Style guide for all ONMS long-form (science, policy, etc.) reports

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This guide is designed to help anyone drafting a long-form document (conservation series report, environmental impact statement, or other long science or policy document) for ONMS. Below you will find information on formatting, colors, writing and grammar, accessibility, and more.

A template for conservation series reports is available for download [on the ONMS website](#) and is frequently updated. Please download the template from the website *every time* you create a new document as it may have been updated since you last used it.

General document formatting

The templates include the colors you should use. If you need to access the ONMS Best Practices colors, they are:

- Dark Blue
    - RGB 0, 70, 127
    - CMYK 100, 57, 0, 38
- Teal:
    - RGB 0, 141, 168
    - CMYK 100, 0, 19, 23
- Body text should be in black ink.

Fonts
- Main text: use Georgia. Georgia is a serif font. It is easier to read for long bodies of text.
- Headings, subheadings, and photo captions/credits: use Arial. Arial is considered a sans serif font.

Font size
- For main text, the font size should either be 11 or 12 point font.
- Image captions/credits should be 10 point font.

Headings and subheadings:
- Use title case for all headings/subheadings: Capitalize the first letter of the first word, and the first letter of each word that is not a preposition or article. For example: A Mission to Recover the Coral Reefs

Margins and spacing:
- Documents should have 1-inch margins on all sides with left justified text.
- Use 1.15-1.25 spacing between lines of text.

- It is best to include white space after paragraphs, with no indentation at the start of the next paragraph.
- Use one space between sentences in the same paragraph.

Text guidelines

For the most part, ONMS follows AP style. When in doubt, consult the latest AP Stylebook.

Always be sure to use plain language. Shorter sentences are easier for people to understand.

Acronyms

Do not use acronyms unless they are absolutely necessary. You may use an institution's acronym if it is in the common lexicon (e.g., NASA) or if it is often known by the acronym rather than its whole name (e.g., NCCOS); otherwise, do not use acronyms for institutions/organizations. If you have more than 5 acronyms, please include a glossary at the end. Only include one space between sentences (not two).

Acronym Tips:
1. Typically, define the acronym the first time it is used and then never again after that. The exception is when there is an acronym in the abstract/executive summary. In that case, define it in the abstract/exec summary at first use, then again in the full report at first use.
2. Try to avoid use of acronyms in titles as much as possible. If you need to use it, and if the acronym has already been defined, don't spell it out again.
3. General rule of thumb: if you use an acronym five or fewer times, just spell it out each time and remove the acronym. If a document is very long, you could go up to 10 times—if the acronym is used fewer than 10 times, spell it out each time.
4. If you have 10 or fewer acronyms within your document, you do not need a glossary of acronyms unless you would like to include one. If the document has more than 10 acronyms, add a glossary. Make sure you really need an acronym before using it in the document.
5. When you are finished with your document, cross check that every acronym used in your document is defined and present in the glossary.

Style details (note: some of these are exceptions to AP Style)

- We use the Oxford/serial comma (the comma used after the penultimate item in a list of three or more items, before "and" or "or.") For example: Elasmobranchs include sharks, skates, and rays.
- Do not put "the" before the name of a sanctuary.
- When referring to the National Marine Sanctuary System, all words should be capitalized. "Sanctuary" and "national marine sanctuary" are only capitalized when in the

name of a single sanctuary (e.g., Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary). When referring generally to "a sanctuary" or "the national marine sanctuary," or to multiple sanctuaries, it should be lowercase. For example: Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast and Thunder Bay national marine sanctuaries.

- ○ Exception: When writing Cordell Bank and Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuaries, "National Marine Sanctuaries" should be capitalized since these sites are now co-branded, sharing staff, and holding joint SAC meetings.

