and etc.

email: No hyphen and always lowercase unless at the beginning of a sentence.

direct-hire: Use **U.S. Direct Hire (USDH)** the first time it appears in your text (used as a noun). After that, you may just use the abbreviation. Hyphenate if using the term "direct-hire".

Parentheses: Punctuation with words or phrases: Place punctuation outside

parentheses, even if the parenthetical phrase is at the end of a sentence.

> Example: USAID organizations must attempt to build core teams within a size range of 5 to 10 members (the generally accepted size range for efficient and effective teams).

Punctuation with complete sentences: If the item in parentheses is a complete sentence, place the punctuation inside the parentheses.

> Example: (More details on Agency AIS security responsibilities are contained in the internal mandatory reference, "Information Technology Security Roles and Responsibilities.")

Periods: Insert one space after a period.

Quotation marks: Place periods and commas inside quotation marks.

Example: See OMB Circular A-76 (revised), "Performance of Commercial Activities," for more details.

Other punctuation marks should be placed outside the quotation marks unless they are part of the matter being quoted.

Examples: Who asked, "Why?" What prompted her to say, "Be careful in handling documents marked 'Confidential'"?

semi-colon: Use to separate clauses containing commas, to separate statements that are too closely related in meaning to be written as separate sentences, and to set off explanatory abbreviations or words that summarize or explain preceding matter.

Do not use a semi-colon when a comma will suffice.

Telephone numbers
Render as follows: (202) 712-0798.

that/which
Use **that** to introduce a restrictive or essential clause.

Example: This chapter outlines the basic policies that underlie the Agency's Classified Information Systems (IS) Security Program. (The sentence cannot be understood without the information following "that".)

Use **which** to introduce a nonrestrictive or nonessential clause.

Example: The report, which I sent you last week, should be useful. (The sentence makes sense without the information in the clause following "which".)

Time
Use numerals: 4:00 p.m., 8:45 a.m. Use periods with a.m., p.m.

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