Job Aid 1: Writing for VA

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References

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014231/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-2-Section-B-Decision-Notices?articleViewContext=article_view_browse_tree&isFeatured=undefined&topic=undefined), Decision Notices
* [M21-1, Part I, Chapter 2.B.2](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/topic/554400000003064/Chapter-02-Due-Process), Notice of Proposed Adverse Action
* [M21-1 Part III, Subpart vi,7](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/topic/554400000003118/Chapter-07-Certifications-for-Special-Purposes), Certifications for Special Purposes
* M27-1, Part I, Chapter 5, Correspondence\*

\*To find this reference refer to [M21-1 Part III, Subpart vi, 7.2.h](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014301/M21-1,%20Part%20III,%20Subpart%20vi,%20Chapter%207%20-%20Certifications%20for%20Special%20Purposes#2)

The Importance of Correspondence

It is extremely important to use written communication efficiently and effectively because most of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VAs) contact with the public is through correspondence.

**Rules for Effective Correspondence**

All correspondence generated by VA must provide complete, accurate, and understandable information, consider the reader's point of view, and be simple, sincere, and empathetic.



VA Style and Usage

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| **Referring to the Department** | |
| **If You** | **Then** |
| Refer to the Department of Veterans Affairs | You should:   * Use no apostrophe after Veterans * Spell it out for a first reference and add the abbreviation VA in parentheses after the reference— e.g., Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) * Make subsequent references to “the Department” or “VA” |
| Need to distinguish VA from a State department of Veterans affairs | Use the full title “U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs” |
| Use VA to refer to the Department of Veterans Affairs | Do ***not*** use “The” before the abbreviation—e.g., “VA announced today that…” |
| Use VA to refer to a subset of the Department | Use “the” in front of VA— e.g., “The VA task force announced today that…” |
| Refer to the Department’s major operational administrations | Use Veterans Health Administration (VHA); Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA); and National Cemetery Administration (NCA) |
| Have too many references to the abbreviations | Use “agency” to refer to any one administration and “agencies” to refer to the three as a group |

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| **Acronyms** | |
| **If You** | **Then** |
| Use a phrase that has an acronym | Spell out the phrase the first time you use it with the acronym in parentheses after it – e.g., The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will release its latest statistics |
| Use a phrase that has an acronym only one or twice in a document | Spell out the phrase each time |

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| **Spacing Within Memos and Letters** | |
| **If You** | **Then** |
| Include an address | Put two spaces between the state abbreviation and the ZIP code and ***do not use punctuation in the address*** |
| Refer to a Post Office Box as an abbreviation | Put one space between the abbreviation— e.g., PO Box |
| Refer to the United States as an abbreviation | Put one space between the abbreviation— e.g., U. S. Government |

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| **Proofreading** |
| Proofread for these four common mistakes: |
| * Check that you use “an” in front of words that begin with a vowel (or words that begin with a vowel sound, like hour). |
| * Refer to the Veteran by name, not “the Veteran.” |
| * Do not rely totally on ***Word***’s spelling & grammar check, so you can catch words like “there” vs. “their.” |

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| **Punctuation** | |
| **If You** | **Then** |
| Refer to the month, date, and year | Put a comma after the date— e.g., January 2, 2020 |
| Refer to the month, date, and year anywhere within a sentence | Put a comma after the date and after the year— e.g., The regulation took effect on January 2, 2020, in the continental United States |
| Refer to only the month and year | Do not use a comma between the month and year or after the year— e.g., The regulation took effect in January 2020 in the continental United States. |
| Start your sentence with a month and year | Do not use a comma after the date— e.g., In January 2020 the law was in effect. |
| Have a series of three items or more | Put a comma after each item except the last one—  e.g., “Colors in the U. S. flag are red, white, and blue” |
| Include a quotation in the sentence | Put the appropriate commas and periods **inside** the final quotation marks |

Cursor Movement & Editing Keys

| **Movement / Editing Function** | **Keyboard Shortcut** |
| --- | --- |
| Go to beginning of document | Press “CTRL + HOME” |
| Go to end of document | Press “CTRL + END” |
| Go to page | 1. Press F5 2. Type page number 3. Press “ENTER” |
| Go to beginning of line | Press “HOME” |
| Go to end of line | Press “END” |
| Highlight a *word* | Double click on the word. |
| Highlight a *line* | Move the mouse to the left edge of the line and click. |
| Highlight a *sentence* | Place cursor anywhere within the sentence, press the CTRL key, and click once with the mouse. |
| Highlight a *paragraph* | Move the mouse to the left edge of the paragraph and double click. |
| Highlight *entire* document | Move the mouse to the left edge of the document, hold the CTRL key, and click once with the mouse. |
| Insert | Place the cursor at the point you want the information inserted, and then type or paste the text. |
| Delete | To remove characters, words, or spaces use the “DELETE” key or highlight them with the mouse, and then press “DELETE.” |
| Replace | Highlight the information to be replaced, and then type the new information. |
| Copy | Highlight the information to be copied. Click the Copy (or Ctrl + C) button on the tool bar, place the cursor at the new location, and click the Paste (or Ctrl + V) button. |