



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Style Guide



Bureau for Management
Office of Management Policy, Budget, and Performance
Performance Division

June 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This style guide sets forth the general guidelines that the Performance Division (M/MPBP/PERF) follows in producing documents. It has been adapted from the USAID Executive Secretariat (ES) Style Guide updated on February 3, 2011, available at: http://inside.usaid.gov/es/word/style_guide.doc.

For M/MPBP/PERF purposes, in the event of a discrepancy between the guidelines set forth in this manual and ES' guidelines, the guidance set forth in this Style Guide prevail.

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I. FORMATTING

M/MPBP/PERF Documents

Font: Calibri 11
Indents: Paragraphs are not indented

ES Documents

Font:
All executive document Times New Roman 12
Meeting talking points: Times New Roman 14
State Department documents,
including funding memos: Times New Roman 14
Remarks: Times New Roman 16
Indents: Paragraphs are indented five spaces

Standard Margins

One-inch left and right non-justified; one-inch top and bottom

Spacing

Leave two spaces after periods, colons, and before zip codes.

Example:

See Jane run. See Dick fall.

Items will include: (1) x; (2) y.

Arlington, VA 22201

Leave one space between FY or CY and the year.

Example:

FY 2009; CY 2009

Leave two spaces after a period when it follows a number or letter indicating enumeration (agenda items, numbered paragraphs, etc.)

Example:

I. Agenda Item 1

A. Funding Source

Pagination

Paginate documents of more than one page.

Place page numbers at the bottom center of a page.

Suppress the number on the first page of the main document and of each attachment.

The clearance page should be numbered consecutively, as part of the main document.

Paginate each attachment individually.

Line Wrapping

Do not split the following between lines: proper names, names and their titles, numbers, “Fiscal or Calendar Year”, and “FY and CY” and the year in question. What is listed in quotation marks in the following examples should always appear on one line in the text.

Example:

“Mary Jane Doe”; “Ambassador John Doe”;

“One million dollars”; “\$10 million”;

“Fiscal Year 2009”; “CY 2009”

Symbols

Always spell out “percent” (never use the “%” sign).

Example:

One percent; 15 percent

Always spell out “and” (never use “&”).

Numbers

Numbers 10 and above are expressed in numerals, not words.

Example:

At least 12 people have registered.

Numbers less than 10 are written as words.

Example:

Four adults and five children attended.

Exception: When a sentence contains more than one number *of like items*, one of which is 10 or higher, all numbers in the sentence should be expressed in numerals.

Example:

She brought three documents for editing. Last week she brought 10. The 3 she just brought, plus the 10 from last week, total 13.

Yesterday, she brought four oranges in to work. Today, she brought 20 cookies. Since she has four oranges and 20 cookies lets go visit her office.

In 1982, I had four cats.

Always spell out a number that begins a sentence.

Example:

Three thousand people were in attendance.

Exception: For measurements, use numerals for the amount. No periods are used with the abbreviations.

Example:

8 inches long; 5 lbs. of sugar; 12 cm of rain

Exception: Always use figures for percentages and decimal fractions.

Example:

9 percent; 2.5 inches of rain

Always form the plural of numbers by adding an “s”.

Example:

Experts note that the phenomenon began in the 1990s.

Dates

When a month-day-year sequence is used at the end of a sentence, insert a comma between the day and year.

Example:

She was born on May 6, 2000.

When a month-day-year sequence is used in the middle of a sentence, insert commas between the day and year, and after the year.

Example:

On May 31, 2010, I plan to retire.

When only a partial date is used (month and day, month and year), no comma is needed.

Example:

June 11 is her birthday. November 1945 is a historic month.

Do not write dates using all numerals.

Do not place the day in front of the month.

Avoid: 03/06/2000; 6 March 2000

Fractions

Spell out standalone fractions.

Example:

Over two-thirds of the staff were absent.

Use numerals for mixed numbers.

Example:

4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

Phone Numbers

Put area code in parentheses. Leave one space before the prefix.

Example:

(202) 712-0700

Proportions/Ratios

Use numerals.

Example:

a 5:1 ratio; a proportion of 1 to 4

Thousand, Million, Billion, Trillion: Write out the words. Combine numerals and words for amounts above 999.

Example: 100 thousand people; \$13.045 billion

Exception: Always use numerals in tables and spreadsheets.

Time

Use numerals. Use periods with a.m. and p.m.

Example:

4 p.m.; 8:45 a.m.

II. STYLE

Tone

Use concrete examples, rather than descriptive words. Concrete words avoid the appearance of a positive or negative bias.

Avoid: “the outrageous budget” or “the large budget”

Better: “the \$8 million budget”

Parallel Construction

Express words and phrases in a series in the same way.

Avoid: Mary likes to hike, swimming, and skiing.

Correct: Mary likes to hike, swim, and ski.

Correct: Mary likes hiking, swimming, and skiing.

Avoid: The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and in a detailed manner.

Correct: The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.

Active/Passive Voice

Use active voice whenever possible, rather than passive.

Active verbs eliminate ambiguity about responsibilities.

Passive voice is signaled by the use of 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: New employees must complete the form.

Passive: The Office was notified by OMB.

Active: OMB notified the office.

By eliminating the helping verb, the active voice sentence generally uses fewer words to communicate the same information.

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 information. (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.

Tips to convert passive sentences to active sentences:

(1) Turn the clause or sentence around, putting the subject first.

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

Active: General Counsel published the proposed rule in the Federal Register.

(2) Change the verb to eliminate the helping verb “to be.”

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

Active: We must consider how to use our resources to deliver quality services.

(3) Rethink the sentence.

