SAN DIEGO COUNTY
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE AGENCY

ELIGIBILITY OPERATIONS

WRITING STYLE GUIDE FOR
PROGRAM GUIDES

OCTOBER 2014

No one should ever have to read a sentence twice to know what it means.
William Zinsser

What is a "Style Guide"?
A Style Guide is a guide to uniform writing. It provides the road map and directions for how to be internally consistent across the organization.

This guide may not reflect some of what you have learned about writing in the past; in fact, it may differ from things you have learned and believe to be correct. American English is not a precise, rule-driven language, so as a writer you are always faced with stylistic choices. This guide is based largely on Strunk and White's *Elements of Style.*

It offers rules for writing Program Guides and related materials such as Special Notices and Desk Aids in the Office of Eligibility Operations at San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency. It is a living document, accepting additions as they surface. It also contains appendices that contain specific guidelines for Program Guides and related materials, including sample revisions showing a preferred writing style.

HSSA Program Guide Overview (See the Appendices for more information.)

- Follow the Template

- Link to any information contained in other Program Guides. Link all related information within the text of the Program Guide. Note state and federal references within the text and link them in the reference section.

- Do not repeat information unnecessarily.

- Maintain a clear focus on the Program Guide's primary audience: Case Managers/ Eligibility Workers.

- Use clear, direct language.

Strive for Invisible Writing
Good writing should be invisible, conveying critical information while not focusing attention on the writing itself.

Keys to invisible writing:

1. **Pay attention to detail.**
   The easiest way to improve your writing is to pay attention to detail. Unfortunately, detail is also among the easiest elements to overlook. Avoid sloppy or silly mistakes. Carefully proofread your writing for errors. Read aloud so you can listen for continuity and flow. Use spell check and grammar check. Check headers and numbering to be sure information is correct.

2. **Be consistent.**
   Even if you are not sure of a rule or a practice, once you have established a way to write something, stick with it.

3. **Use strong, understandable vocabulary.**
   Keep your vocabulary natural and understandable. You do not need to continue using the overblown or bureaucratic language you might find in your source material. Use language, especially verbs, with clear, unambiguous meaning.

4. **Keep your sentences short**
   By definition, a sentence contains only <u>one complete thought</u>. While varying sentence length aids readability, too many long sentences detract from readability. Try to keep your average sentence length around 15 words.

5. **Be clear.**
   The purpose of writing is to communicate. It enables you to reach a large audience at one time, and it leaves a permanent paper trail. When you write, you generally know what you are trying to say, but your reader does not. Write for your reader, not yourself.

   Writing for your reader may require you to think carefully about what your reader knows and does not know. You may need to add information that you already know or add logical transitions that are obvious to you. When these steps are necessary, do them. Clarity is more important than brevity.

6. **Be well organized.**
   Your reader must be able to follow your logical development of information. Use subheads and lists to help the reader follow.

7. **Revisit what you have written to keep improving it.**

Just because you wrote something does not mean it is perfect.

8**. Get feedback on what you are writing or have written.**
Your colleagues are your strongest allies. Save time and improve quality by working collaboratively. Air questions when you have them instead of wrestling with information alone.

9. **Write concisely.**
The best writing is often the most succinct. Your reader will appreciate your brevity as long as it is complete.

10. **Use good judgment**.
For those times when you cannot locate a rule for your style question, exercise good judgment. When in doubt, err on the side of being professional and respectful.

Style Issues

Abbreviated expressions
1. **Abbreviations**
Abbreviate sparingly. Your reader may not know what the abbreviation means, or it might have multiple meanings depending on the context.

2. **Latin Abbreviations**
Avoid Latin abbreviations. (You are writing in English, and they are often mis-used!) Replace "e.g." with "for example." Replace "i.e." with "that is" or "meaning." Replace "etc.," which comes at the end of a list, with "such as" or "including" at the beginning; they tell the reader that the list is not exhaustive.

3. **Acronyms**
When possible, define your acronyms in context so you avoid the practice of defining the acronym in parentheses following the fully spelled out title. If necessary, use parentheses to define the acronym, then use the acronym through the Program Guide.

