



**Food Safety and Inspection Service  
Correspondence Manual**

**April 2015**

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# Introduction

The *Food Safety and Inspection Service Correspondence Manual* is a reference guide to help Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) employees to prepare and process Department of Agriculture (USDA) and FSIS correspondence and memoranda. Its specific purpose is to help employees with the following responsibilities:

- Produce correspondence that effectively represents the Agency and meets FSIS, Departmental, and Government wide standards, including those of the Plain Language Act.
- Document properly official decisions and transactions.

Producing consistently high-quality correspondence offers many benefits to the Agency and to those we serve. Prompt replies to letters and messages, for example, provide efficient service, promote good will, and increase the Agency's effectiveness with stakeholders, Congress, and the public.

Other resources that might be useful include the following items:

- Common grammatical errors to avoid are in Appendix E.
- Common punctuation errors to avoid are in Appendix F.
- The *USDA Departmental Regulation for Correspondence Management* at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3060-001.htm>.
- The *U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual* at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/stylemanual/about.html>.
- The *USDA Secretarial Correspondence and Documents Manual* at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR3060-001.pdf>.
- A glossary of FSIS acronyms and terms at: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/searchhelp/help/glossary/acronyms/acronyms>.

Contact the FSIS Executive Correspondence and Issues Management Staff (ECIMS), Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE), FSIS, with any questions, comments, suggestions, or requests for additional information regarding the *Manual*.

## Plain Writing: Why and How

On October 13, 2010, the President signed The Plain Writing Act into law.

The law requires the Federal government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a “clear, concise, and well-organized” manner that follows the best practices of plain language writing.

Plain writing is written for the average reader. Plain writing includes some or all of the following:

- Short sections and sentences
- Active voice (active =“FSIS determined...”; passive =“A determination was made by FSIS...”)
- Concrete and familiar words, rather than jargon
- Useful headings
- Lists and tables

USDA has pledged to provide “information that is clear, understandable, and useful in every paper or electronic letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction.” FSIS wants to make Plain Writing the foundation of every written document we issue. The Office of Management and Budget issued “Final Guidance for the Plain Writing Act of 2010” (PDF) on April 13, 2011. That document reviews the requirements of the Act, and how agencies will meet those requirements. The following Web sites and checklists also can help.

- <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>
- [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN\\_WRITING](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING)
- <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/whatisPL/>
- <http://centerforplainlanguage.org/resources/plain-writing-laws/plain-writing-act-of-2010/>.

Using the information in this *Manual*, you can extend plain writing to Agency correspondence and other important documents.

# FSIS' Green Initiative Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to help employees plan, prepare, and disseminate correspondence and other documents using “green friendly” practices to support FSIS’ Green Initiative and USDA sustainability efforts. This includes guidance for document format, fonts, margins, and spacing to reduce consumption of paper, ink, and other office resources. The guidance covers the three types of correspondence and documents generally handled by FSIS employees: informal, formal or official, and legal.

Additional writing standards and guidance are in the Government Printing Office (GPO) style manual at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?granuleId=&packageId=GPO-STYLEMANUAL-2008&fromBrowse=true>.

## INFORMAL DOCUMENTS

Informal documents are those prepared for unofficial purposes to aid in accomplishing day-to-day work related activities with colleagues in FSIS, associates in other government agencies, or private organizations. Examples include: meeting agendas and minutes, draft papers, tables, etc. FSIS employees should apply discretion as provided under FSIS’ Green Initiative, when preparing informal documents to reduce paper, ink, and other Agency resources. The green guidance offers employees the following options to reduce paper and ink.

- Smaller fonts (8-11 point).
- Narrower margins, such as .5” on all sides of document (right, left, top and bottom).
- Single-line spacing for paragraphs and between paragraphs.
- Adjusted indent range to between - 0.3” and maximum 0” left and right. Indents can be adjusted by using the toolbar options for “Page Layout” and “Paragraph” functions in Microsoft Word.
- Printing on both sides of the paper.

## FORMAL OR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Formal or official correspondence is a memo, letter, circular, report, or other document prepared in an official capacity on behalf of FSIS, excluding FSIS Directives, FSIS Notices, and Compliance Guidelines. Generally, formal or official correspondence communicates an Agency/office decision, action, inquiry, response, finding, or other message related to work operations. Examples of formal or official correspondence include: congressional responses and reports, and letters and responses to federal plant owners, industry representatives, and others.

Official correspondence prepared for signatures (Secretary, Under Secretary, Administrator, or Deputy, etc.) should meet the standards established below. Employees must ensure that all letters comply with this standard for proper fitting on the FSIS or USDA *letterhead*.

- The official font is Times New Roman 11-12 point. The size may be adjusted as needed to improve the document appearance and minimize unnecessary paper use (e.g., to avoid having just one sentence on a page).
- The narrowest margins permitted are .5” and the widest margins are 1.0”. The margin widths used should minimize the number of pages and improve the appearance and usefulness of the document for the intended audiences. The following variations are allowed:
  - Left and Right Margins (.5” - 1.0”)
  - Top Margin- 1.0”
  - Bottom Margin- .5” - 1.0”
- Indents should be set to 0” left and right.
- Single line spacing should be used between sentences and paragraphs.
- Two spaces should appear after periods, colons, and between states and zip codes.
- Printing is permitted on only one side of the paper for the main document.
  - Enclosures and attachments for official correspondence can be printed on both sides, as can appendices for reports.
- The format for addresses should include the name and official title, if any, followed by the address, state, and zip code.

*Examples:*

Mr. William Moore  
 1234 Anyname Street  
 Atlanta, Georgia 30340

Ms. Carolyn Green, Ph.D.  
 1234 Anywhere Street  
 Ravensdale, Washington 98051

Reports to Congress

Standard correspondence font and margins apply. As a general rule, reports are only printed on one side of the page, unless a high quality paper is used, and the report is being bound. The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) semi-annual report is an example of this exception. This report is printed on a thick, high-quality paper and bound in a book-style cover.

