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Product
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RMA-14050

RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY EXTERNAL HANDBOOK STANDARDS

Effective Upon Approval and Until Obsoleted

**RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY
KANSAS CITY, MO**

TITLE: RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY EXTERNAL HANDBOOK STANDARDS	NUMBER: 14050
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SUBJECT: Provides the standards developing, amending, and maintaining RMA external handbooks.	OPI: Product Administration and Standards Division
	APPROVED: June 09, 2011 <i>/s/ Tim B. Witt</i> Deputy Administrator for Product Management

REASON FOR ISSUANCE

This handbook is being issued to provide approved standards for developing, amending and maintaining RMA external handbooks. All RMA external handbooks must be developed and maintained according to this handbook.

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PART 1 GENERAL INFORMATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1 General Information

A. Purpose and Objective

This handbook provides procedures and instructions for developing and maintaining RMA external handbooks. The objectives include, but are not limited to,:

- (1) producing clear, concise, consistent, complete, and easily understood procedures and instructions presented in a logical manner;
- (2) standardizing format, font, organization, and appearance of all RMA external handbooks;
- (3) providing expeditious and cost-effective channels of communication with stakeholders by eliminating duplicative information within and between handbooks;
- (4) establishing standards to efficiently issue and maintain handbooks; and
- (5) allowing writers to focus on the content rather than the format.

B. Source of Authority

Federal programs enacted by Congress and the regulations and policies developed by RMA, USDA, and other Federal agencies provide the:

- (1) authority for program and administrative operations; and
- (2) basis for RMA directives.

Authority for managing a directives system is authorized by:

- (1) 44 U.S.C., Federal Records Act of 1950
- (2) regulations at:
 - (a) 41 CFR, managing and using Government records; and
 - (b) 36 CFR Part 1222, documenting agency programs, policies, and procedures; and
- (3) Federal Property Management Regulations.

C. Related Handbooks

The following table provides handbooks related to this handbook.

Handbook	Relation/Purpose
DSSH	Provides the form standards and procedures for use in the sales and service of crop insurance contracts.

1 General Information (Continued)

D. RMA Writers, Other Writers, and RMA Contact Person

For the purposes of this handbook, “writer” and “writers” refer to RMA writers, other writers, and RMA contact person, as applicable, based on the responsibilities provided in paragraph 2. See exhibit 2 for definitions of RMA writer, other writer and RMA contact person.

2 Responsibilities

A. RMA Writers Responsibilities

RMA writers are responsible for:

- (1) ensuring their handbook(s):
 - (a) is consistent with the standards and instructions in this handbook;
 - (b) complies with all applicable regulations and policy provisions;
 - (c) complies with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
 - (d) is cleared through all applicable divisions and offices;
 - (e) is approved by the approving official(s);
 - (f) is posted on RMA website after approval, if applicable;
 - (g) original signed copy is provided to Office of DAPM, if signed by DAPM;
- (2) obtaining a handbook number from Office of DAPM for new handbooks that will be signed by DAPM; and
- (3) notifying office of DAPM when an existing handbook is obsoleted.

B. Other Writers Responsibilities

Other writers are responsible for:

- (1) working with their RMA contact person in the development, clearance and posting of their handbook(s);
- (2) ensuring their handbook(s):
 - (a) is consistent with the standards and instructions in this handbook;
 - (b) complies with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
 - (c) complies with all applicable regulations and policy provisions;
- (3) when the handbook is part of a privately developed product, such as a product developed under section 508(h) or 523(d) of the Act:
 - (a) including a completed draft copy of the handbook with the product submission;
 - (b) assuring content is consistent with the FCIC Board of Directors approval and submitted in a timely manner.

2 Responsibilities (Continued)

B. Other Writers Responsibilities (continued)

- (4) when the handbook is part of a product developed under a contract awarded by FCIC or RMA, ensuring the handbook complies with the provisions of the applicable contract.

C. RMA Contact Person Responsibilities

An RMA contact person is responsible for:

- (1) working with the other writer(s) to whom they have been assigned to ensure they understand their responsibilities regarding handbook development and standards;
- (2) acting on behalf of the other writer to:
 - (a) obtain a handbook number from Office of DAPM, if applicable;
 - (b) notify Office of DAPM when handbook is obsolete;
 - (c) clear the handbook(s) through all applicable divisions and offices;
 - (d) obtain approval from approving official(s);
 - (e) post handbook on RMA website after approval, if applicable; and
- (3) working with the other writer to determine handbook title and the best method for maintaining, amending and reissuing handbook(s).

D. Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring the RMA writer, other writers, and RMA contact person, as applicable, has met all their responsibilities and RMA external handbooks within the supervisor's area are:

- (1) developed according to the standards and instructions in this handbook;
- (2) accurate and complete;
- (3) cleared through all applicable divisions and offices before approving; and
- (4) provided to the appropriate official for final approval.

E. Approving Official Responsibilities

Approving officials are responsible for ensuring writers and supervisors have met all their responsibilities, and providing final approval of the handbook.

3 Handbook Clearance

Handbook writers shall ensure the handbook is reviewed by all applicable divisions/offices. If applicable, writers shall use an approved clearance sheet to obtain all required signatures.

Example: DAPM has an approved clearance sheet to be used for all handbooks that will be issued under DAPM signature.

4 Approving Official Signature

The approving official will sign the original copy of handbook. The original copy shall be provided to DAPM. Do not post an original signature copy of a handbook to the RMA website. Replace the approving official's original signature with an "S" signature.