4. **Shortened proper nouns**
Follow the same rule as for acronyms. For example, if the meaning is clear, you may refer to the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency as HHSA without the need for parentheses. Stay consistent with your usage.

Capitalization

1. When in doubt, use a reference book to find precise rules for capitalization. The tendency in American business is to over-capitalize, so <u>capitalize sparingly</u>.

2. Capitalize a professional title only when it immediately precedes a name.

   Executive Director John Doe signed the new bylaws.
   John Doe, the executive director, signed the new bylaws
   The executive director signed the new bylaws.

3. Use the uppercase when referring to a specific city or county. For example, write "City of San Diego" or "San Diego County."

4. *Capitalize the name of a department when referring to it as a department. For example, "*Six employees from Public Affairs will be attending an offsite seminar on Wednesday.*"*

5. Capitalize "Council" if it can be replaced with its formal noun, "City Council." For example, "The Council adopted the proposed policy principles." If it cannot be replaced with its formal noun or you are not sure, use "council."

6. Capitalize individual words that require highlighting for importance, such as "NOT" or "MUST."

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns, such as staff or team, denote a group, but are used in a singular form. For example: "The team is playing," not "the team are playing." Or "the government is made up of three branches," not "the governments are made up of three branches."

Commonly confused or misused words

And/or   Avoid the use of "and/or." If you mean "both" or "all," use "and." If you mean "either" or "each" use "or." The expression "and/or" often introduces vagueness.

Communication(s) Communication is the general act of communicating. Communications is the technology or system. If uncertain, stick with "communication" (no "s").

Homonyms: Be careful of words that are spelled differently but sound alike. You probably know what is correct, but it is easy to get careless (to, two, and too; hear and here; there, their, and they're; your and you're).

Its and it's: Use the apostrophe only when making the contraction for "it is." The word "its" is the possessive form, even though it has no apostrophe.

Less and fewer: Use "fewer" when referring to items that <u>can</u> be counted and "less" when referring to items that <u>cannot</u>.

For example: "The audience gave less applause, so the show closed with fewer curtain calls."

Shall and will: Use "will" to communicate necessity (as opposed to "may.") "Shall" is generally unnecessary and antiquated; only use it when the legal department prefers the word in contracts or to express firm determination, as in "We shall overcome." "Shall" also shows conditionality, such as *Shall we eat at home or go to a restaurant?"*

That: Try reading your sentence with and without the word "that." If it reads equally well without the "that," omit it. It is unnecessary.
Good: I'd like to summarize the conversation we recently had.
Unnecessary: I'd like to summarize the conversation *that* we recently had.

That and which: "Which" introduces a commenting expression. Commenting expressions <u>are not essential</u> to the meaning of the sentence. Follow this rule of thumb: "which" expressions should always follow a comma.

"That" introduces a defining expression. Defining expressions <u>are essential</u> to the meaning of the sentence. They do not need to be preceded by a comma.

Commenting expression:
"The taxes, which are reasonable, will be paid."
(The taxes will be paid, and they happen to be reasonable.)

Defining expression:
"The taxes that are reasonable will be paid."

(Only the reasonable taxes will be paid; the rest will not.)

Who and whom: "Whom" is the objective pronoun, similar to "him" or "her."
                  "Who" is the subjective pronoun, similar to "he" or "she."

Regardless of the rules, feel comfortable trusting your ear and using the form that sounds right (after you have read the phrasing aloud).

Contractions

Contractions may be appropriate in informal emails, but do not use contractions in formal business writing.

Dates

1. Use Arabic figures. Write "September 28," not "September 28th."

2. In formal documents, spell out the month. For example, "The upgrade will take place in November 2016."

3. Abbreviate the months of Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. in informal documents. When writing formal documents, spell out the name of all the months.

4. Use a comma when writing Month Day, Year. For example, "May 25, 2016." Do not use a comma when writing Month Year. For example, "May 2016."