Standard fonts and margins generally apply to other official documents but may be modified upon discretion by FSIS program areas, based on their needs, procedures, and policies to meet the needs of the intended audience.

**LEGAL DOCUMENTS**

Legal documents are those prepared for administrative, civil, criminal, and other legal proceedings, and include: administrative, civil, or criminal complaints; settlement agreements; and motions, among others.

FSIS employees will follow and apply the standard format and guidelines provided by OGC, Department of Justice, and other appropriate agencies for preparing written legal documents.

## Handling Restricted Information

The guidance in this section is taken from USDA Departmental Regulation (DR) 3060-1, Correspondence Management. The information applies to all forms of correspondence addressed in the *Manual* and must be used in a manner that is consistent with the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act and their implementing regulations, Subparts A and G, Part 1 of Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations. In addition, only officials with appropriate authority are permitted to make public any matters of policy and information of a policy nature.

Guidelines on handling restricted information include the following.

- *Personally Identifiable Information (PII)*. Do not include a Social Security number in correspondence, e-mail, or e-mail attachment unless required for personnel action. Occasionally, the number is included with incoming correspondence. If so, make sure that it is completely removed (eradicated with black marker with the eradicated page copied, and the copy used, or with redacting tape) and not passed on to anyone else, including other Agency employees. It is a violation of the Privacy Act to include or pass on a Social Security number unless it is needed for a personnel action.
- *Secretary's Correspondence*. Correspondence prepared to be signed by the Secretary or any Department or Agency official must not be made public before it is signed and then is to be released only through appropriate channels.
- *White House Correspondence*. Correspondence that is referred to USDA and then to FSIS must not be published in whole or in part. Employees must not quote from any of these letters unless required to do so by law.
- *Foreign Negotiations*. Correspondence between employees and members of the press, or trade, or other non-Government officials must omit any reference to current or pending negotiations with foreign governments and agencies, except when specifically authorized, or when disclosure is required by law. Reference to completed negotiations is permitted only when the matter has been officially announced and the Government's policy determined. [\*DR 3060-1\*](#) has additional information.

## Letterhead

In May 2013, FSIS began using the Departmental Visual Standards Guide, dated January 2013. The Guide identifies standards for all USDA agencies, in accordance with Secretary Vilsack's "One USDA speaking with One Voice" branding. Copies of the new letterhead and other documents that align with the new standards are on the FSIS Intranet by searching "Communication Standards."

## FSIS Logos

In accordance with the January 2013 visual standards guidance, the following logos are acceptable for use (as is the logo on the title page of the Manual). The above standards guide link contains guidance on logo use by agencies.

### Acceptable Variations



**United States Department of Agriculture**



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**



**United States Department of Agriculture**



**United States Department of Agriculture**

# Document Management: Naming, Storing, and Retrieving

Documents should be named and stored so that they can be retrieved or used again in the future. It is important to record any clearances on the document, to ensure the correct version is used. Most program areas have their own methods and systems for filing and naming documents. Follow any established procedures for your program area. If there are no established procedures, consider the following when completing your document.

- Name the document so that others can easily retrieve and understand its contents.
- Store the document so that you, your colleagues, and your supervisor can quickly find it.
- Include on the document information that identifies who created the document and his or her telephone number, the sources of the information used, the names of those who cleared the document, and the dates the document was cleared.

There are a number of ways to show who created, provided, and cleared the document's information. Below are a few examples, but choose what makes sense to you and your organization.

### Example 1:

FSIS:OPACE:ECIMS: Ann Anyone (202)-123-4567 12/13/20XX

Document Name: Jones – repeat violators response

Processing Code: FI50 Control Number: 1234576

Information: Information from OPHS John Doe – see his November 2012 letter on repeat violations of *Salmonella*

### Clearance

PROGRAM AREA	NAME	DATE
OFO	W. Smith with changes	12/17/20XX
OPACE	C. Blake	12/18/20XX
OPPD	D. Engeljohn with comments	12/19/20XX

### Example 2:

FINAL:FSIS:LPA:John Smith:fs:12/11/XX:851-4111:OES24S-7930787:CS6761

SOURCE: Alincoln-OPPD

### Clearance:

Exec Correspondence\_\_\_\_\_

Congressional and Public Affairs\_\_\_\_\_

Office of Public Health Science\_\_\_\_\_

Office of the Administrator\_\_\_\_\_

## Document Management: Using the Enterprise Content Management (ECM) System

The Department and FSIS use ECM to move controlled or executive correspondence through the various clearance steps. It also is used by program areas for moving documents that are program-area specific through clearance and review.

FSIS Program Area Offices use ECM extensively for handling specific review processes and have established and maintained several processes in ECM. Other offices use a simpler approach. ECIMS can consult with any office on establishing a process or set of processes in ECM. In addition, simple processes using the processing codes below have been established. These are often used for clearing documents within FSIS prior to setting up a *Red Jacket*, but program areas can use and modify the workflow as needed.

- OFO30
- OIEA30
- OPHS30
- ODIFP30
- OM30

If you want to discuss setting up a process in ECM, please contact ECIMS.

# Document Management: Controlled Correspondence

FSIS manages all correspondence it receives, whether from the Office of the Administrator, from FSIS program areas, referrals from other agencies, or from USDA's Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES).

Although program areas respond to much correspondence, ECIMS has overall responsibility for the Agency's official correspondence management. Correspondence includes letters, e-mail messages, postcards, memorandums, notes, faxes, and other documents received from individuals, organizations, government officials, Congress, and other constituents, as well as documents such as informational and decision memorandums initiated within FSIS.