- Capitalize "Sanctuary Advisory Council," but do not capitalize "advisory council," "the council," or "sanctuary advisory councils."
- Document titles are given with capital letters, e.g., Florida Keys Restoration Blueprint. However, general types of documents are *not* capitalized – e.g., draft environmental impact statement.
- All species' common names are lowercase, except for proper nouns or names contained within them. For example, great hammerhead; elkhorn coral; French angelfish; Risso's dolphins.
- For species Latin names, genus and species are italicized, with the genus capitalized (e.g., *Hypsypops rubicundus*). Other taxonomic ranks (family, order, class, phylum, kingdom, domain, etc.) are capitalized but not italicized (e.g., Cetacea, Cephalopoda).
  - ○ However, terms used to describe members of a particular taxonomic group are not capitalized. For example, the phylum Cnidaria is capitalized in "these individuals belong to the phylum Cnidaria;" however cnidarians is not capitalized in "these individuals are cnidarians."
- Using U.S. units (feet, inches) is preferable to metric (meters, centimeters). However, just be consistent.
- When providing examples, use the following formats:
  - ○ Use "i.e.," when you want to specify something previously mentioned, like saying "that is" or "in other words."
  - ○ Use "e.g.," to introduce one or more examples of something. The use implies that there are other examples not mentioned in the list.
- Use % throughout all reports
- Use scuba, not SCUBA.
- "Whale watching" and "bird watching"
- Vessels:
  - ○ Vessel names are given in italics, not all caps (e.g., R/V *Manta*, not R/V MANTA).
  - ○ When the vessel designation is directly in front of the name, it gets capitalized; otherwise, it does not. For example: Scientists used the Research Vessel *Manta*; National marine sanctuary science relies on research vessels.
  - ○ Vessels are referred to as "it," not "she."
  - ○ If the vessel's name has a designation in front of it, use "the" to refer to the vessel. With no designation, omit the "the." For example: scientists used the R/V *Shearwater*; researchers dove on *Monitor*. Think of it as a person's name; you wouldn't say "the Dayna" but you would say "the outreach coordinator Dayna."

- Use gender inclusive language, such as "uncrewed" rather than "unmanned" when referring to ROV and AUV operations. Exception for when the word is in the name of an already existing program or document title being referenced. For more tips on using gender-inclusive language, click here.
- Mallows Bay-Potomac River gets a hyphen between Bay and Potomac, no spaces (not Mallows Bay – Potomac River). Acronym is MPNMS.
- Usage of hyphens and dashes:
  - Use hyphens (-) to join words:
    - "Footage was recorded using a high-definition video camera."
    - "A 10-m belt transect was used to assess benthic cover."
  - Use en dashes (–) to show ranges of numbers:
    - "pp. 487–489"
    - "Study site depth was 12–17 m."
    - "Monitoring took place from 1990–2005."
  - An em dash (—) is used to indicate a pause in a sentence. In general, use commas instead of em dashes when possible.
    - "Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary—the first Great Lakes national marine sanctuary—protects nearly 100 known shipwreck sites."
  - "Deep-sea exploration" and "deep-sea habitat"; but "come explore the deep sea."
  - "Hard-bottom communities"; but "these corals are often found on hard bottom."
  - Preference for saying "Indigenous tribes and nations" rather than saying "Native American," American Indian," or other forms. "Indigenous" should be capitalized. Only capitalize "tribe" or "nation" when referring to a specific sovereign entity (e.g., Onondaga Nation). See also: Race-related coverage section of AP stylebook.
  - When stating who will perform certain tasks or activities, such as in the action plans of sanctuary management plans, say "ONMS will" or "NOAA will" rather than "CINMS will." As often as possible, we should talk about ourselves as a system (e.g., saying "ONMS" or "ONMS vessels"), but in certain circumstances (such as when it is absolutely critical to be very specific about who is collaborating with who), it is okay to refer to staff under the entity that is most appropriate for the statement being made. These exceptions should be very rare for public-facing documents.
  - Since at the beginning of management plans and other long documents the sanctuary entity is typically defined as "XX National Marine Sanctuary (XXNMS or sanctuary)" that means the two shorthands CAN be used interchangeably.
  - Capitalization rules of note (follows AP style):
    - Capitalize
      - "Alternative 1"; "Alternative 2"; "No Action Alternative"
    - Do not capitalize
      - "proposed action"; "alternatives 1 and 2"; "proposed alternatives"
    - Capitalize the names of zones when providing a full formal name