Passive: Although Mr. Doe was found to be eligible for this position, all of the positions 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 positions before we received his application.

N.B.: The passive form is appropriate in two situations: (1) when the person/entity performing the action is unknown; and (2) when the person/entity performing the action is unimportant.

If adding the name of the person or organization performing the action would make the document stronger, the doer should be identified where possible.

Personal Pronouns

Avoid the use of personal pronouns, e.g. we, our.

Conjunctions

Do not begin a sentence or a talking point with the conjunctions “And” or “Because.”

Foreign Words

Use English equivalents of foreign words or phrases whenever possible.

When foreign words have no English equivalent, italicize them.

Example:

“That’s life” instead of “c’est la vie.”

Ethiopia’s short rainy season is called *belg*.

Exception: bona fide, e.g., i.e., ad hoc, and etc.

Use English translation of indigenous organizations.

Example:

The Brazilian Agency for Cooperation

Headings

Use as many informative headings as possible.

Jargon

Jargon is the specialized language of a trade, profession, or similar group. Avoid jargon as it can be a barrier to communication with non-specialists.

Multiple Negatives

The use of multiple negatives muddles 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

Positive: Changes will be made only if the supervisor reviews the regulations and concludes that they are lacking important information.

Phonetic Spelling

In briefing memos, always include the phonetic spelling of any biographical or geographical name that may be unfamiliar, but will need to be pronounced correctly during meetings, remarks, receptions, etc.

Phonetic spellings are set off in brackets after each section of a name (one section per bracket).

Any syllable to be stressed should be capitalized so that the speaker knows where to place the emphasis. When a name has only one syllable, there is no need to capitalize.

Place hyphens between each syllable of one word.

Example:

Ambassador Urs {Oohrs} Ziswiler {ZEES-vee-ler};

Pristina {PRISH-tuh-naa}, Kosovo {KO-suh-vo}

N.B.: For briefing memos with remarks or talking points: The phonetic pronunciation should only be included in the remarks section of a briefing memo. It should NOT be included in the title, objectives section, participant list, or biography.

For briefing memos without remarks or talking points: The phonetic pronunciation should be included the first time the name appears.

Shall vs. Must

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

Correct: Contractor will provide training services.

Avoid: Contractor shall provide training services.

Shall vs. Will

Do not use “shall.” “Will” signifies future action. It can also be used to indicate mandatory future action.

Correct: We will decide. You will finish tomorrow.

Avoid: We shall decide. You shall finish tomorrow.

Will vs. Would

Use “will” to signify future tense. Do not use “would” unless it is conditional.

Example:

Additional funding will expedite the process.

Additional funds would expedite the process if they are received before the start of the rainy season.

Must vs. Should

Must indicates that something is mandatory; should indicates that it is NOT mandatory.

Example:

You must be on time.

You should be on time if at all possible.

Talking Points and Remarks

Words should be written as they are spoken.

Correct: one million dollars

Avoid: \$1,000,000; \$1 million

Talking points should be written in the first person.

Example:

I support your decision.

Readability

Documents should be written at a sixth grade level (referring to simple sentence structure, not simple concepts).

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.

Write with analytical logic, not emotional appeal.

Put key information first – the first seven words count the most.

Sentences should contain a maximum of 15 – 17 words.

Tips to improve sentence and paragraph structure:

1. Divide long sentences into two or three shorter sentences of no more than five lines each.
2. Delete any extraneous words.

Word’s readability function measures how easily an adult can read and understand text. It is a good predictor of the level of reading difficulty of a document—particularly technical documents. As with spellcheck and grammar check, this tool is useful but should not be taken as absolute. Strive to stay within the suggested ranges while using your best judgment.

Enabling readability in Word:

1. Click the File tab.
2. Click Options.
3. Click Proofing.
4. Under "When correcting spelling and grammar in Word," make sure the “Check grammar with spelling” check box is selected.
5. Select Show readability statistics.
6. After you enable this feature, open a file that you want to check, and check the spelling. When Outlook or Word finishes checking the spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document.

Understanding readability scores:

Each readability test bases its rating on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. There are two scores:

- Flesch Reading Ease test: This test rates text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard files, you want the score to be between 60 and 70.
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test: This test rates text on a U.S. school grade level. For example, a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader can understand the document. For most documents, you want a score to be in between 6.0 and 7.0.

Unnecessary Qualifiers

Avoid using unnecessary qualifiers as they add no additional 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.

Excess Words

Omit needless words. Use the fewest words possible to convey your meaning.

Tips to eliminate excess words:

1. Try to cut out adverbs (quickly, carefully, fully, etc.).
2. Limit your use of adjectives.

Elaborate Words

Excess or elaborate words make a document weaker. Impress your readers with sound ideas, avoid elaborate terms.

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	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

Lists

There are very few hard rules for formatting lists in style guides. For the purposes of the Performance Division, the following guidelines should be used although other styles can also be grammatically correct.

Lists in a Sentence

Lists in a sentence should be set off by numbers followed by a right parenthesis. Lists should be preceded by a colon and separated by semicolons.

Example:

In my class we read three books: 1) To Kill a Mocking Bird, by Harper Lee; 2) The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald; and 3) Catcher in the Rye, by J.D. Salinger.

Vertical Lists

There are three types of vertical lists: bulleted, numbered, and lettered.

All lists, regardless of type, should: 1) use a colon after the introductory sentence or sentence fragment, 2) capitalize the first letter of each item in the list, and 3) use parallel construction.