Controlled correspondence includes correspondence that is assigned a control number in USDA's ECM system by either FSIS or OES. The FSIS Correspondence Control Officer (CCO) oversees the Agency's controlled correspondence.

OES scans all incoming letters addressed to the Secretary of Agriculture or USDA into ECM and refers the letters to the proper agency to prepare a response. Also in ECM, OES designates whether the Secretary, Under Secretary for Food Safety, or an FSIS official should sign the response. ECIMS scans letters received by FSIS into ECM.

The process for responding is similar for letters received by OES and FSIS. An ECIMS analyst drafts a response in consultation with the appropriate program areas. After the draft response has received Agency clearance, it is returned to the ECIMS CCO to prepare the final document for signature by the appropriate FSIS official. Although responses to some letters are signed by the Secretary, Under Secretary, or FSIS Administrator, responses to the majority of letters referred to FSIS are signed by the Assistant Administrator of one of the FSIS program areas.

## **PREPARING LETTERS FOR A DEPARTMENT-LEVEL SIGNATURE**

All letters designated for signature at the Department level (i.e., the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or Under Secretary) are handled using the same procedures for Agency clearance. After the draft has been cleared by the appropriate FSIS officials, including the OPACE Assistant Administrator and the FSIS Administrator, it is forwarded in ECM to OES. The OES Program Liaison Specialist coordinates Departmental clearance and signature of the letter.

For correspondence to be signed by the Secretary and Under Secretary, avoid lengthy letters. After the first page, subsequent pages should be on plain bond paper. Correspondence prepared for the Secretary's signature ***must not be made public before it is signed and is to be released only through appropriate channels.***

## Style Choices and Guides

Different audiences and document types require different writing styles. Style refers to considerations such as specific language use, rules or conventions for usage and punctuation, and the appearance of the information on the page. Style also reflects the choices writers make when they plan, design, write, and edit documents. These choices can include the specific words chosen; the structure and length of sentences and paragraphs; the way in which the document is organized; and the tone, attitude, and perspective.

Style preferences for FSIS letters and other documents include the following.

- Write for the audience.
- Write brief, pleasant, businesslike responses that are to the point. Be concise but not curt.
- Avoid jargon and technical language when writing for readers who are unfamiliar with the terms.
- Use concrete, specific words that can be found in a standard dictionary.
- Spell and capitalize consistently in the document.
- Use acronyms and initials consistently: spell out on first use, then use as acronym on subsequent usage.
- Write short paragraphs, limited to one topic.
- Begin paragraphs with one main thought and follow with supporting details.
- Try to keep sentences to approximately 25 words or less.
- Avoid excessive hyphenation or dividing hyphenation at the end of a line.
- Hyphens connect the words of a compound modifier when it comes before the word being modified. Hyphenate “up-to-date” only if it is used as an adjective.
- Use the active voice rather than the passive voice, unless it changes the meaning.
- Use command verbs, to the maximum extent possible, when action is required of readers.
- Never use contractions, such as it’s for it is or aren’t for are not.
- Use two spaces following colons, the punctuation at the end of sentences, and between the state name and zip code.
- Use tabs to align signature blocks, etc. Never use the keyboard space bar.
- Do not use spaces on either side of an em dash (–). An em dash is used to set off a parenthetical expression—an expression that is inserted into the flow of thought.
- When citing the scientific name of a microbe, plant, or animal, italicize and capitalize the genus, but only italicize the species’ name. Examples include *Salmonella* Enteritidis and *E. coli* O157:H7.
- Use “establishment” when referring to meat and poultry establishments and use “plant” when referring to egg plants producing egg products.

- Always type the name of the month in full and the day and year in numerals when referring to dates in the text (e.g., September 12, 1943).

## INITIALISMS

Initialisms are abbreviations that use the initial letters of the words that together make up the complete form of a name or term. They are written in capital letters, without periods, though the term itself may not be capitalized. Generally, an initialism is used when the word or words it represents are repeated in a document one or more times. Spell out the words at the first reference and use the initials thereafter. Two common examples are Office of Food Safety (OFS) and Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

## ACRONYMS

Acronyms are words formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word. Like initialisms, acronyms are written in capital letters and without periods. An acronym is used when the word or words it represents are repeated in a document one or more times. Spell out the words at the first reference, and use the acronym thereafter. Two examples are the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START).

## ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations are a shortened form of a word (e.g., “St.” for “Street”). There are several acronyms and abbreviations that are not spelled out, even when using them for the first time in a document (i.e., CD-ROM, Dr., Ms., and fax). The name United States is usually abbreviated when it is part of the name of a government agency (e.g., U.S. Department of Agriculture). When United States is used as an *adjective*, the name is usually abbreviated. When United States is used as a *noun*, it is usually spelled out.

Official style guides are sometimes used. These guides reflect the standards and common usage for certain aspects of writing (such as use of punctuation, numbers, figures, and capitalization). For instance, when writing for media distribution, the AP style guide is used, but information that is to be published in the *Federal Register* (FR) must meet the style requirements of the FR. Science journals often have their own style requirements. Controlled and formal correspondence is subject to the [style guide](#) of the U.S. General Printing Office.

Always use spell check and readability statistics!

# Standard Letters - Formal/Official Letter Guidance

Program areas can choose their own format for letters prepared and signed within the program area.

Letters prepared by ECIMS or by program areas to be signed by the Deputy Administrator, Administrator, Under Secretary, or Secretary normally should use the following standard format for formal letters found [here](#) and described below. (Letters written in response to letters from members of Congress and congressional committees are prepared by ECIMS, use slightly different formats, and are subject to slightly different procedures and clearances.)

FSIS now receives most correspondence from the general public via e-mail. Increasingly, organizations and groups also send their messages via e-mail. Responses to e-mail correspondents are to be addressed to the name or e-mail address appearing on the incoming message.