Editing

1. **Editing strengthens writing**
   Just because an editor or reviewer makes extensive comments and corrections to your work does not mean you have done a bad job, and it does not necessarily reflect on the quality of your writing. The editor should have an objective eye, a great deal of expertise and information, and a commitment to improving the work. Do not get derailed by documents filled with red ink. Instead, see if the editing has strengthened the writing or made your points clearer to the reader. Strong and thoughtful editing helps writers improve. Imagine two writers, one whose work is never edited and one whose work receives consistent strong editing. The writing of the latter will improve, while the writing of the former will stagnate.

2. **Stay substantive**
   As an editor, work hard to stay substantive. Have reasons for your comments

and corrections. Avoid the temptation to criticize someone's style just because it is different from your own.

3. **"It works better" is okay**
   As an editor, you do not need to have words to explain your reactions. Sometimes, "It just seems to work better" can be sufficient. At those times, however, allocate time to talk through your responses with the writer; perhaps the underlying rationale will become clear.

4. **Talk through logic**
   When you disagree with an editor's comments, consider asking for an explanation or clarification. Sometimes you can comfortably reject comments that do not work or do not improve the document. At other times, you may need to request time with the editor/reviewer to talk through your logic and point of view. The result of such focused conversations will always be a better final product.

5. **Do not let ego affect editing**
   As either editor or writer, do not let your ego get in the way. Remember, the beneficiaries of your hard work are HHSA and the people of San Diego County. Do not let yourself become defensive.

Email

The only difference in email and other forms of written communication is the speed of transmission. Avoid being too informal. Use the same level of professionalism and care in your emails that you use in other forms of writing. Do not hit the send key until you have carefully edited and proofread your work.

Spell "email" as one word, lower case, and without a hyphen.

Fonts

Use Arial 12 point in Program Guide materials. Use Arial 12 point for headings and captions and Links. The Links must be presented in the color blue.

DO NOT USE ALL CAPS. They "scream" at the reader and are hard to read. ONE or TWO words in all caps, however, provides a highlight.

Formality vs. informality

When in doubt, always err on the side of formality and professionalism.

Jargon

Jargon is acceptable in most forms of business writing as long as you are certain that your readers understand the meaning. If you are the slightest bit unsure, avoid jargon. It is best to avoid jargon when dealing with the general public.

Lists

1. In certain instances, lists can be easier to see and read and interpret than narrative and paragraphs. Always be certain your lists are parallel and have similar syntax; in other words, every entry in the list should flow comfortably from the introductory wording. Begin with introductory language, and then follow with the listed items. Depending on the number of activities and relationship among the items, the list may take the form of a paragraph, bullets, or numbered list. Choose the strongest approach for the situation. If the situation calls for the use of a verb in a bulleted list, be sure every bullet point begins with a verb.

2. You may want to structure a two- or three-item list in paragraph form or bulleted list form. For example,

   Staff conducted the following outreach: Coordinated logistics for a community meeting, drafted copy for the brochure, and served as liaison to the community group.

   or

   Staff conducted the following outreach:
   - *Coordinated logistics for a community meeting*
   - *Drafted copy for the brochure*
   - *Served as liaison to the community group.*

3. A large number of items in sequential order work best as a numbered list. For example,

   Staff will conduct the following outreach over the next three months:
   1. *Contact the local community council early February and arrange an overview of the proposed project.*
   2. *Set-up a project sub-committee with the community council.*
   3. *Notify residents of the upcoming activities at least two weeks before the event via the community newspaper, door hangers, and direct mail.*
   4. *Provide two project updates in March.*

5. *Arrange a tour of the construction site in early April for interested community representatives, local government officials, residents, and media.*

Myths

There are no rules of grammar prohibiting 1) splitting infinitives, 2) ending sentences with prepositions, or 3) beginning sentences with "because." Those practices, however, raise eyebrows. Avoid them unless they are clearly the best way to communicate your information.

Numbers

1. Spell out the numbers one through nine. Use numerals for 10 and above.

2. When writing percentages, do not spell out the number, even if less than 10 and use the "%" sign. So write 7% or 25%.

3. Do not mix numerals and words in the same sentence; the words will become invisible. In those instances, use numerals for numbers one through nine too. For example, you would write, "We successfully passed 9 of the 14 bills before the assembly."