Correct:

On vacation I am going to:

- See the Eiffel Tower,
- Shop on the Champs-Élysées, and
- Eat croissants,

Incorrect:

On vacation I am going to

- see the Eiffel Tower
- Champs-Élysées – to go to all of the shops
- Find a great place to buy croissants and go there every single day. Make sure I buy plenty to bring home.

Simple lists do not need punctuation.

Example:

I'm bringing:

- A swimsuit
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen

Complicated lists need commas or semicolons and should have an "and" after the punctuation on the second to last item.

Example:

Job requirements include the ability to:

- Perform complex quantitative and qualitative analysis;
- Work effectively in a team environment and demonstrate a high level of initiative, independence, and sound judgment; and
- Track and provide input on relevant legislation.

Lists with more than one sentence should use periods.

Example:

Essential duties are as follows:

- Serves as the appointments manager for various boards and commissions by actively recruiting potential applicants, interviewing applicants, and monitoring and evaluating current appointees. Accurately advises the Governor regarding appointment recommendations for boards and commissions.
- Works closely with the legislature during the Senate Nominations Process to gain approval on interim appointments.
- Assists the Division Director and other division staff with special projects, preparation of specialized reports, and complex research.

Bulleted Lists should be used when the order does not matter. However, items should be grouped in a way that makes sense.

Example:

My grocery list includes:

- Apples
- Oranges
- Buns
- Hot Dogs
- Napkins
- Paper plates

In this case the items are grouped by type and alphabetically within that. It would also be okay to order alphabetically or all food then paper products. Whatever makes the most sense for the document.

Numbered lists should be used when order is important, often for directions. Numbers should be followed by a right parenthesis.

Example:

To get to grandmother's house:

- 1) Head north on Rugby Road,
- 2) Turn left at the light onto University Avenue, and
- 3) The house is the third on the right.

Lettered lists should be used when the order is not important but you want to refer to the letter later in the document. When referenced later the letter should be enclosed in parentheses.

Example:

We ask that operating units fulfill the following requirements:

- a) Develop a strategic plan,
- b) Create a results framework, and
- c) Update their websites.

M/MPBP is available to assist operating units throughout this process, namely with requirements (a) and (b)

Data Notes

All data tables must note the data source. Include one of the following forms of data notes for spreadsheets where data require an explanation.

Comment box: Include a comment box when a specific data cell requires a note, for instance to describe a change in the formula used to calculate that cell or a deviation in results.

Footnote: Include a footnote when a category of data or an entire data table requires an explanation. The data source can appear as a footnote.

Notes tab: Include a Notes tab in the workbook when the entire data set(s) requires an explanation or summary.

III. GRAMMAR

Common Errors

When in doubt about a word's spelling, consult a dictionary. The following section provides specific guidance for commonly used words and sets forth general grammar rules.

The following list provides the correct forms of common errors:

Correct	Explanation
ad hoc	two words in Latin
bottom line	two words
crosscutting	one word
crosswalk	one word
database	one word
decision maker	two words, not hyphenated
e-mail	all in lower case separated by a hyphen
hands-on	hyphenated
home page	two words, lower case
ongoing	one word
online	one word, lower case, no hyphen
round table	two words
state of the art	no hyphens
through	not, thru
time line	two words
toward	not, towards
Web page	two words with "W" capitalized
Web site	two words with "W" capitalized
web-based	all in lower case with hyphen
Webmaster	one word, capitalized
well-being	compound word, see below
work force	two words

Modifiers and Compound Words

As a general rule, use a hyphen with modifiers where the hyphen can prevent misunderstanding.

Example:

"American-football player" avoids confusion about whether the writer means a "player of American football" or an "American player of football".

Exception: If the compound is a familiar one, it is usually unhyphenated or combined as one word.

Example:

interagency, high school students, crosswalk

Compound words with the adverb “well” are often hyphenated:

well-being	well-advised
well-balanced	well-defined

Compound nouns ending in “up” are one word or hyphenated:

checkup	close-up
roundup	sign-up
pileup	follow-up

Exception: If the same words are used as verb phrases, each word stands alone.

Example:

I will follow up {verb phrase} on your suggestion.

I will give you a detailed follow-up {noun} afterwards.

Compounds nouns ending in “down” are usually one word.

showdown	meltdown
breakdown	slowdown
sundown	countdown

Exception: If you give someone a “put-down,” you need to hyphenate.

Compound nouns ending with “in” are usually hyphenated. Compound nouns ending in “out” are usually one word.

break-in	dropout
trade-in	standout
sit-in	sellout
drive-in	buyout

Exception: You must give your children a “time-out.” When you eat dinner, it may become a “pig-out.”

Compound nouns ending in “on” are usually hyphenated, while compound nouns ending in “off” are either one word or hyphenated.

add-on	layoff
carry-on	takeoff
run-on	show-off
follow-on	send-off

Exception: You “login” and “logoff” your computer.

Compound nouns with a prepositional phrase are usually hyphenated but not always.

attorney-at-law	power of attorney
brother-in-law	line of credit
right-of-way	rule of thumb
standard of living	state of the art

Correlative Conjunctions

A pair of conjunctions that connect two parts of a sentence and are not used adjacent to each other.

The most common pairs are:

both...and
either...or
neither...nor
not only...but also

Sentences containing correlative conjunctions are internally unpunctuated.

Example:

He has changed neither his style nor his ethics nor his attitude.

Idiomatic Expressions

Agree with/agree to

Agree with: concur with a person or idea
Agree to: show acceptance to another person’s plan

Example:

I agree with John. We agree to the terms.

Angry with/angry at

Angry with: used when the object of anger is a person
Angry at: used when the object of anger is not a person

Example:

I am angry with Jean. I am angry at the idea of it.