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- - "Mud Keys No Entry Zone"
    - Do not capitalize zones when just referring to zone type
      - "no entry zone at Mud Keys"

Image captions and credits:

- Image captions should be in full sentences when possible.
- Give credit as Photo: Name/Institution or Image: Name/Institution. If there is no specific photographer known, use Photo: Institution.
  - Example: Photo: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA
  - Example: Image: NOAA
  - All NOAA office photos are credited as NOAA, not by line office/sanctuary site (e.g., NOAA, not ONMS or FGBNMS).
- Photographs should be listed as "Photo:" while any other forms of image (graphs, charts, drawings, maps) should be listed as "Image:".
- Image credit *does* need to be provided for images created by the authors for use in the document.
- If data for a figure were provided by a source outside the publication authors, cite those data as "Source:". A figure may have both a "Source" citation and an "Image" citation (the source being where the data came from, and the image citation being who made the figure).
- If a figure is pulled directly from another publication, the image credit can go to that publication (e.g., Broughton 2000).

Citations

- APA style is required for Conservation Series and condition reports, and is preferred for other long-form reports. Other citation styles may be used for non-Conservation Series reports as long as the style is consistent throughout the document. If a citation style other than APA style is used (e.g., a style from a particular journal), please provide the copy editor with an article that provides an example of the citation style.
- For the page count in the citation of the paper itself, use the page number that is on the last page of text.
- When referencing a statute in the United States Code (U.S.C.), include in parentheses the title number, abbreviation of the code, the section symbol (§), and the section number containing the statute. Example: (16 U.S.C. § 1361).
  - Use two symbols (§§) when referring to multiple sections of the same code and separate them with a comma if you do not want to include information in between those sections (U.S.C. §§ 1101, 1523).
  - Separate with a dash if reference represents a range (U.S.C. §§ 1101–1104).
- Use latin abbreviations where necessary in in-text citations.

- Use "et al." upon the second occurrence of an in-text citation for a reference with multiple authors (e.g., Pollock et al., 2010)
- Use "*et seq.*"to include all information that follows the referenced section (e.g., The National Marine Sanctuaries Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 1431 *et seq.*))
- Additional examples:
  - A single section of the C.F.R.: 15 C.F.R. § 922.60
  - Multiple sections of the C.F.R.: 15 C.F.R. §§ 922.60 and 922.72
  - An entire part of the C.F.R.: 15 C.F.R. part 922
  - An entire subpart of the C.F.R.: 15 C.F.R. part 922, subpart F
  - A single section of the U.S.C.: 16 U.S.C. § 1434
  - Multiple sections of the U.S.C.: 16 U.S.C. §§ 1434-36 or 16 U.S.C. §§ 1434, 1435, and 1436
  - All sections of a statute: 16 U.S.C. §§ 1431 *et seq*. (note: 1431 is the section the statute begins on)
  - Public Law: Pub. L. 98-473
  - Federal Register: 40 Fed. Reg. 21706 (May 19, 1975) (I typically abbreviate longer months)
- When you're referencing a particular section within a sentence/paragraph, write out the word "section" and keep it lowercase.

Accessibility

One in four U.S. adults has a disability. Legally (under Section 508), our documents must be accessible to those with visual impairments, who may have colorblindness and/or use a screen reader.

