



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# ADS Style and Format Guide

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 501

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## **Introduction**

This ADS Style Guide sets the guidelines for how to write and format ADS material.

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

## Editorial Guidelines

### I. Writing in Plain Language

- Write clearly, using common, everyday words.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- Use the active voice. Active verbs eliminate ambiguity about responsibilities. 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 see: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>.

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 must 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.

## II. 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

### **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. The acronym should immediately follow in parentheses.

### **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

Exception: 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.

### **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
Public Law	P.L. 102-511
U.S. Code	32 U.S.C. 3726

### III. Capitalization

#### **Always capitalize official titles:**

Administrator; Deputy Secretary; Mission Director; Prime Minister.

#### **Agency:**

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

#### **Bureaus:**

- Bureau for Africa;
- The Bureau/A Bureau; and
- Bureau contacts.

#### **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.

#### **Federal:**

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

#### **The Internet:**

- **Not** “the net” or “the web.”

#### **Missions:**

- The USAID Mission in Burkina Faso;
- USAID Missions around the world;
- Mission Director John Doe; and
- The Mission Director/A Mission Director.

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

**Operating Unit:** Always use initial caps.

#### **Post (when used as a noun):**

- Post (if referring to a specific overseas post); **but**
- At post.

#### **States:**

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

**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):**

Always capitalize and hyphenate “U.S. Direct-Hire”:

She was a U.S. Direct-Hire.

**website:**

Use as one word. Yet, “The Internet” is preferred.

**IV. 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.”

**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.

**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.

## V. 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.

Always spell out a number that begins a sentence.

### **Fractions:**

Spell out any fraction standing alone: two-thirds of the Missions. Use numerals for decimal fractions: 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.

### **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 in parentheses. Leave one space before the prefix:  
For example: (202) 712-0700.

### **Time:**

Use numerals. Include periods in “a.m.” and “p.m.,” and do not capitalize them:  
For example: 4 p.m.; 8:45 a.m.



## 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, are 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, are the same thing:  
Mary and Peter's report was due this morning.

### 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.*

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).

### 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.

For the word “email”: No hyphen and always lowercase unless at the beginning of a sentence.

### **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:**

Insert two spaces after a period.

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.)

Doctoral Degree (Ph.D.)

### **Quotation Marks:**

Always use curly quotation marks: “

Periods and commas always go inside the closing quotation mark:

John said, “The proof is in the pudding.”

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

Please let me see all orders marked “Rush: ‘For Administrator only.’”

Semicolons and colons always go outside the closing quotation mark:

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; it goes outside 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."

### **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.*

## **Formatting Guidelines**

### **I. Fonts**

For ADS cover pages:

- Microsoft Sans Serif 24 for the title of the document.
- Microsoft Sans Serif 20 for the type of document.  
For example: A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 501.
- Microsoft Sans Serif 14 for the Revision Date, Responsible Office, and File Name.

For all text within a document: Arial 12

For Effective Dates in a chapter: Arial 10

For page numbers: Arial 11

For Headers and Footers: Arial 11

### **II. Pagination**

- Do not use page numbers on the cover page.
- Use page numbers for all other pages in the document in Arial 11 font.

### **III. Sections**

In ADS chapters, you can only drill down twice. For example:

501.3.1  
501.3.1.1

Every section must have an effective date unless there is no text in the section.

### **IV. Spacing**

- Ensure single-line space throughout the document. Double-space between paragraphs and bullet points.
- 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.
- 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

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