Part from/part with

Part from: when referring to a person or people
Part with: when referring to an object

Example:

I parted from Joe. I parted with my favorite sweater.

Different from/identical with

Use “different from” not different than

Use “identical with” not identical to

Example:

Your idea is no different from mine.

Your situation is identical with mine.

Between/among

Between: referring to two people, places, or things

Among: referring to three or more people, places or things

Example:

There is agreement between the two of them.

The memo was circulated among five people.

All/all of

All: when “all” refers to a noun.

All of: when “all” refers to a pronoun.

Example:

All the developers went on vacation.

All of them are gone.

Modifiers

Place adjectives and adverbs next to the noun or verb they modify to avoid confusion.

Correct: He spoke in the strongest possible terms of a new trade agreement with the Europeans.

Avoid: He spoke of a new trade agreement with the Europeans in the strongest possible terms.

Nonrestrictive Clause

One that will not affect the meaning of a sentence if eliminated.

Example:

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

Restrictive Clause:

One that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Example:

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

Which/that:

“Which” is used to introduce a nonrestrictive or nonessential clause.

Example:

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

“That” is used to introduce a restrictive or essential clause.

Example:

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

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

1. When there are two or more parallel essential clauses in the same sentence.

Example:

She is taking courses which will earn her a high salary and which will qualify her for higher-level jobs.

2. When "that" has already been used in the sentence.

Example:

That is a movie which you must not miss.

3. When the essential clause is introduced by "this," "that," or "those."

Example:

We need to enforce those rules which we presented in earlier chapters.

Troublesome Nouns

Principal/Principle

"Principal" refers to the first, highest, or foremost.

"Principle" refers to a basic truth, law, assumption; moral or ethical standard.

Data

The word "data" is the plural of datum.

Correct: The data are being collected at this time.

Prepositional Phrases

Avoid multiple prepositional phrases.

Avoid: 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

Avoid unclear use of pronouns; ensure that the noun referenced is clear.

Avoid: Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged.

Better: Although the motorcycle hit the tree, the motorcycle was not damaged.

Singular: Use "his" or "her" if the subject is singular.

Example:

The Director, or her designee, will sign.

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

Example:

Employees must submit their forms for clearance.

Tips for using pronouns effectively: Try to reword sentences to avoid the awkward “his or her” by using plurals or other forms.

Avoid: An assistant tries to anticipate the needs of his/her boss.

Better: An assistant tries to anticipate the needs of the 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

Example:

Everyone is going to the concert.

The following are indefinite pronouns and are always plural:

few	several	both
many	others	

Example:

Few people have received training in PowerPoint.

The following may be singular or plural, depending on the subject.

any	some	more
all	none	most

Example:

Is any money left in the contract? Are there any bills to be paid?

Split Infinitives

Avoid split infinitives. An infinitive verb form with an adverbial element interposed between “to” and the verb form.

Correct: The aim is to examine the evidence carefully.

Avoid: The aim is to carefully examine the evidence.

Verbs

Avoid verbs that supply little information and require addition words in a sentence. A verb is the life of a sentence.

Avoid: We’re asking everyone to make a recommendation for a solution.

Better: We’re asking everyone to recommend a solution.

Weak Verbs	Smothered Verbs	Strong Verbs
get	Get the room reservations.	Reserve the room.
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.

Troublesome Verbs

Affect/effect

Affect is a verb that means to influence, change, or assume.

Effect is a noun that means a result or an impression.

Assure/ensure/insure

“Assure” applies only to people.

Example: I assure you, it will be fixed.

Ensure means to make certain; it applies only to inanimate objects.

Example: I will ensure that it gets fixed.

Insure is what insurance companies do.

Example: Geico insures homeowners.

Lay/lie

Substitute the verb “place” for the word in question. If it fits, use lay, if it doesn’t, use lie.

Example:

Lay it on the sofa. I’m going to lie on the sofa.

Imply/infer

Imply means to suggest.

Example:

He implied that we would participate in the event.

Infer means to assume or reach a conclusion.

Example:

From your comment I inferred that we would not participate in the event.

Who/whom; whoever/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.”
3. Fill the gap with “he/she” or “him/her.”

If “he/she” completes the thought, then who is correct.

If “him/her” completes the thought, then whom is correct.

Example:

The person (who/whom) does the best work will be promoted.

who/whom does the best work

____ does the best work

she does the best work

She completes the thought, so who is correct.

This candidate is the one (who/whom) I will promote.

who/whom I will promote

I will promote _____

I will promote him

Him completes the thought, so whom is correct.

Report incidents to (whoever/whomever) is the responsible official.

whoever/whomever is the responsible official

_____ is the responsible official

She is the responsible official

She completes the thought, so whoever is correct.

Give the information to (whoever/whomever) you want to write the report.

whoever/whomever you want to write the report

you want ____ to write the report

you want him to write the report

Him completes the thought, so whomever is correct.

Words/Phrases to Avoid

And/or; either/or

These devices make the meaning of a sentence unclear. Usually, the drafter means one or the other, but not both. Decide which conveys the correct meaning and delete the other.

IV. PUNCTUATION

Apostrophe

Always use curled apostrophes rather than straight ones.

Example:

Secretary's (NOT Secretary's)

Individual Possession/Authorship: An apostrophe is used after each name.

Example:

Mary's and Peter's reports are both due.

Joint Possession: One apostrophe is used in the last of two or more nouns in a series.

Example:

Mary and Peter's report.

Comma

Use a comma before the word "and" and "or" in a series of three or more.

Example:

apples, bananas, and oranges; men, women, or children

Use a comma before the title of a publication named in a sentence.

