

EXEC SEC EXPECTATIONS FROM BUREAUS

In order to increase efficiency in processing correspondences—and to avoid offending recipients of letters from the Secretary—it is imperative that all preventable errors are corrected before the draft arrives at the Exec Sec office. This can be done simply by re-reading the original draft, administering basic fact checking, and following a few simple rules for commonly made mistakes, as described in this handout.

Expectations

The following are expectations of all drafts coming into the Exec Sec office for final edits:

- I. **Word documents** for every draft (letters, memos, etc.) are uploaded to WordDocFlow
- II. Names are **spelled correctly**
 - Check the incoming letter, if applicable
 - Search Google, if no incoming letter is available
 - If you still can't find it, call someone who would know
- III. **Appropriate, current titles** are given to all named persons in the document
 - Assign correct gender titles (e.g., Mr. vs. Ms., His vs. Her Excellency)
 - Assign correct, up-to-date position titles (e.g., Senator, Representative, Minister, Leader, Dr., General, Retired General, Honorable, Honourable, etc.)
 - Refer to the incoming letter, if available, and search Google to find appropriate titles
- IV. **Address lines and greetings** must be accurate
 - Double-check to ensure that street names and cities are spelled correctly and that correct state abbreviations are used (e.g., Arkansas = AR, not AK or AS)
- V. Address lines must be **formatted** correctly. The following is an example of a **correct** address line:

June 15, 2009

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**The Honorable Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510**

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Dear Senator Snowe:

- VI. **Basic grammatical errors** should be omitted. See “Common Errors” below for a list of common examples.

Writing a Letter

Letters should be timely, responsive, and well written. They should send a clear message about the subject matter and clearly identify the public benefit of the Department's activities.

In addition, please observe the following guidelines:

- **Be on time.** Abide by Executive Secretariat-assigned due dates. Plan time to obtain clearances and make revisions.
- **Be responsive.** Make sure the letter responds to all issues. In rare instances when the Department cannot provide the information requested, the response should say so clearly and offer a specific date when the information will be provided.
- **Include contact name and telephone number.** All letters should include the name and telephone number of someone to provide further information. For the Secretary's correspondence, use the following language:

If you have any further questions, please contact me or (Name, Title, and telephone number).

When a letter from the Secretary is to a congressional committee chairman, member of the Cabinet, Governor, or another VIP, the Secretary wants to have follow-up questions referred to him. If the addressee is not a major stakeholder, refer follow-up questions to the program office.

- **Use the correct tone.** All letters require courtesy. Some letters require a formal tone, while others require a more personal, warm tone. Consider the subject and the recipient to develop the correct tone. When writing a letter for the Secretary's signature, use the tone the Secretary would use when speaking—personal, humane, direct, and non-bureaucratic.

Use Spell- and Grammar-Check

Proofread letters carefully. Use the spell-check feature on the computer, but spell-check will not identify wrong words if they are spelled correctly. The grammar tool is useful in many ways, but it is especially helpful in ensuring that the writer uses the active voice in letter writing.

Another under-used tool is Word's synonym finder. If you think a particular word isn't quite appropriate, or if you are concerned that you have used a word repetitively, simply right-click the word in question and scroll down to the word *Synonym*. For most words, several options will appear. If this still leaves you unsatisfied, use a Thesaurus or even Thesaurus.com.

Fact-Check Tools

The following are useful websites for fact checking and other research:

- Google: www.google.com
- Dept of Commerce home page (with links to bureaus): www.commerce.gov
- U.S. Senate: www.senate.gov/
- U.S. Senate Committees:
www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d_three_sections_with_teasers/committees_home.htm
- U.S. House of Representatives: www.house.gov
- House Committees: www.house.gov/house/CommitteeWWW.shtml
- Federal Register: www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/

Common Errors

The following are basic rules to avoid errors that are commonly corrected in the Exec Sec office:

- Put **two spaces after each period** ending a sentence.
- Two spaces **between state and zip** in address line (e.g., **Washington, DC 20230**).
- Insert **three line breaks** (no more, no less) between “Sincerely,” and “Gary Locke”
- **U.S. vs. United States** – only use U.S. as an adjective, but spell out United States when it is used as a noun. Also, spell out United States in all cases when it begins a sentence.
- Capitalization of **“Federal,” Nation,” or “State”** – capitalize “Federal” only when using it in a name or as an adjective synonymous with the United States. “Nation” is always capitalized when referring to the United States. Capitalize “State” when it refers to a State as a unit of government.
- **Acronyms** – introduce an acronym or abbreviation (in parenthesis) if you are going to use the acronym/abbreviation later in the correspondence, but do NOT introduce it if it will not be used again in the correspondence.
 - Thank you for your letter regarding the Department of Commerce’s (Department) April 2009 progress report. The Department values your insight and expertise...
- **Dates** in a sentence – insert a comma after the year in a date within a sentence (e.g., **August 14, 2005, is not a holiday**).
- **Under Secretary** is two words, not one.
 - Correct title is as follows: **“Under Secretary for Industry and Security”**
 - NOT **“Under Secretary of Industry and Security”**
 - NOT **“Under Secretary for the Bureau of Industry and Security”**

DO

Get it done on time

Be responsive, clear, and concise in your language and explanations

Begin your letter with the key idea. This should reflect the rationale for the Department's actions

Use common sense. And use spell-check

Use bullets when appropriate

Include only useful information

Introduce full names of organizations, departments, legislation, etc., before using corresponding acronyms and abbreviations

Precede names used in correspondence with *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *or Dr.*, *Rev.*, etc., as appropriate

Call Exec Sec contact with any questions

When circulating letters for concurrence, always include the name and telephone number of an informed contact point who can answer substantive questions

Enter all documents into WebDocFlow and assign action to Exec Sec. Enter background, enclosures, or attachments as distinct documents.

DON'T

Don't use acronyms unless the full name has been introduced (they can often be avoided altogether)

Don't use flowery, excessive language

Don't repeat what people already know

Don't recount details of the letter the Secretary is responding to

Don't address someone as Mr. or Ms. unless you are sure it is the appropriate title