1. The response message should be formatted as a letter (consisting of the correspondent's name and e-mail address) and include most of the standard elements of a letter: date, inside address, salutation, text, complimentary closing, signature block, and notation of any enclosure or attachments.
2. A paper letter may be prepared, cleared, and signed in the standard way and then e-mailed to the correspondent as a portable document format (PDF) file.

General guidelines for a standard letter include the following.

- The font should be 12-point Times New Roman.
- All margins (left, right, top, and bottom) should be set at 1 inch. Beginning on the second page, the copy should start 1 inch (on the sixth line) from the top of the page.
- A brief, one-paragraph letter (usually 10 lines or less) can have left and right margins of up to 1.5 inches. Such a letter should be double spaced when it is put in final form for signature.
- Blank lines can be added as needed to attractively balance a one-page letter.
- The left margin should be in block style, flush left. The right margin should not be aligned.
- Drafts are double spaced. Final letters are singled spaced, with one line space between paragraphs.
- If the lines of a paragraph are split between two pages, ensure that at least two lines of text appear on each page.
- On the second and succeeding pages, use the software toolbar to insert a header with the addressee's name, exactly as it appears in the inside address, and page number, with a blank line under the page number. (*Do not* type a header and page number manually into the document.) The header should be flush with the left margin.

Example:  
Ms. Sally Smith  
Page 2

## Elements of a Standard Letter

The basic elements of a letter include the date, inside address, salutation, letter text, complimentary close, and signature block as well as an enclosure notation (if any). These elements are aligned flush left.

### DATE

- Generally, an Agency or Department letter is date-stamped at the top on the right above the inside address *after* the letter is signed.
- The date should reflect the day the letter was signed or approved for autopen signature.
- Do not use the month day endings “st,” “nd,” “rd,” and “th.”

### INSIDE ADDRESS

#### *Name/Title*

- Most often, the first line of the inside address begins on the 14<sup>th</sup> line from the top of the page or the 10<sup>th</sup> line below the top margin. If the letter is only one page and is brief, enter additional blank lines so that the page is attractively balanced from top to bottom.
- If the name of the correspondent is not given in the incoming message, use the salutation “Dear Sir or Madam.”
- Use an appropriate title before the recipient’s name (if known) such as Mr., Ms., Mrs., according to the correspondent’s preference (if known).
- Spell out all titles in an address, except Mr., Mrs., Ms., Esq., and Dr. Unless the person holds a title, the salutation is usually “Dear Mr./Miss/Mrs./Ms. (last name).”
- If the addressee’s gender is not implied by the first name, e.g., “Leslie Smith,” the address should not contain any reference to Mr. or Ms., and the salutation should be “Dear Leslie Smith.”
- Do not use more than one title with the same meaning with one name, e.g., use “Paul Jones, M.D.” (preferred) or “Dr. Paul Jones,” not “Dr. Paul Jones, M.D.”

The term “The Honorable” is used when addressing all Presidential appointees, Federal and State elected officials, and city mayors. Salutations for persons addressed as “The Honorable” should reflect that person’s position, e.g., “Dear Senator (surname),” or “Dear Mr. Secretary.”

- As a general rule, city officials, except mayors, are not addressed as “The Honorable.”
- A person who once held the title of “President,” “Governor,” “Judge,” “General,” “The Honorable,” “His Excellency,” or a similar distinctive title may retain the title throughout his/her lifetime.

### *Address*

- Follow the address appearing on the incoming letter, but if it includes a Post Office Box and a street address, use only the Post Office Box number.
- Do not abbreviate “Post Office” in Post Office Box numbers. For example, use Post Office Box 123. Do not abbreviate words such as Street, Avenue, or Boulevard.
- When abbreviating Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest, the [\*U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual\*](#) indicates that the abbreviation should be followed by a single period—for example, NW. rather than N.W.
- The names of countries, states, and cities are usually not abbreviated in the inside address. An exception is the District of Columbia, which is abbreviated as D.C. (not DC).
- Although the inside address does not include abbreviations for countries, states, or cities, abbreviate the names of states on the envelope using the two-letter postal codes of the United States Postal Service. For a list of state abbreviations, see “Acronyms and Abbreviations” later in this section.
- Limit the inside address to six lines, none of which should exceed the center of the page. If runover lines are required, indent each line by .20 inch.

#### *Example:*

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

- If an attention line is unavoidable, type it on the envelope, not in the letter.

### **SALUTATION (GREETING)**

- Type the salutation on the second line under the inside address. Generally, use only the surname. The salutation is followed by a colon, as in:

#### *Example:*

Dear Ms. Brown:

Dear Dr. Brown:

Dear Dr. and Ms. Brown:

- If no name is provided use “Dear Sir or Madam”.

- If a woman holds a position that carries a formal title such as President, Chairman, Secretary, or Ambassador, the salutation would be Dear Madam President, Dear Madam Ambassador, Dear Madam Secretary, or Dear Madam Chairman, unless she has a known preference.
- In some cases, a person who holds a Ph.D. degree prefers to be addressed as “Dr. (last name),” rather than as “Reverend,” “Dean,” “Professor,” etc.

### **TEXT (BODY OF LETTER)**

- Begin the body of the letter on the second line below the salutation in block style, flush with the left margin. Generally, do not indent paragraphs.
- Respond to an incoming letter by thanking the writer or otherwise acknowledge receipt of the incoming letter and referring to the incoming letter’s date, addressee, and subject.

*Example:*

Thank you for your letter of September 29, 20XX, to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requesting information on a Federal Grant of Inspection for operating a poultry processing establishment.

