



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

**ORDER
1000.36A**

National Policy

Effective date:
12/21/2023

SUBJ: FAA Writing Standards

- 1. Purpose of This Order:** This order highlights the federal plain language guidance most often used by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).
- 2. Audience:** This order applies to all FAA Employees and Contractors.
- 3. Where to Find This Order:** You can find this order on the FAA website at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/orders_notices.
- 4. What This Order Cancels:** This order cancels FAA Order 1000.36, FAA Writing Standards, dated March 31, 2003.
- 5. Content:** Pursuant to the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-274), the FAA has developed these guidelines to assist FAA employees and contractors to write clearly so users of FAA content can:
 - Find what they need.
 - Understand what they find.
 - Use what they find to meet their needs.

For a more detailed look at FAA guidelines, visit [Writing User-Friendly Documents](#). For current government-wide guidance, please visit the [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#).

6. Writing Principles:

a. Use effective writing techniques. There are several simple techniques to make your writing clear and effective. This section describes the most critical ones. You must follow them when writing an FAA document.

(1) Consider your audience. To whom are you writing? What expertise and knowledge do they have? What information do they need from you? If you are responding to questions from your audience, make sure you answer all of them. If you believe you have more than one audience, select one as the primary audience and prepare your document accordingly.

(2) Organize your document. Present material in the order that is most useful to the reader. If your document outlines a process, organize it chronologically. You can also organize documents by putting the most important points first and the minor ones at the end. Put standard provisions first and exceptions last. Sometimes a combination of these organizational methods is useful. Whichever method you use, keep your reader in mind and be consistent. Ask yourself, "What will help my reader understand and follow my document?"

(3) Use active voice whenever possible. Voice is the form a verb takes to indicate whether its subject acts or is acted upon. When the subject of a verb takes the action (acts), the verb is in the **active voice**. When the subject of a verb receives the action (is acted upon), the verb is in the **passive voice**. For example:

Active voice: Tom Clancy wrote *The Hunt for Red October*.

Passive voice: *The Hunt for Red October* was written by Tom Clancy.

The active voice emphasizes the actor and action and is usually briefer, clearer, and more emphatic than the passive voice.

(4) Use short sentences, typically, no more than 20 words. Use offset lists instead of long sentences that incorporate listed items. Keep list items to 20 words or fewer as well.

(5) Write short paragraphs that cover only one topic each.

(6) Limit abbreviations of all types, and be sure to spell out any shortened words or phrases the first time you use them. For example, write out “Coordinated Operational Approval Process” the first time you use it, and follow the phrase with “COAP” in parentheses. There is typically no need to include an acronym for any name or phrase you only use once within a document.

(7) Avoid using “shall.” Shall is an ambiguous word. It can mean must, ought, or will. Most legal writing experts recommend using “must” to impose requirements, including contractual requirements.

b. Format for readability.

(1) Use quotation marks for direct quotations or to set off words used atypically. Do not use quotation marks to enclose titles of chapters, sections, or paragraphs. Present long quotes—four or more lines of text or about 40 words—by indenting from the left and right margins without quotation marks. This also applies to quotes of more than one paragraph, including when the quote is fewer than 40 words.

(2) Use figures such as charts, tables, and other illustrative material as examples to explain complex material. Mention or introduce every figure in the text before it occurs and place the figure close to the text that explains it. Try to fit each figure to one page. For figures that extend to more than one page, repeat the name and figure number on each page on which they appear. Make sure all figures have informative headings.

(3) Place administrative information, such as references to other documents or lists of superseded documents, in a footnote or endnote. This helps your reader focus on your main message rather than on administrative details.

c. Write informative headings. Most documents benefit from headings. However, it is important that you supply useful headings. After good organization and active voice, informative headings are the most helpful way to guide readers through your document. Your reader should

be able to decide, based on the heading, if they need to read a section. Do not waste a reader's time by using headings that are not informative, such as "general," "transfer," or "training." Instead, headings should give the reader a synopsis of what information follows, such as "General Information about Markings" and "Transferring Responsibility for Maintaining an Aircraft." Since most readers come to our documents with questions in mind, headings in the form of questions are often an effective way to direct them to needed information, such as "How many hours of training must I have?" Consider using descriptive subheadings if a headed section is more than a few paragraphs.

d. Other helpful writing principles. In general, follow these principles when writing FAA documents:

(1) Do not be wordy. Excess or needlessly complex words make your writing weaker and more difficult for the reader to comprehend. Government writing is often too wordy, complex, or jargony. Here are some examples of excess and overly complex words in our writing and plain alternatives:

Excess /Overly Complex Words	Plain Alternatives
accordingly,	so
addressees	you
as a means of	to
as prescribed by	in, under
assist, assistance	aid, help
at a later date	later
at the present time	now
commence	begin, start
constitutes	forms, makes up
facilitate	help
for the purpose of	to, for
heretofore	until now
implement	start, carry out
in accordance with	under
in order to	to
in the event that	if
initiate	begin, start
obtain	get, gain
on a monthly basis	monthly
pertaining to	of, about
provide	give
related to	of
so as to	to
such that	so

You can find many more common substitutes at the Plain Language site referenced in item 5 (General Information) above.

(2) Hidden verbs are verbs used as nouns. Avoid them. They add length and weaken sentences. The simple present tense is the strongest, clearest way to write. Here are some examples of hidden verbs and how to make sentences clearer and stronger:

- Hidden Verb: The inspector will carry out a review of the company's programs.
- Clearer Version: The inspector will review the company's programs.

- Hidden Verb: To determine part life, make a calculation of the . . .
- Clearer Version: To determine part life, calculate . . .

(3) Avoid unnecessary qualifiers, which are words added to further delimit a word's meaning. They are often redundant. They add no additional meaning to a sentence. The classic example from everyday language is "very dead." Here are some examples we see in FAA writing:

- Their claim was *totally* unrealistic.
- We are *completely* convinced.
- It is *definitely* worth explaining.
- Work in partnership with.
- Maintain *successful* bilateral agreements.

(4) It is easy for readers to get lost in run-on sentences. Vertical lists are quicker and easier for readers to follow and are an ideal way to explain a series of facts. Consider this example, presented as a paragraph:

Along with your letter of application, submit a statement of conformance certifying that you have met the requirements of Subpart O of part 21 and that the article meets the TSO in effect on the date of your application; one copy of the data the TSO requires; and a description of your quality control system.

Or, presented as a list:

With your application, include:

1. A statement of conformance certifying that you have met the requirements of Subpart O of Part 21 and that the article meets the TSO in effect on the date of your application;
2. One copy of the data the TSO requires; and
3. A description of your quality control system.

When including a list, typical punctuation and grammar rules apply. When creating a numbered or bulleted list, end items that are written as complete sentences with a period or other appropriate punctuation. Use semicolons after each item and include a conjunction (and, or, etc.), with the final item ending in a period or other appropriate punctuation, as shown above.

(5) Avoid noun clusters—three or more nouns “sandwiched” together. They confuse and bore readers. Use prepositions and articles to clarify the relationship among the words. Here is a typical FAA example: “drug testing and alcohol misuse prevention regulations.” It would be better to say, “regulations about drug testing and preventing alcohol misuse.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. G. Whitaker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael G. Whitaker
Administrator

Appendix A. Administrative Information

1. **Distribution.** This order is to be distributed to all FAA Lines of Business and Staff Offices.
2. **Authority to Change This Order.** The issuance, revision, or cancellation of the material in this order is the responsibility of the Office of Communications.
3. **Suggestions for Improvements.** Please forward all comments on deficiencies, clarifications, or improvements about the contents of this order to the Directives Management Officer at carey.young@faa.gov.

We welcome your suggestions. FAA Form 1320-19, Directive Feedback Information, is in Appendix B of this order for your convenience.

4. **Records Management.** See FAA Order 0000.1, FAA Standard Subject Classification System; FAA Order 1350.14, Records Management; or your office Records Management Officer (RMO)/Directives Management Officer (DMO) for guidance on the retention or disposition of records.

Appendix B. Directive Feedback Information

Please submit any written comments or recommendations for improving this directive or suggest new items or subjects to be added to it. Also, if you find an error, please tell us about it.

Subject: Order _____

To: Directive Management Officer, _____

(Please mark all appropriate line items)

An error (procedural or typographical) has been noted in paragraph _____ on page _____.

Recommend paragraph _____ on page _____ be changed as follows:
(attached separate sheet if necessary)

In a future change to this order, please include coverage on the following subject:
(briefly describe what you want added):

Other comments:

I would like to discuss the above. Please contact me.

Submitted by: _____ Date: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Routing Symbol: _____