Images

Images should have two to three main text components: description within the main text, a caption, and alt text.
- Description within the main text: Charts and graphs should have some information in the main text of the document that describes their content. (That is, if the graph shows a trend in fish population over time, the main text should at some point refer to this trend.) Photos do not need this, but the connection between a photo and the main text should be clear to the reader.
- Caption: All images (photos, graphs, charts, etc.) should have a caption briefly explaining what is in the image (see above). This should be in complete sentences and be followed by a photo credit. e.g., "A giant sea bass swims through a kelp forest in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. Photo: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA"
- Alt text: Alt text is important for accessibility and 508 compliance. It is used by screen readers (which are used by people with visual impairments), which will read the text in the place of the image. Alt text is brief (125 characters or less) and only needs to let the

reader know what the image shows. You do not need to begin it with "photo of."
Example: "giant sea bass swimming through kelp" or "chart showing trend of fish population over time."

Additional alt text considerations:

- Alt text is a legal requirement for all visual elements (photos, graphs, figures, infographics, etc.) in a report. Reports without alt text are not 508 compliant and will be rejected from the NOAA Institutional Repository.
- The purpose of alt text is to provide a description of an image for readers with visual impairments. **When drafting alt text, think about how you would briefly describe the image to someone who could not see it.** Additional guidelines for alt text are listed below.
- **Do not copy and paste any part of the caption to create alt text for a figure.** Alt text serves a different purpose, and should be a literal description of the image.
- Keep alt text short and simple.
- Do not include image/photo credit in alt text.
- Add alt text directly to images in Word or Google Docs.
- Do not begin alt text for photos with "photo of."
- For graphs and charts, large amounts of detail regarding trends are not required as long as the information conveyed by the figure is described/referenced within the report text.
- For more in-depth information on alt text, including instructions for adding alt text in Word and Google Docs, visit Alt Text Guidance.
- For additional information about alt text, visit https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/image-alt-text.

Color

There are two main types of color blindness: red-green and blue-yellow. It is best to avoid using this combination of colors.
- If red and green *or* blue and yellow must be used, change the font style of one color (e.g., make one color text bold) or use a pattern (for graph/chart fills).
- Your text color should have a strong contrast with the background.
- Color alone should not be used to convey information. Use different symbols or line styles instead or or in addition to color.
- When using color in graphics, make sure your graphics use colors that can be differentiated between by people with colorblindness. See these links for examples: http://mkweb.bcgsc.ca/colorblind/ or https://venngage.com/blog/color-blind-friendly-palette/.

Other figure tips:

- Font in figures should be Arial and at least 10pt in size (but can be as small as 8pt if necessary).
- Avoid embedding large amounts of text or text boxes with additional descriptions in graphs, charts, or other images; instead, use the caption to add additional information.
- Ensure graphs and charts have visual legends to differentiate image components. Avoid describing components in the caption. For example, do not use statements like "red line shows temperature and blue line shows pH" in the caption.
- Photos should be larger than 1MB to maintain quality.
- Any graph, chart, or figure not created by one of the report authors for the purpose of the report must include an image credit (either the name and affiliation of the image creator or a citation of the original work where the image was published). Examples: "Trends in pH at the study site over time. Image: J. Doe/NOAA" or "Trends in pH at the study site over time. Image: Doe et al., 2019"
- Graphs, charts, or figures created by one of the report authors generated from a dataset not created as part of the study or work being described in the report should include a source credit (either the name and affiliation of the owner of the data set or a citation of the original work or repository where the data set was published). Examples: "Trends in pH at the study site over time. Source: J. Doe/NOAA" or "Trends in pH at the study site over time. Source; Doe et al., 2019"

Tables: Align text to the left and numeric data to the right. Center-align column headings. Create text-based tables (e.g., "Insert Table" function in Word); do not insert an image file (e.g., jpg) or screenshot of a table. The data in image files/screenshots are not readable by screen readers.

Accessibility checker: Both Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat have built-in accessibility checkers. Before submitting your document for clearance, please run your document through the Word accessibility check. Find the instructions for Word's accessibility checker here.