- Make the first paragraph concise.
- In general, do not abbreviate words in the body of a letter, except for common abbreviations such as Ms., Mr., or Esq.
- Avoid separating words at the end of a line that are in close association, such as the elements of dates and of proper names, groups of initials and surnames, and abbreviated titles (e.g., Dr.). When dividing a date or proper name, carry it over to the next line if possible. Dates may be divided with the month and the day on one line (December 1,) and the year (20XX) on the next line. The name of a city may appear on one line with the state on the next. A person’s first name may appear on one line and the last on the next.
- Avoid using specific numbers and dates that might be outdated before the letter in which they appear is sent.
- At the end of a sentence, and outside parentheses, place a period or other punctuation mark at the end of a sentence and outside parentheses. Place periods and commas inside closing quotation marks; place question marks, colons, semi-colons, and exclamation marks that are not part of the quote outside the closing quotation mark.
- Spell out single numbers of less than 10 if the numbers are within a sentence, except when referring to measurement and time (e.g., three houses, 1 inch, and 2 minutes).

- The current preference in letters is to italicize *Federal Register*. However, in publications to be sent to the *Federal Register*, it is underlined (e.g., Federal Register).
- Thank the writer in the final paragraph (e.g., “Thank you again for your letter.”) or express another suitable closing thought.

## COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE

- Leave one blank line between the text and the complimentary close.
- Use “Sincerely” followed by a comma. The primary exception is “Respectfully,”. Use the close “Respectfully,” in a letter responding to or on behalf of the President of the United States.

## SIGNATURE BLOCK

**In general, leave three blank lines between the complimentary close and the typed name of the person signing the letter. The title or position of the person is typed on the next (fifth) line**

Additionally, all outgoing emails and Blackberry or mobile device messages should adhere to the following format, all in Cambria 11-point font..

*First Name Last Name* (Bold, Italic)

Title

Program Area

Agency, Department

Room Number

City, State Zip Code

Phone Number:

Cell Number: (if applicable)

Email Address:

*SAMPLE*

***Carol Blake***

Assistant Administrator

Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education

Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA

Room 339-E Whitten Building

Washington, DC 20250

Phone: (202) 720-3884

Cell: (202) 557-4736

[carol.blake@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:carol.blake@fsis.usda.gov)

It is not appropriate to use wallpaper or stationery in emails related to official FSIS business. Food safety icons and any confidentiality statements deemed necessary by specific program areas may be used after the line containing the email address in the signature block; however, quotations or other messages are unacceptable.

## **ENCLOSURES**

- In addition, whenever material is enclosed or attached with correspondence, the word “Enclosure” or “Enclosures” is spelled out for letters, and “Attachment” or ”Attachments” is spelled out for memoranda. The appropriate word is spelled out two lines flush left below the signature block.

*Example:*

Daniel L. Engeljohn, Ph.D.  
Assistant Administrator  
Office of Policy and Program Development

Enclosure

# Memoranda

A memorandum is generally the preferred means of communication within and between USDA offices and governmental departments. The informational memorandum and the decision memorandum are the most frequently used, but the appointment memorandum and scheduling memorandum are also popular.

**An informational memorandum** provides the recipient with general information about an issue. An example is in the appendix.

**A decision memorandum** frames an issue on which a decision is sought and provides alternative decision-making options along with a recommended option. A blank line beside each option provides the decision maker the opportunity to initial and date the option chosen, thus providing a written record of the decision. An example is in the appendix.

**A briefing memorandum** provides information on a subject or issue, often to assist the recipient in preparing for a meeting or other event. This type of memorandum features talking points for consideration and possible use by the recipient. An example is in the appendix.

A standard letter, rather than a memorandum, is used for letters to Agency employees about awards; special achievements and other recognitions; condolences; and disciplinary action, as well as for letters addressed to individuals outside USDA or in other departments.

## Memorandum Format and Style

Memoranda should be prepared using a block-style format on FSIS letterhead stationery for a memorandum that is to be signed within FSIS.

Letterhead stationery is used for the first page of a memorandum, and plain bond paper for succeeding pages. Generally, a memorandum is date-stamped to the right of the signature after it is signed. If more than one signature appears, a date stamp should be applied to the right of each signature indicating the date on which it was signed.

## Tips for Writing Memoranda

In writing memoranda, the following may be useful.

- The components of a memorandum include the TO, THROUGH (if needed), FROM, and SUBJECT lines as well as the text and a notation about attachments, if needed.
- Do not use titles such as Dr., Mr., Ms., on the “TO,” “FROM,” or “THROUGH,” lines. Instead, use a person’s title or position, if it is available.

*Example:*

**TO:** John Q. Doe  
Assistant Administrator

- If a memorandum is written to more than three persons, use “See DISTRIBUTION” rather than listing them on the TO line.

*Example:*

**TO:** See DISTRIBUTION

- At the end of the memorandum, type “DISTRIBUTION:” flush with the left margin, two lines below the last line of text or the attachment notation, whichever is last.

*Example:*

**DISTRIBUTION:**

District Managers

Deputy District Managers

All Front Line Supervisors

- A THROUGH line may be necessary to allow a senior official (not necessarily a clearance officer) to review and initial the memorandum before it is received by the addressee. The THROUGH line must show the person’s name and title.

*Example:*

**THROUGH:** Name  
Title

- The SUBJECT line in a memorandum is a brief summary of the content of the memorandum. It should be concise—usually not more than 10 words. If more than one line is needed, begin the second line flush with the first line. Capitalize the first letter of each word except for articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. “To” may be capitalized if it is part of an infinitive expression (e.g., “To Appoint”).

*Example:*

**SUBJECT:** Proposed Changes to the Regulatory Jurisdiction  
Of Products Containing Meat and Poultry

- Do not use a salutation or a complimentary closing in memoranda.
- Use two blank lines between the SUBJECT line and the beginning of the text. (In a letter format, one blank line appears between the salutation and the beginning of the text.)
- Prepare the memorandum in double-space draft if the document is to be reviewed by several people before signature.
- If someone other than the person whose name appears on the FROM or THROUGH line signs the memorandum, that person signs his or her own name and writes “for” in parentheses after the signature.