Example:

More information is available in the report, *Information Technology in the Twenty-First Century*.

Use a comma in a compound sentence connected by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet).

Example:

There is a difference between the novels of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and it is a difference worth noting.

Omit the comma in short compound sentences.

Example:

I understand your argument but I do not agree.

Use a comma between two or more adjectives modifying the same noun if "and" could be used between them without altering the meaning. Omit the comma if an "and" cannot be used.

Example:

a solid, heavy gas; a polished mahogany dresser

Use a comma after Washington, D.C., when used in a sentence.

Example:

The conference will be in Washington, D.C., in May.

Use a comma in numbers of four or more digits.

Example:

4,000

Tip for using commas correctly:

If you are unsure where to place commas, read the sentence aloud.

The natural pauses when reading aloud often indicate the appropriate place for commas.

Dash

Use the “em” dash to separate clauses or parenthetical comments in a sentence. It is longer than the “en” and regular dashes. No space should be left before or after the dash.

Correct: He tried once—at age nine. (“em” dash)

Avoid: He tried once—at age nine. (“en” dash)

Avoid: He tried once--at age nine. (double hyphen)

Ellipsis Mark

Leave one space before and after the ellipsis when used within a sentence to signify missing information.

Example:

“During the past forty years ... we have been witnessing a change in buying habits.”

Leave no space before or after the ellipsis when an opening or closing quotation mark precedes or follows the ellipsis mark.

Example:

“...we have been witnessing a change in habits...”

If one or more words are omitted at the end of a quoted sentence, use the ellipsis followed by the necessary terminal punctuation for the sentence as a whole.

Example:

“Are we witnessing a change in buying habits...?”

Hyphen

As a general rule, do not use a hyphen to set off prefixes, including co, de, pre, pro, and re.

Example:

copilot; demilitarize; prepay; prorevolutionary; redo; interagency; antidumping; antiboycott

Exceptions:

anti-inflammatory; re-engineer; anti-terrorism

The prefixes “ex” and “self” always require a hyphen.

Example:

ex-president; self-control

Words describing an entity-wide endeavor require a hyphen.

Example:

government-wide, department-wide, administration-wide

Exceptions:

worldwide, nationwide

Words beginning with “non” are not hyphenated, unless the word is capitalized or already hyphenated.

Example:

nongovernmental; non-American; non-direct-hire employees

Do not use a hyphen when the first word is an adverb ending in “ly.”

Example:

economically disadvantaged countries

Use a hyphen between words when combined to form a unit modifier, when the modifier immediately precedes the word modified.

Example:

less-developed countries, long-term development

Do not repeat the hyphen where the same ending is used for two consecutive words.

Correct: small and medium-sized businesses

Avoid: small- and medium-sized businesses

Others: G-77 (rather than G77); G-8 (rather than G8)

Direct Hire: Do not hyphenate when used as a noun.

Direct-hire: Hyphenate when used as a modifier.

Example:

John Doe is a U.S. Direct Hire.

It is for direct-hire employees.

i.e., e.g., etc.

Avoid using i.e. and e.g., by using “for example” instead. Avoid using etc.; it is implied by “for example.”

Incorrect: Employees must file important documents electronically (i.e., policies, mission orders, performance reports, etc.).

Correct: Employees must file important documents electronically (for example, policies, mission orders, performance reports).

Parentheses

To set off words or phrases

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

Example:

USAID must build core teams within a size range of 5 to 10 members (the generally accepted size range for effective teams).

To set off complete sentences

Place punctuation inside the parentheses.

Example:
(More details are contained in the full report.)

Double parentheses

When a parenthetical phrase falls within another parenthetical phrase, enclose each phrase in parentheses, even if they adjoin each other.

Example:
(See ADS 565, Physical Security Programs (Domestic))

Period

Use with a.m. and p.m.

Use with U.S.

Washington, D.C.

Use periods when mentioned in a sentence.

Washington, DC

No periods when used in an address.

Quotation Marks

Periods and commas always go inside the closing quotation mark.

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

Periods and commas always go inside the single closing quotation mark.

Example:
Please let me see all orders marked 'Rush.'

Semicolons and colons always go outside the closing quotation mark.

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

A question mark or exclamation point goes inside the closing quotation mark when it applies only to quoted material; they go outside when they apply to the entire sentence.

Example:
The question John posed was, "When will it be ready?"
John's statement is true for everyone: "I want it now"!

Semicolon

Use to separate clauses containing commas, and to separate statements that are too closely related in meaning to be written as separate sentences.

Example:
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 completed by that date.

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

Backslash

Do not use spaces around a backslash.

Correct: and/or

Avoid: and / or

V. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

General Rules

Avoid excessive use of abbreviations and acronyms. Do not introduce an acronym if the word is not repeated.

Include all acronyms or abbreviations used in a document in an acronym list.

Use “M/MPBP”, not “MPBP” without the Bureau designation.

Abbreviation

Avoid using shortened forms of a word or phrase to represent the full form. Abbreviations should not be used in executive documents.

Example:

approx. for approximately; est. for estimated

Exception: U.S. when used as an adjective. Write out United States when used as a noun.

Exception: USG when used in correspondence with other federal departments and agencies. Use U.S. Government in all other correspondence.

Example:

U.S. partner countries;

The United States will partner with India.

After referring to the Department of State once in a document, it can subsequently be referred to as “the Department.”