4. When writing large numbers, combine numerals and words: "The reorganization cost $1.2 million."

5. Do not begin sentences with numerals. Either spell out the number, or find another way to structure the sentence.

Numerical Ranges

Compound sentences that include numerical ranges pose a greater risk of ambiguity. To insure clarity, use one of the following techniques to separate the range:

Use a hyphen with spaces on either side to write numerical ranges, such as $50 - $100 million. The hyphen automatically implies that both numbers relate to *million*.

"Omit needless words"

This famous directive from *The Elements of Style* is essential to good writing.

In all likelihood, you will never need to use language such as "It is important to note that…" or "in the year 2020." "In 2020" will work just fine. Likewise, "considering" is stronger than "in consideration of."

In most cases, eliminate "in order" and start with "to." Read the sentence aloud to decide if deleting "in order" compromises the meaning. If it does, leave it in. If it does not, eliminate it.

The following sentence provides an example of when you would want to leave the full expression "in order to" because omitting it would create confusion as to the meaning:

The article describes the science concepts students should learn in order to develop and expand their scientific literacy.

Parallel structure

Keep your writing internally consistent.

Always check the first word of each item in a list to be sure it is the same part of speech as the other first words.

WRONG: *The four phases of the project are:*
  • *choosing employees to participate in focus groups*
  • *analysis of the focus group results*
  • *train supervisors to answer questions*
  • *a slide show to explain the new program.*

RIGHT: *The four phases of the project are:*
  • *choosing employees to participate in focus groups*
  • *analyzing the focus group results*
  • *training supervisors to answer questions*
  • *explaining the new program with a slide show.*

Pronouns

1. You may use personal pronouns in your writing, especially "you" in reference to case workers using the Program Guides. Do not overuse the word "I." Your writing should never be self-centered. Be sure the reader and the information get more attention than you do.

2. Take care to define all of your pronouns. Just because you know the meaning of a pronoun does not mean it will be clear to your reader. Pronouns must agree with their referent in case (subjective or objective – he or him), number (singular or plural), and gender.

3. Keep your writing gender neutral and grammatically correct. In most cases you can do this by using plural nouns. "They" refers to a plural noun without introducing the gender complications of "he" and "she." Take care when omitting pronouns for the sake of gender neutrality; you may inadvertently introduce the passive voice or vague language.

    WRONG: "An employee … he …" The "he" introduces gender bias.

    WRONG: "An employee … he or she …" The gesture toward political correctness draws the reader's attention away from the communication.

    WRONG: "An employee … they …" The plural pronoun does not agree with the singular noun.

    RIGHT: "Employees … they …"

4. When you begin sentences with the words "This," "That," "These," or "Those," always follow them with a noun. It is good practice and will help you avoid misunderstandings.

    WRONG: "This should make the practice clear."

    RIGHT: "This example should make the practice clear."

5. "Who" refers to people; "That" refers to things. Do not personalize inanimate objects, and do not de-personalize people.

Proofreading

Proofreading is an essential part of writing. Do it with care. Read aloud; if you stumble or something does not sound right, it is probably not right and needs to be revisited and rewritten.

To increase your proofreading accuracy, ask a colleague to read over your shoulder as you read aloud. Take note of places where you stumble, places that do not sound right, and places where you do not read the exact words on the page.

Punctuation

1. *Check punctuation by reading aloud*
    Read your writing aloud to punctuate it correctly. Commas indicate a pause; periods indicate a full stop. If you pause where there is no comma, add one; if you get to a comma and do not pause, remove it.

2. *Punctuating quotation marks*
   - Commas and periods <u>always go inside quotation marks</u>.
   - Semicolons and colons always go outside quotation marks (but you need not worry because you will probably never encounter this situation).
   - Question marks and exclamation points follow the same rule as parentheses (entry #3): they may go either inside or outside the quotes, depending on the structure.

3. *Punctuating parentheses*
   Punctuate inside the parentheses when the material in the parentheses is a full sentence; punctuate outside when the parentheses does not contain a full sentence. Try to stay consistent in your use of parentheses throughout a document.