Example:

**FROM:** John Q. Doe /s/ *Susie Smart* (for)  
Director

- If the memorandum has an attachment, leave two blank lines after the text and add “Attachment” flush left.

## Red Jacket Documents

Agency program offices prepare various types of internal, information, or action documents that require review, clearance, or signature of the FSIS Administrator, the Under Secretary of Food Safety, or the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. Documents that are initiated by FSIS and do not respond to previous correspondence or requests are called “Red Jackets” and are controlled and tracked in ECM. Red Jackets are submitted to the Document Management Specialist (DMS) in ECIMS for review, to ensure compliance with Agency and Department procedural requirements. Documents include, but are not limited to: letters, memoranda, acquisition requests, requests for publications, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) letters, notices, directives, and dockets.

A document becomes a Red Jacket after the program office has obtained all necessary clearances from other program areas, using their internal process, and the issuing Assistant Administrator has signed off. Once this process has been completed, all required documents (e.g., clearance sheets, attachments/enclosures, and the documents requiring clearance, approval, or signature from the Administrator, Under Secretary, or the Secretary) should be uploaded in ECM and then forwarded to ECIMS Red Jacket inbox.

ECIMS conducts procedural and substantive reviews of Red Jacket documents. These reviews include verifying that workflows are set up correctly and ensure appropriate clearances, that enclosures or attachments are included, and that the document and any enclosures or attachments use the correct format or style, and are grammatically clear, accurate, and complete. The reviews allow ECIMS to expedite documents based on time constraints associated with a particular document. Additionally and when necessary, the DMS will make or provide comments to a document accompanied by notes offering instructions or guidance.

The benefits of the Red Jacket process are multiple as highlighted below.

- Program offices can track their internal documents from creation through archival
- ECIMS provides editorial review at the draft and final stages of the document
- Priority documents are cleared, signed, and delivered in advance of deadlines (electronically)

Information in ECM is to indicate whether signatures, clearances, concurrences, review, or other actions are required by the Administrator, the Under Secretary, or the Secretary. If the document is deemed accurate and complete, it is forwarded with the requested instruction for the clearing/signatory official. However, if changes or corrections are warranted, the document is returned to the originating program office with comments or instructions added to the notes section of ECM. Such comments or instructions should be added to the notes section each time a document is forwarded in ECM. Revised documents must be resubmitted to the DMS to review for accuracy and to verify whether comments were accepted.

Letters and memoranda submitted into the Red-Jacket system for the Administrator's, Under Secretary's, or Secretary's signature must be prepared according to Departmental guidelines. Whenever attachments are included with letters or memoranda, a copy of the attachment should be scanned or uploaded into the ECM folder. The legend lines or clearance lines do not appear on the original page with the signature block, but are included on copies or on a separate page.

### **The Responsibilities of the Designated Program Area Point of Contact (POC)**

It is expected that the program area POC will serve as a subject-matter expert (SME) and technical contact, providing relevant information about a document that would assist reviewers in the clearance process. This program area POC must establish/create ECM folders to submit documents in final format, complete with attachments and appropriate clearances. The program area POC must review and verify that addressees have been properly identified on letters they submit, that these addresses are correct, especially with regard to congressional letters, and that the letter or document conforms to Departmental policies and correspondence procedures. Also, the POC must add essential items, such as a legend line, with the SME's name and phone number and provide written instructions in the folder-note section containing special instructions or guidance for the type of service required for the document (such as the required signature/clearance, deadlines, or other special requests).

The POC must understand the nature and importance of the document being submitted into clearance, as well as his/her role in serving as an SME and a liaison between his/her office, or on behalf of an initiating office, in conjunction with ECIMS and the signatory officials. The POC must provide in ECM notes/explanation that alerts all stakeholders of the importance of the documents being reviewed, as well as any urgencies associated with the documents.

The DMS communicates to the POC the importance of having a business process that ensures that documents are handled efficiently to avoid delays in the clearance process.

Based on the above information, the following standard operating procedures ensure the accuracy and monitoring of a Red Jacket from start to finish.

1. The program office prepares the document on letterhead and in final form, and obtains clearances from the appropriate officials for their program area.
2. The program office creates an ECM folder, adding documents to include relevant attachments. The POC adds folder notes with requested instructions and submits the electronic folder to the ECIMS DMS by clicking the "complete task" or "launch" toggles.
3. The DMS reviews the documents to ensure that they adhere to proper style and format, and to ensure correct grammar.
4. On documents greater than 10 pages, the DMS will arrange for the team lead or supervisor to assign a "review folder" task to an ECIMS analyst who will provide editorial review using tracked comments. Any document found to need further action will be returned to the program office for updates. The DMS will enter notes alerting the POC of discrepancies and next steps.

5. The POC uses the “ECM document check in and checkout” toggle to revise a document and then saves it as Word document. Once saved, the POC must click on the “check-in” toggle, and then click on the “browse” toggle to search for the saved document. Once found, the POC clicks the “check-in” toggle again. The POC then makes an annotation in the notes section of the folder prior to clicking on the “complete task” toggle, which returns the folder to the ECIMS Red Jacket inbox.
6. The DMS verifies that all necessary edits have been made and that the document contains the proper notes, messages, emails, or other documentation that will assist reviewing/signatory officials.
7. The process ends when all documents that have been signed/cleared/approved at the appropriate level have been forwarded to ECIMS DMS who then returns the folder to the initiating program office with instructions to close.

# Telephone Responses

Occasionally, an inquiry to FSIS is better answered by a telephone response than a letter. If an item of ECM controlled correspondence is answered by telephone, the person responding completes the following form and e-mails it to the FSIS Correspondence Control Officer (CCO).