Always spell out the following terms:

Correct	Incorrect
USAID/Washington	USAID/W or AID/W
Contracting Officer	CO
Agreement Officer	AO
civil service (lower case)	CS
foreign service (lowercase)	FS
state names, when stated without a city.	state acronyms, unless preceded by a city
U.S. assistance	USG assistance

Acronym

As a general rule, any acronym appearing more than once in a document should be spelled out when it first appears. The acronym should immediately follow in parentheses. (See chart on following page for allowable exceptions in USAID internal documents only.)

Example:

International Labor Organization (ILO)

If an acronym occurs infrequently in a document, it may be necessary to spell it out again.

N.B.: Some organizations use what appears like an acronym for their actual name.

Example:

CHF International was formerly “Cooperative Housing Foundation”, but their formal name is now CHF International.

Use the following acronyms or abbreviations. These should be spelled out in all internal and external communications documents:

FULL NAME	ACRONYM OR ABBREVIATION OR RULE
United States Agency for International Development	USAID
Child Survival and Health Programs Fund account (formerly Child Survival and Disease Programs Fund, CSD),	CSH
Director of Foreign Assistance	DFA
Office of the Director of Foreign Assistance	State/F
President’s Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief	President’s Emergency Fund - or - the Emergency Fund
Fiscal Year	FY (When followed by four digit year, <i>i.e.</i> FY 2010.)
State names, when with a city	Abbreviated, <i>exempli gratia</i> Biloxi, MS)
State names, when alone	Spell out

The following acronyms do not need to be spelled out in internal USAID documents or in correspondence with the Department of State and Congress. It is unlikely that these acronyms will be used in correspondence from USAID to any other external recipient; if they are, they must be spelled out.

CATEGORY	REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES
Agency and Bureau/Independent Office Acronyms	AFR, CFBCI, EGAT, EOP, GC, GH, HR, IG, M, ODP, OSDBU, SEC, USAID
Funding Sources	DA, ESF, FMF, GHCS, INCLE, IMET, NADR, OE, TI

Procurement	BPA, GLASS, IQC, PO, RFA, RFQ
Regional Missions	RDMA, REDSO/ESA, USAID/CAR
Personnel Categories	AD, CASU, FSN, PSC, PAPA, PASA, RSSA, SMG, TCN, USDH
Congressional Documents	CBJ, CNs, NOA
Collaborating Agencies	MCA, MCC, NSC, OPIC
Committees/Boards	ACVFA, APCC, BIFAD, BTEC, Development IPC, DC, PC
USG Executive Departments and Agencies	DoD, DOS, GAO, GSA, HHS, OMB
Interagency Programs	PEPFAR, PMI
Bilateral Partners	DFID, JICA, NORAD
Multilateral Partners	EC, EU, FAO, IMF, OAS, OECD, UN, WB, WHO
Military Partners	AFRICOM, NATO, CENTCOM
Private Sector Partners	NGO, PVO, PPP
Long-term Projects/Programs	FEWS, FFP
White House	POTUS, FLOTUS, WH
Laws/Acts	FOIA, PL 480
Other	ADS, ICASS, IDP, RRB, USAID, USG

N.B.: When in doubt, err on the side of spelling an acronym out.

The following acronyms are so common, they do not need to be spelled out in either internal or external correspondence:

ATM	BMW	CIA	FBI
IBM	IRS	PhD	

Articles with Acronyms

Use the indefinite article “a” or “an” according to how the acronym is pronounced.

Example:

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.”

Example:

ERSs; SOAGs; CTOs

Exception: Do not add an “s” for the plural of acronyms when the acronym contains a word that can be either singular or plural.

Example:

Administrative Management Staff (AMS) – “staff” can be either singular or plural.

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 U.S.C. 3726

VI. CAPITALIZATION

General Rules

Always capitalize official titles.

Example:

Administrator, Deputy Secretary; Prime Minister

Where a formal name is used for an act, plan, report or other document, write references to the report, plan, or act in lower case.

Example:

Performance and Accountability Report, but “the report”; Thrift Savings Plan, but “the plan”

Beware of the difference between proper names and concepts or general references. Proper names are capitalized; the other two generally are not.

Avoid arbitrary capitalization. As a rule if you cannot identify a reason for capitalizing a word, use lower case.

Specific Rules

Administration

- General Services Administration
- the Obama Administration
- 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 a specific federal or international unit)
- but an agency, agencies, interagency

Ambassador

- Ambassador John Smith
- Ambassador at Large
- the Ambassador (if referring to a specific ambassador)
- but an ambassador

Bureau

- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Bureau for Africa
- the Bureau (if referring to a specific USAID or federal unit)
- **but** bureau contacts

Cabinet

- the Cabinet
- but cabinet-rank

Chargé d’Affaires ad interim

- Chargé John Smith
- the Chargé

- Chief of Mission
- the Chief of Mission of Embassy XYZ

Congress

- Congress of the United States
- the Congress (if referring to the national legislative body of the United States)
- Member of Congress
- but the congressional report

Consul/Consul 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

Consulate/Consulate 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

Embassy

- Embassy XYZ
- the Embassy (if referring to a specific embassy)
- but an embassy

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)
- federal employees (do not capitalize when used as an adjective)

Government

- the Government of the United States; the U.S. Government, the Government of Denmark (formal)
- but the Danish government (informal)

Mission

- the USAID Mission in Burkina Faso
- Mission Director John Doe;
- USAID's mission directors (if not referring to a specific person)
- USAID missions around the world

Nation

- the Nation, when referring to the United States
- otherwise lowercase

Post

- Post (when used as a noun)
- Post (if referring to a specific overseas post)
- but "at post"

Parliament

- Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Member of Parliament

President

- President John Smith
- the President (if referring to a specific president of a country)
- presidential elections; presidential candidates; presidential appointees

State

- She is from the State of Iowa.
- but federal, state, and local law

Tribe

- the Cherokee Indian Tribe (if referring to a specific tribe)
- tribe

VII. OFFICIAL FORMS OF ADDRESS, ACRONYMS AND NAMES

References

The USG *Yellow Book* identifies presidential appointees who have been confirmed by the Senate. In letters to persons meeting these criteria, "The Honorable" should be used in the inside address.