   Example #1:   *Place tab A into slot B (figure 1-1).*
   Example #2:   *Place tab A into slot B. (See figure 1-1.)*

4. *Punctuating compound sentences*
   <u>Compound sentences</u> contain two independent clauses. They must be joined by either a semicolon or a comma and conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so). If the clauses are improperly punctuated, the result is a "run-on" sentence.

   > <u>Phrases</u> are related words that contain <u>no verb</u>.
   > <u>Clauses</u> are related words that do <u>contain a verb</u>.
   >
   > <u>Dependent clauses</u> cannot stand alone as a sentence because they do not express a complete thought. "Although I had never eaten banana bread…"
   >
   > <u>Independent clauses</u> could stand alone as a sentence. "I had never eaten banana bread."

   Compound sentence:
   "<u>Joe and I</u> went to the store, and <u>we</u> bought a paper."
   "<u>Joe and I</u> went to the store; <u>we</u> bought a paper."

   Simple sentence:
   "<u>Joe and I</u> went to the store and bought a paper."
   (This example does not contain a second subject, so it is not a compound sentence and requires no special punctuation.)

5. *Punctuating bulleted lists*
   If a complete sentence follows the bullet, place a period at the end. If not, the bullet acts as the punctuation.

Don't place "and" between the last two items in the list.

6. *Serial comma*
   The serial comma is the comma that goes between the last two items of a list, immediately before the "and." Technically, using it or not using it are both grammatically correct. *The Elements of Style* says to use it (Rule of Usage #2); the *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* says not to use it. Use it all the time unless the use of the *Associated Press Style Guide* is an accepted practice or when writing for the media, such as news releases or articles for publication. You will be consistent, and you will be less apt to expose yourself to ambiguity, like in this dedication that appeared at the beginning of a book: "To my parents, the Pope and Mother Theresa."

7. *Hyphen*

The hyphen (-) indicates a compound. When placed between two or more words, it signals to the reader that the combination should be read as one. Avoid overuse. If the sentence flows and the meaning is clear without them, don't use them. Use only when needed to insure clarity and flow, such as the distinction between "resent" and "re-sent."

Hyphenate word combinations when used as an adjective; don't hyphenate when they are used as a noun.

Example #1:   *The law requires a 200-gallon-per-day water use limit.*
Example #2:   *The new efficient appliances cut water use by 300 gallons per day.*

Sentences and Paragraphs

1. A sentence contains a noun and a verb (or a subject and a predicate), and it expresses <u>one complete thought</u>. Do not cram more than one thought into each of your sentences. Keep them short and focused.

2. A paragraph is a collection of one or more sentences that addresses a <u>single topic</u>. Be sure the topic of your paragraph is clear. The first sentence of the paragraph is the <u>topic sentence</u>. Upon reading the topic sentence, the reader should know precisely what the paragraph is about.

   Read each paragraph as an independent unit to find the topic. If the topic is unclear, the paragraph is unclear. When you know the topic of the paragraph, re-read the topic sentence to be sure it expresses the topic clearly to the reader.

3. Keep your sentences short. Longer sentences detract from readability. A document consisting of sentences with average lengths of more than 15 words tends to have reading comprehension rates of less than 90 percent.

Spacing between sentences

Use one space between sentences, which has always been standard practice in typesetting. (Typewriters introduced the practice of using two spaces.) With the proportional spacing capabilities of computers, one space works fine.

To convert from two spaces to one, use the global "find and replace" function, and simply replace two spaces with a single space.

Technical and web-related terms

Technical terminology continuously evolves as it becomes more familiar. For example, Dictionary.com indicates that "email has recently been gaining

ground over the forms E-mail and e-mail, especially in texts that are more technologically oriented. Similarly, there has been an increasing preference for closed forms like homepage, online, and printout."

The following list provides a guide to terms you might encounter.:

Cyberspace	hypertext	webcast
database	Internet	website
DSL	intranet	web page
email	login	webmaster
home page	logon	World Wide Web
hyperlink	shareware	

Time

1. Use figures to express the time except for noon and midnight.

2. Use a colon to separate the hour from the minute. For example, write 1:23 p.m.

3. When writing a span of time, do not repeat a.m. or p.m. Use it after the second entry.

   RIGHT: 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

   RIGHT: 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.