**1. ECM Control Number:**

---

**2. Name of the correspondent:**

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**3. Date of the telephone response:**

---

**4. Name/title of the USDA representative who spoke with the correspondent:**

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**5. Name of the person with whom the USDA representative spoke, if someone other than the correspondent:**

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**6. Brief synopsis of the conversation (include the reason that a telephone response was made rather than a written response):**

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# APPENDIX A – STANDARD LETTER (or EMAIL)



Food Safety and  
Inspection Service

November 28, 20XX

1400 Independence  
Avenue, SW.  
Washington, D.C.  
20250

John Jones, M.D., Ph.D.

[Dr.Jones@Comcast.com](mailto:Dr.Jones@Comcast.com)

Dear Dr. Jones:

Thank you for your letter of November 22, 20XX, email to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding scientific integrity. The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has been asked to respond to your message.

FSIS is the public health regulatory agency in USDA responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS enforces the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, and the Egg Products Inspection Act, which require Federal inspection and regulation of meat, poultry, and processed egg products prepared for distribution in commerce for use as human food.

I am pleased to inform you that USDA is establishing a department-wide Scientific Integrity Policy that will provide guidance to USDA leadership and scientists on conducting and using science that will inform decisions regarding food, agriculture, natural resources, and related areas. The principles set forth in this policy will apply to all USDA employees, including career staff and political appointees. The policy will direct employees on the proper use of scientific findings and the principles of conducting scientific activities. The principles and policies will remain consistent with the Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity, dated March 9, 2009, the Office of Science and Technology Policy's 2010 guidance on scientific integrity, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Information Quality Guidelines, and the 2005 OMB Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

On the advice of advisory committees and the National Academy of Sciences for more than 2 decades, FSIS has been steadily moving toward science-based and risk-based inspection. On July 25, 1996, FSIS issued a landmark regulation on Pathogen Reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems. The rule addressed the serious problem of foodborne illness in the United States associated with meat and poultry products by focusing attention on preventing and

*dr.jones@comcast.com*

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reducing microbial pathogens on those products that can cause illness. The rule also clarifies the roles of government and industry in food safety, and requires all meat and poultry plants to develop and implement a system of preventive controls to improve the safety of their products.

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

David P. Goldman, M.D., M.P.H.  
Assistant Administrator  
Office of Public Health Science

# APPENDIX B – INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY (or Other Official)



Food Safety and  
Inspection Service

1400 Independence  
Avenue, SW.  
Washington, D.C.  
20250

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**THROUGH:** Name  
(if needed) Title

**FROM:** Name  
Title

**SUBJECT:** A Short, Concise Description of the Subject Matter Discussed in the  
Memorandum

**ISSUE:**

Identify briefly the issue that will be discussed.

**DISCUSSION:**

Include pertinent, relevant information that will be of concern and interest to the  
Secretary and/or the Deputy Secretary.

**SUMMARY:**

Concisely summarize the memo with a few sentences or bullet points. Mention how  
follow-up of the issue will be handled.

# APPENDIX C – BRIEFING MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY (or Other Official)



Food Safety and  
Inspection Service

1400 Independence  
Avenue, SW.  
Washington, D.C.  
20250

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**THROUGH:** Name  
(if needed) Title

**FROM:** Name  
Title

**SUBJECT:** Subject matter

## **PURPOSE OF MEETING (OR BRIEFING):**

One of two paragraphs indicating the basic purpose of the meeting, e.g. to discuss a specific issue, a courtesy visit. Outline the background of the meeting – who, what, when, where, and why. If you know, mention who will be attending from your staff and from the visiting group.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Provide one or two paragraphs with relevant information and highlights of the briefing. If the briefing is with a group, provide details about the group, briefly discuss the issue or issues they plan to raise and their position with respect to those issues, and mention any other information that would be of importance to the Secretary.

## **TALKING POINTS:**

Include the key bullet points that should be mentioned by the Secretary in order of priority. At the end of the memorandum provide a name and telephone number of Agency person to contact for additional information.

# APPENDIX D – DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY (or Other Official)



Food Safety and  
Inspection Service

1400 Independence  
Avenue, SW.  
Washington, D.C.  
20250

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**THROUGH:** Name  
(if needed) Title

**FROM:** Name  
Title

**SUBJECT:** Subject Matter

**ISSUE:**

Identify briefly the issue that will be discussed.

**DISCUSSION:**

Include pertinent, relevant information that will be of concern and interest to the Secretary.

**OPTIONS:**

List options enumerating pros and cons of each. Number them 1, 2, 3, etc. Indicate budget effect, position of other agencies, position of the industry, or any other information that may be particularly relevant.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

If you have a recommendation, provide it, but do not feel obligated to do so.

**DECISION BY THE SECRETARY:**

Approve: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Disapprove: \_\_\_\_\_

Discuss with me: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E – GRAMMAR HELP

**You're versus Your:** You're means you are, as in "You're going to be late." Your indicates something belongs to you, as in "Your lunch is on your desk."

**It's versus Its:** It's means It is or it has as in "It is almost time for lunch" or "It's been fun working together." Its indicates possession, as in "FSIS takes its public health mission seriously" or "the dog chased its tail."

**They're, their, and there:** They're means they are, as in "They are almost ready." Their indicates possession as in "Their bags are in their rooms." There indicates a location, as in "I left the car over there."

**Then and than:** Then is used to place actions in time, as in "If you don't eat breakfast, then you will be hungry later." Than is used to compare two things, as in "There are more OFO personnel than OPACE staffers."

**Affect and Effect:** Affect is a verb, as in "I affect the quality of food in this country by being an FSIS inspector." Effect is usually a noun, as in "The effect of my work on the line prevents foodborne illness every day."

**Fewer and Less:** Fewer should be used before words that can be preceded by a number, as in "Fewer dogs are in the park today." Less should be used before words that cannot be preceded by a number, as in "I have less interest in this issue than you."