Use the names of foreign heads of state, capital cities, and the official names of countries provided on the State/ES "Heads of State and International Organizations" list found at the following link: <http://inside.usaid.gov/es/infolink/ChiefsofStateList.pdf>

Refer to the "Forms of Address" table on the following pages for guidance on how to correctly address envelopes, and salutations and complimentary closings in letters.

If further guidance is needed for forms of address for people other than those listed below, call the State ES Correspondence Unit at extension 7-5292.

General Guidelines

Address all elected officials of the U.S. Government and presidential appointees as "The Honorable". Spell out all titles in the address, except "Dr.," "Mr.," "Ms.," or "Mrs."

Be consistent in the use of titles within a letter.

Use: Dr. Timothy White" or "Timothy White, M.D."

Avoid: Dr. Timothy White, M.D."

Use "Mr." if the gender of an addressee is unknown or ambiguous. Use "Ms." when addressing women, unless it is known that they prefer "Miss" or "Mrs."

The following list provides models for forms of address for officials of federal, state, and foreign governments, as well as other professions. Forms of address for female officials generally follow the model listed for males, except where differences are indicated

Address	Address on Letters and Envelope	Salutation and Complimentary Closing
The President	The President The White House Washington, DC 20500	Dear Mr. President: Respectfully,
<i>Former</i> President	The Honorable (Full Name) (Address)	Dear Mr. (Surname): Sincerely,
Wife of the President	Mrs. (Full Name) The White House	Dear Mrs. (Surname):

	Washington, DC 20500	Sincerely,
Assistant to the President	The Honorable (Full Name) Assistant to the President The White House Washington, DC 20500	Dear Mr. (Surname): Sincerely,
The Vice President	The Honorable (Full Name) The White House Washington, DC 20500 The Honorable (Full Name) President of the Senate United States Senate Washington, DC 20510	Dear Mr. Vice President: Respectfully, Dear Mr. President: Sincerely,
The Chief Justice	The Chief Justice of the United States The Supreme Court of the United States Washington, DC 20543	Dear Mr. Chief Justice: Sincerely,
Associate Justice	The Honorable (Full Name) The Supreme Court of the United States Washington, DC 20543	Dear Justice (Surname): Sincerely,
U.S. Senator	The Honorable (Full Name) U.S. Senate Washington, DC 20510	Dear Senator (Surname): Sincerely,
<i>Former</i> U.S. Senator	The Honorable (Full Name) Local Address City, State ZIP	Dear Senator (Surname): Sincerely,
U.S. Representative (Member of Congress)	The Honorable (Full Name) U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515	Dear Mr. (Surname): Dear Ms. (Surname): Sincerely,
<i>Former</i> U.S.	The Honorable (Full Name)	Dear Mr. (Surname):

Representative (Member of Congress)	Local Address City, State ZIP	Sincerely, Dear Ms. or Mrs. (Surname): Sincerely,
Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives	The Honorable (Full Name) Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515	Dear Mr. Speaker: Sincerely,
<i>Former</i> Speaker of the House of Representatives	The Honorable (Full Name) Local Address City, State ZIP	Dear Mr. (Surname): Sincerely,
Committee Chairman	The Honorable (Full Name) Chairman, Committee on (Name) U.S. Senate Washington, DC 20510 The Honorable (Full Name) Chairman, Committee on (Name) U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515	Dear Mr. Chairman: Sincerely, Dear Madam Chairwoman: Sincerely,
Cabinet Members	The Honorable (Full Name) Secretary of (Name of Department) Washington, DC 00000 The Honorable (Full Name) Attorney General Washington, DC 20530	Dear Mr. Secretary: Dear Madam Secretary: Sincerely, Dear Madam Attorney General: Sincerely,
Secretary of State	The Honorable (Full Name) Secretary of State Washington, DC 20520	Dear Madam Secretary: Sincerely,
Deputy Secretaries, Under, or Assistant Secretaries	The Honorable (Full Name) Deputy Secretary of (Name of	Dear Mr. (Surname): Sincerely,

	<p>Department) Washington, DC 20520</p> <p>The Honorable (Full Name) Under Secretary of (Name of Department) Washington, DC 20520</p> <p>The Honorable (Full Name) Assistant Secretary of (Name of Department) Washington, DC 20520</p>	
Head of Independent Offices or Agencies	<p>The Honorable (Full name) Comptroller General of the United States General Accounting Office Washington, DC 20548</p> <p>The Honorable (Full Name) Chairman (Name of Commission) Washington, DC 20000</p> <p>The Honorable (Full Name) Director, Office of Management and Budget Washington, DC 20503</p>	<p>Dear Mr. (Surname):</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Dear Mr. Chairman: Sincerely,</p> <p>Dear Mr. (Surname): Sincerely,</p>
American Ambassador	The Honorable (Full Name) American Ambassador (City), (Country)	Dear Mr. Ambassador: Dear Madam Ambassador: Sincerely,
<i>Former</i> American Ambassador A former Ambassador retains "The Honorable" but not the title of "Ambassador." See Career Ambassador entry below.	The Honorable (Full Name) Local Address City, State ZIP	Dear Mr. (Surname): Dear Ms. or Mrs. (Surname): Sincerely,
<i>Former</i> American Ambassador (Career)	The Honorable (Full Name) Local Address	Dear Mr. Ambassador: Dear Madam Ambassador:

A Career Ambassador retains both "The Honorable" and the title of "Mr./Madam Ambassador" for life.	City, State ZIP	Sincerely,
American Consul General or American Consul	(Full Name) American Consul General (or American Consul) (City), (Country)	Dear Mr. (Surname): Sincerely,
U.S. Representative to the United Nations or Organization of American States	The Honorable (Full Name) United States Representative to the United Nations (or Organization of American States) (City), (State or Country) 00000	Dear Mr. Ambassador: Dear Madam Ambassador: Sincerely,
President (or leader) of a Foreign Country	His Excellency (Full Name) President of (Country) (Local Address) 00000	Dear Mr. President: Sincerely,
Foreign Ambassador in the United States	His Excellency (Full Name) Ambassador of (Country) (Local Address) 00000	Excellency: <i>(formal)</i> Dear Mr. Ambassador: <i>(informal)</i> Sincerely,
Foreign Minister	His Excellency (Full Name) Minister of (Name of Ministry) (City), (Country) or Her Excellency (Full Name) Minister of (Name of Ministry) (City), (Country)	Dear Mr. Minister: Dear Madame Minister: Sincerely,
Governor of a State	The Honorable (Full Name) Governor of (Name of State) (City), (State) 00000	Dear Governor (Surname): Sincerely,

<p>Professor</p>	<p>Professor (Full Name) (Full Address)</p> <p>or (must be Ph.D. or M.D.) Dr. (Full Name) (Full Address)</p>	<p>Dear Professor (Surname):</p> <p>or (must be Ph.D. or M.D.)</p> <p>Dear Dr. (Surname):</p> <p>Sincerely,</p>
<p>Head of Foreign Donor Agency Located Outside the United States</p>	<p>The Honorable (Full Name) (Full Address)</p>	<p>Dear Mr./Madam (Title): (Never say Dear Ms. (Title)</p> <p>or Dear Mr./Ms. (Surname): (If you are certain the woman is married, it is appropriate to say: Dear Mrs. (Surname)</p> <p>If the head has a PhD: Dear Dr. (Surname)</p> <p>Sincerely,</p>
<p>Head of Donor Agency Located Within the United States</p>	<p>The Honorable (Full Name) (Full Address)</p>	<p>Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. (Surname)</p> <p>If the head has a PhD: Dear Dr. (Surname)</p> <p>Sincerely,</p>

Official Cabinet Names, Acronyms and Principal Names

The Administration

President Barack Obama
Vice President Joe Biden
First Lady Michelle Obama
Dr. Jill Biden

The Cabinet

White House Staff
Executive Office of the President
The Cabinet
In order of succession to the Presidency:

Vice President of the United States

Joseph R. Biden

Speaker of the House

John Boehner

President Pro Tempore of the Senate

Daniel Inouye

Department of State (DOS or State)

Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton
<http://www.state.gov>

Department of the Treasury (Treasury)

Secretary Timothy F. Geithner
<http://www.treasury.gov>

Department of Defense (DoD)

Secretary Leon Panetta
<http://www.defenselink.mil>

Department of Justice (DOJ)

Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.
<http://www.usdoj.gov>

Department of the Interior (DOI)

Secretary Kenneth L. Salazar

<http://www.doi.gov>

Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack

<http://www.usda.gov>

Department of Commerce (DOC)

Secretary Rebecca Blank

<http://www.commerce.gov>

Department of Labor (DOL)

Secretary Hilda L. Solis

<http://www.dol.gov>

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius

<http://www.hhs.gov>

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Secretary Shaun L.S. Donovan

<http://www.hud.gov>

Department of Transportation (DOT)

Secretary Raymond L. LaHood

<http://www.dot.gov>

Department of Energy (DOE)

Secretary Steven Chu

<http://www.energy.gov>

Department of Education (ED)

Secretary Arne Duncan

<http://www.ed.gov>

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Secretary Sloan Gibson (Acting)

<http://www.va.gov>

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Secretary Janet A. Napolitano

<http://www.dhs.gov>

Positions with Cabinet Rank

Council of Economic Advisers (The Council)

Chair Alan Krueger

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/cea/>

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Administrator Lisa P. Jackson

<http://www.epa.gov>

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

Director (Acting) Jeffrey Zients

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb>

Small Business Administration (SBA)

Karen Mills

<http://www.sba.gov/>

United States Trade Representative (USTR)

Ambassador Ronald Kirk

<http://www.ustr.gov>

United States Ambassador to the United Nations

Ambassador Susan Rice

United States Mission to the United Nations (USUN)

Ambassador Susan Rice

White House Chief of Staff

Jacob Lew

VIII. OTHER

Education Degrees

Associates Degree (AA)

Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA)

Bachelor of Science Degree (BSc)

Master of Arts Degree (MA)

Master of Science Degree (MSc)

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

Doctoral Degree (PhD)

Juris Doctor (JD) or Doctor of Jurisprudence (DJ or JD)

Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS)

Publishers

Italicize names of newspaper and magazine publishers.

Example:

The Washington Post Company

Titles

Italicize titles of books, epic poems, magazines, movies, musical compositions, newspapers, paintings, pamphlets, plays, radio and television programs, reports, sculpture, etc.

Example:

To Kill a Mockingbird

Use quotation marks around titles that represent only part of a published work.

Example:

The chapter on "Foreign Assistance" was useful.

Use quotation marks around the titles of individual poems (versus epic poems cited above).

Example:

A favorite poem is "A Red, Red Rose."

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