

## Quality Guidance for Staff Documents

The quality of our work directly contributes to fulfilling our mission of ensuring safety and security, and also enhances our effectiveness, efficiency, and openness. Our individual and organizational performance is reflected in the quality of products and services that we provide. It is important that our documents and communications achieve quality, not only in their technical content, but also from an editorial and plain language standpoint. This guidance document highlights several existing references that the staff should consider in developing quality documents and communications, as well as some “do’s and don’ts” that may be helpful.

### **Do**

- Ensure the product matches the expectation. Answer the mail.
  - Respond to the direction in the SRM or the questions asked in correspondence. State the purpose up front.
- Align with your management early in the process to avoid changes in scope late in the process.
- Use the [NRC Style Guide](#).
- Use Management Directive 3.57, “[Correspondence Management](#).”
- Take advantage of the [grammar and spelling check](#) feature in Word 2010.
- Sign up for NRC [training classes](#) at the PDC or on your computer:
  - Writing in Plain Language (Instructor-led, 2 days)
  - Technical Writing (Instructor-led, 2 days)
  - Plain Language (Web-based, 45 minutes)
  - Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely (Web-based, 1 hour)
  - Business Grammar: Sentence Construction (Web-based, 1 hour)
- Refer to [SECY guidance](#).
- Use EDO Procedure 380, “[SECY Paper Development Process](#).”
- Use an [NRC technical editor](#) as the last reviewer of a document.
- Use [plain language](#). (To comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010 the EDO has instructed staff to include a plain language summary with documents commonly read by the public—specifically Plant Performance Assessments, Generic Communications, Inspection Reports, and Significant Enforcement Actions.)
- Place Code of Federal Regulations citations and other information that interferes with the written flow of a document in a footnote. Similarly, the essential information of a document should appear on the first page; if a document is being sent to a long list of recipients, move this list to an endnote or enclosure.
- Ensure consistency in the style and format of documents with several contributors. This is the responsibility of the final authorizer. Documents with multiple authors would strongly benefit from final review by a technical editor.

## Don't

- Don't create multiple drafts of the same document in ADAMS; save the final version only. (Multiple "official" drafts can become a severe drain on agency resources when responding to Freedom of Information Act requests.)
- Don't make changes to a document that merely reflect stylistic preferences; avoid "happy-to-glad" edits.
- Don't confuse a purpose statement with the background section of a document.
- Don't make these common mistakes:

### ➤ Over-use of acronyms and initialisms

This is a common source of frustration for readers, especially when multiple acronyms appear in a single sentence. Use plain words when possible. For instance, when writing about the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards, you can avoid using "ACRS" by simply writing "the Committee" after the first use. Unless several committees are being discussed, there should be no ambiguity. Likewise, a Combined Operating License can simply be called "a license" (rather than COL) if no other types of licenses are being referenced in that section of the document.

### ➤ Excessive noun/adjective clusters

Avoid these confusing constructions by using more prepositions and articles to clarify the relationships among the words. For example:

#### Avoid

Underground mine worker safety protection procedures development.	Developing procedures to protect the safety of workers in underground mines.
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#### Use

### ➤ Relying on passive voice

Use active voice whenever possible. For example:

#### Avoid

The following information must be included in the application for it to be considered complete.	You must include the following information in your complete application.
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#### Use

### ➤ Misuse of punctuation

Follow the [NRC Style Guide](#), particularly for the use of commas.

➤ Confusing “that” and “which”

These are not interchangeable. Don't assume “which” is somehow more proper. Use “that” for a restrictive clause (part of a sentence that you can't get rid of because it specifically restricts some other part of the sentence). For example, “Gems that sparkle often elicit forgiveness.” The words “that sparkle” restrict the kind of gems you're talking about. Without them, the meaning of the sentence would change. Use “which” in a non-restrictive clause (something that could be dropped without changing the meaning of the sentence.) These examples show proper usage:

- Training on a simulator ensures a degree of competence **that** cannot be learned otherwise.
- She walked to the warehouse, **which** is a mile away, to pick up the reports.