**Me and I:** I is used when you are the subject, as in "I am cold today." Me is used when you are the object, as in "He gave me the thermometer."

**Complement and Compliment:** Complement refers to something that goes well, enhances, or improves another thing, as in "The sauce is a nice complement to the pasta." Compliment refers to praise or flattery for someone, as in "He complimented me on my report today."

**Principal and principle:** Principal means that something is the highest rank in importance, as in "Food safety is FSIS' principal goal." Principle has several definitions, and can be used to identify something as a basic truth, e.g., the principles of democratic government; or as a fundamental rule or law concerning moral behavior or conduct, e.g., "In FSIS, diversity embodies the principle of fair treatment for all"; or to describe the function of a system or natural phenomenon, as in "the molecular principle of bacterial survival strategies..."

**Continual and continuous:** Continual refers to something that is repeated with breaks in between, as in "The continual problem of our car not starting forced us to sell it." Continuous refers to something that happens without interruption, as in "The continuous sound of the car alarm drove me crazy."

## APPENDIX F – PUNCTUATION HELP

### **The Semicolon (;)**

Use it to connect two related sentences of equal status or to connect elements in a list when the list already contains internal punctuation, such as commas.

*Example:* The beef was not contaminated; therefore, the beef was released into commerce.

*Example:* IPP are to allow inspected and passed carcasses to leave the slaughter floor without being marked, provided that the establishment: requests in writing to the IIC that all carcasses not be marked with the inspection legend; further processes the unmarked carcasses at the establishment; and maintains control of the carcasses in the manner described in Part III of this Directive.

### **The Colon (:)**

Use it after a complete sentence to introduce a list or a quotation. Or use it to join two independent clauses if the second summarizes or explains the first; or after the salutation in a formal letter. Two spaces follow a colon in formal documents.

*Example:* FSIS regulates several types of food: meat, poultry, and processed eggs.

*Example:* The products subject to recall bear the label: “Tom’s Boneless Skinless Breast Pieces with Rib Meat.”

*Example:* Dear Mr. Jones:

### **The Hyphen (-)**

Use to connect two or more words functioning together as an adjective before a noun.

*Example:* Well-known candidate (but “candidate is well known”)

### **The Apostrophe (‘)**

Use an apostrophe to indicate possession or to indicate the plural of uppercase and lowercase letters (and then use only when leaving it off would confuse the reader).

*Example:* Please remember to contact the Agriculture Department’s Secretary Vilsack.

*Example:* Please remember to dot your i’s and cross your t’s.

## The Quotation Marks (“”)

Use quotation marks to enclose a direct quotation, any words following terms such as “labeled,” “entitled,” “marked,” “referred to,” and as required for the titles of short works like magazine articles, or essays.

*Example:* The product was labeled, “Not for Human Consumption.”

*NOTE:* Always place commas and periods within quotations, but place colons, semicolons, questions marks, and exclamation points outside quotations unless it is part of the quote.

## The comma (,)

Use commas to make sentences easier to understand. There are many types of commas, and some are included below.

Serial comma: When there are three or more items listed, a comma is to be used (for formal documents) after the last item and before the word “and” or “or.”

*Example:* *E. coli* O157:H7 can contaminate the surface of the carcass, trimmings, ground beef, and other beef products during slaughter.

Conjunctive comma: A comma can be used to connect two independent clauses.

*Example:* He inspected the meat, and made the updates in PHIS.

Parenthetical comma: Use a comma to set off added information.

*Example:* He inspected the product, while the employees watched, and then made the updates in PHIS.

**For more information on common punctuation mistakes, visit the [U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual](#) .**

# APPENDIX G – HOW TO CREATE A FOOTER OR HEADER AND PAGINATION

## HOW TO CREATE A HEADER/FOOTER ON THE FIRST PAGE

1. Click on tab “insert,” then click “header” or “footer.”
2. Insert your header or footer
3. If you do not want the header or footer on the front page, check the “different first page” box.

## HOW TO CREATE A HEADER/FOOTER ON THE THIRD OR SUBSEQUENT PAGE

1. At the end of the first page, click on the tab “page layout,” then select “breaks.” Click “next page” under the header “section breaks.”
2. In the second page of the document, click into the header/footer. Click on “link to previous” under the navigation section of the “design” tab. Check the “different first page” box in the “options” panel.
3. Insert the heading into page three.

### **If you are inserting page numbers:**

4. Click on “page number” under the “insert” tab and select your desired format. The page number on page three will say “3.” If you want it to say “2,” then right-click on the page number and select “format page numbers.” Select “start at” under the “page numbering” heading and then type “1.” The page number should now say “2.”

## HOW TO CREATE A TABLE OF CONTENTS WITH PAGINATION

1. Click on “table of contents” under the “references” tab and select your preferred style.
2. After making edits to a Word file, the table of contents must be updated by clicking on the “update table” button in the “table of contents” section of the “references” tab.

*NOTE: Heading styles must be consistent throughout the document for this feature to function properly.*

# APPENDIX H – FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE CLEARANCE TIMELINE

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9A	Day 9B	Day 10
<b>SECRETARY-SIGNED LETTERS</b>										
DRAFT RESPONSE	DRAFT RESPONSE	PROGRAM AREA CLEAR	OA CLEAR	CCO/ WRITER REVIEW CLEAR	AT DEPARTMENT					
	ECIMS CLEAR			ECIMS FORWARDS OUT						
<b>AGENCY-SIGNED LETTERS</b>										
DRAFT RESPONSE			ECIMS CLEAR	PROGRAM AREA CLEARANCE	CCO/ OA CLEARANCE		OCR CLEAR	CCO FINALIZE	SIGNATURE	
DRAFT RESPONSE		ECIMS CLEAR	PROGRAM AREA CLEARANCE	CCO/ OA CLEARANCE		CCR WRITER REVISE	OCR CLEAR			