   RIGHT: 2:30 through 3:30 p.m.

   WRONG: 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

4. Recognize that 8 p.m. tonight is redundant. So, write 8 tonight, or 8 p.m. today. Better still: 8 p.m. Monday.

Transitions

1. Transitions reveal your logic to your reader. Using strong transitions must be a conscious and deliberate act because you already know your logic; it is the reader who is in the dark. Use transitions such as "for example," "however," "therefore," "nevertheless," or "as a result" between individual thoughts.

   Also, use transitions between paragraphs. You should be able to find a specific link such as a repeated word or thought connecting each two paragraphs.

2. Use visually distinct elements to create transitions. Use subheads, bulleted or numbered lists, or sidebars (text boxes) to break up text visually. However, do not overuse bullets or lists, stay consistent and parallel, and do not let your work get too busy-looking!

Verbs *(See the sample Program Guide text for more guidance on verbs.)*

1. Being verbs (is, was, were, will be, are) show being rather than action. They are weak, while verbs that express action are strong. Avoid using "is" and "was," and use action verbs when possible.

2. Some verbs easily turn into nouns and become weak in the process. Try to use verbs as verbs. ("We recommend…" is much stronger than "It is our recommendation that …")

3. "It is" and "There are" are weak beginnings to sentences and can usually be tightened.

4. Use the <u>active voice</u> rather than the passive voice whenever possible. In the active voice, a subject does an action to an object: "I am reading this sentence." In the passive voice, an object has an action done upon it, sometimes by a subject and sometimes anonymously: "This sentence is being read" or "This sentence is being read by me."

   Passive constructions are always longer than comparable active constructions; they always contain a helping (being) verb; and they can often lead to ambiguity or confusion because the reader may not know the doer of the action.

   Finding passive constructions requires two tests:
   a. Does the sentence contain helping verbs, such as "is, "are," or "am"?
   b. Does the sentence beg the question "By whom?" or "By what?" or does it answer that question at the end rather than the beginning?

   If the answer to <u>both</u> of these questions is "yes," the sentence is in the passive voice. Try to restructure it by either adding a subject or reversing the order of the sentence so the subject goes at the beginning.

   Passive voice: "The pen is being picked up." (Shows no attribution.)
                                           "The pen is being picked up by me." (Shows attribution.)

   Active voice: "I am picking up the pen."

Passive voice: "Once the O&M section was notified by Engineering that the contractor was complete and that a final inspection had been performed, Operations staff began the refill."

Active voice: "Once Engineering notified O&M that the work had been finished and inspected, Operations staff began the refill."

5. Tense denotes place in time. On the one hand, stay consistent with your use of tense. If you are writing a document in the present tense, do not switch arbitrarily between past, present, and future. On the other hand, if you are referring to events that have happened, are happening, and will be happening in the future, stay accurate.

6. When writing procedures, always begin them with a verb. For example: "Check the accuracy of the information" or "Interview clients to learn their work history."

Website

One word, lowercase "w."

"Dictionary.com" carries an interesting usage note on the word: "The transition from World Wide Web site to Web site to website seems to have progressed as rapidly as the technology itself. The development of website as a single uncapitalized word mirrors the development of other technological expressions which have tended to evolve into unhyphenated forms as they become more familiar. Thus email has recently been gaining ground over the forms E-mail and e-mail, especially in texts that are more technologically oriented. Similarly, there has been an increasing preference for closed forms like homepage, online, and printout."

Years

1. Specify if the written year refers to calendar or fiscal.

2. Use all four digits to denote a year: 2015 instead of '15.

Recommended references:

W. Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*. Published by MacMillan, it is an essential reference book on the basics of clear writing.

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*. Published by Harper and Row, it is not a reference book, but rather a book about writing that reads easily from beginning to end.

Margaret Shertzer, *The Elements of Grammar*. Published by MacMillan, it is a companion book to *The Elements of Style* and an excellent, easy-to-use grammar and punctuation reference book.

William Alred, Charles Brusaw, and Walter Oliu, *The Business Writer's Handbook,* for complex grammar and usage questions.

Dictionary: Any good dictionary will do fine. Check out the table of contents; dictionaries contain a great deal more information than words and spellings.

Dictionary.com: Excellent for up-to-date information related to e-language and technology.

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Appendix 1: Use the Templates

Appendix 2: Sample Program Guide Revised Text

> ORIGINAL
> The Human Services Specialist (HSS) will take mid-period action for a voluntary report only when:
> - Verification has been provided that results in an increase in CalWORKs benefits; or
> - There is a request for discontinuance.
>
> REVISED
> Take mid-period action for voluntary reports only upon receiving either:
> - Verification of an increase in CalWORKs benefits, or
> - A request for discontinuance.
>
> **NOTE:** a. Shorter sentences
>   b. Strong verb and brevity ("Take…" instead of "The Human Services Specialist (HSS) will take…"
>   c. Omission of the weak opening expression "There is…"
>   d. Parallel structure in the list. (Both of these items begin with a noun."
>   e. By using "either" and "or" the list clearly does not imply the need to obtain both items.

2. ORIGINAL
> If you are processing the RRR in the month prior to the end of the certification period, the original SAR period must be retained.
>
> REVISED
> If you process the RRR in the month prior to the end of the certification period, retain the original SAR period.
>
> **NOTE:** a. Stronger verb at the beginning: "If you process…" instead of "If you are processing.
>   b. Active verb voice instead of passive: "…retain the original SAR period" instead of "…the original SAR period must be retained."

3. ORIGINAL
> The packets should be mailed at least 45 days, but no more than 60 days prior to the end of the certification period.
>
> REVISED
> Mail the packets 45 - 60 days before the end of certification.

NOTE: a. Active verb use" "Mail…" instead of "The packets should be mailed…"

b. Overall brevity.

4. ORIGINAL
For changes in income and household composition, the budget calculation must be included on the CalWORKs "No Change" NOA in order for the AU to see how the County determined that the reported change did not result in a mid-period increase in benefits.

REVISED
Include the budget calculation on the CalWORKs "No Change" NOA to show that the reported change did not result in a mid-period increase of benefits.

NOTE: a. Strong verb: "Include…" instead of "…must be included…"

b. General brevity, strength, and clarity.

5. ORIGINAL
An interview/ appointment letter would only be needed for the following circumstances;
  • No packet is received, or
  • There is questionable information, or
  • Based on information received they would no longer be eligible, or
  • The client requests an interview.

REVISED
Send an interview appointment letter when:
  • You do not receive a packet.
  • You receive questionable or incomplete information, or
  • The client requests an interview.

NOTE: a. Shorter, tighter list with parallel structure.

Appendix 3: Program Guide Formatting Guide

Use the EO approved template for [Program Guide material, Special Notices,](#) [Program Guide Letters.](#)

Use Arial, 12-point font for body copy.

Use Arial, 12-point font for headers and captions.

Justify the document to align the text on both the left and right sides.

Link all related material including:
- Program Guide to the State and Federal material
- Program Guide to Program Guide Letters
- Program Guide to processing guides/desk aids and vice versa
- Program Guides to other related sections of the Program Guide
- Program Guides to other related sections of other Program Guides

Link to Processing Guides and Desk Guides from the Program Guide material, and include the following items:

Table of Contents	
Purpose	Brief description of the purpose of the Processing Guide.
Background	To be included only if updating the Program Guide or issuing a new Program Guide that replaces one that has become obsolete.
Policy	Brief description of the policy that generated the need for the Processing Guide, including links to the Program Guide.
Actions	The actions for the Processing Guide. Depending on the Guide, you may need to include several subsections for different parts of the process.

Appendix 4:   Sample Re-Written Program Guide
To be added after final approval of the template (Appendix 1).

Appendix 5:   GLOSSARY of Program Guide-Specific terms

This glossary will help ensure consistent language in all program guides across HHSA's three service areas. Although you may sometimes face the challenge of sounding repetitive, consistent language will help keep program guides simple and understandable.

Use generic terms instead of specific titles.

Customer vs. Client   We provide services to our customers.