Example: /s/ I M Approving Official

5 Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, ensures everyone has access to useable information regardless of physical ability. It is the writer's responsibility to ensure the handbook is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Information regarding Section 508 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is available on the RMA Intranet under the "Section 508" tab. For more information about the Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requirements contact Dianne Bell with the RMA Web Content Team.

6-10 (Reserved)

PART 2 COMPONENT, SEGMENT, FORMAT AND FONT STANDARDS

Section 1 Standard Components and Segments

11 Standard Components

A. Basic Information

Each RMA external handbook is comprised of the same basic components. Each component provides different but related information about the subject of the handbook. This section provides information about each component.

RMA external handbooks are comprised of the following components in the order provided.

- (1) Cover page.
- (2) Transmittal page(s).
- (3) Table of contents.
- (4) Parts
- (5) Exhibits.

B. Cover Page

The handbook cover page shall:

- (1) be standard for all RMA external handbooks, including format, fonts, and style;
- (2) not provide policy, procedure or the purpose of the handbook; and
- (3) include all of the following.
 - (a) Handbook title.
 - (b) Handbook number, once approved.
 - (c) Responsible division, such as PASD.
 - (d) USDA, FCIC, and RMA emblem, as applicable.
 - (e) Other information, such as applicable crop years.

Handbook titles shall be descriptive of the subject of the handbook and include the word “Handbook.” Writers shall determine handbook titles. However, if the handbook provides standards for readers to follow, the word “standards” shall be included in the title.

Examples: “Loss Adjustment Manual Standards Handbook” and “Apples Loss Adjustment Standards Handbook.”

Once approved, handbook numbers are assigned and maintained by the Office of DAPM. The Office of DAPM must be notified when a handbook is developed or obsoleted.

B. Cover Page (continued)

When the USDA, FCIC, and/or RMA emblems and associated descriptions are applicable, they are displayed on the left hand side of the cover page in the following order from the top of the page to the bottom. See the cover page of this handbook for the USDA, FCIC and RMA emblems and associated descriptions.

The division responsible for the handbook is displayed under the last emblem followed by the handbook number.

The handbook title and any other needed information are:

- (1) displayed to the right of the emblems;
- (2) separated from the emblems by a solid ½ point line; and
- (3) centered on the page top to bottom.

See the cover page of this handbook for an example.

C. Transmittal Page

A transmittal page must be included when a new handbook is issued or an existing handbook is amended. Transmittal pages shall not include any policy, procedures, or instructions.

The agency or department responsible for the handbook and its location shall be displayed at the top center of the transmittal page.

The transmittal page shall provide all the following in the table format provided in exhibit 5.

- (1) Handbook title.
- (2) Handbook subject.
- (3) Handbook number.
- (4) Approving official title, signature, and date of signature.
- (5) Effective date.
- (6) Issue date.
- (7) Name of the division responsible for the handbook.

In addition, the transmittal page shall provide the reason for the issuance of the handbook or amendment to the handbook. The reasons for issuance shall be provided beginning one line below the table.

C. Transmittal Page (continued)

When issuing only amendments to an existing handbook, the transmittal page:

- (1) must include a list of the significant changes provided by the amended pages and the reason for each change;
- (2) does not have to identify insignificant or editorial changes included in the amendment; and
- (3) may include a brief paragraph, when necessary, providing the background which resulted in the amendment.

See exhibit 5 for examples of transmittal pages.

D. Table of Contents

The title of the handbook shall be displayed at the top center of each page of the table of contents. The title “**TABLE OF CONTENTS**” shall be displayed center of the page one line below the handbook title on each page of the table of contents. See paragraph 22 for font standards for the table of contents.

The table of contents shall list only the following.

- (1) Part numbers and titles.
- (2) Section numbers and titles, if the handbook contains sections.
- (3) Paragraph numbers, titles, and the applicable page number.
- (4) Reserved paragraphs, parts, and sections.
- (5) Exhibit number(s) and title(s).

Page numbers are not displayed in the table of contents for:

- (1) part numbers;
- (2) section numbers;
- (3) reserved part, section, and paragraph numbers; or
- (4) exhibits.

Part numbers and titles are aligned with the left margin. Section and paragraph numbers and titles are aligned 1/8 inch from left margin. Reserved parts, sections, and paragraphs are aligned 1/8 inch from left margin.

The title “**Exhibits**” is aligned with left margin. Exhibit numbers and titles are aligned 1/8 inch from left margin.

See the table of contents of this handbook for an example.

11 Standard Components (Continued)

E. Parts

See paragraph 12 for information about parts.

F. Exhibits

Exhibits shall be used to provide information that supplements the procedure provided in the various parts of the handbook. Exhibits shall not be used to provide procedure.

To provide consistency between handbooks and allow readers to know where certain information is located in all RMA external handbooks, exhibits 1, 2, and 3 are reserved for certain information. See subparagraphs 11G, H, and I for more information.

Number exhibits consecutively beginning with exhibit 1. The exhibit number shall be displayed in the top right corner of each page of the exhibit. The exhibit title shall be displayed one line below the exhibit number, aligned with the left margin, and underlined with the underline extending to the right margin. If an exhibit continues from one page to the next, repeat the exhibit number and title on each page and add “(Continued)” after the title on the second and subsequent pages.

Writers may reserve exhibit numbers. The number of exhibits reserved is based on the writer’s knowledge of future needs. Reserving exhibits decreases the need for decimal point exhibit numbers when adding additional information an existing handbook. Reserving exhibits is at the discretion of the writer.

See exhibits 1, 2, and 5 of this handbook for examples of exhibits.

G. Exhibit 1

Exhibit 1 shall be titled “Acronyms and Abbreviations,” and shall provide the approved acronyms and abbreviations used within the handbook. Reserve exhibit 1 if no acronyms or abbreviations are used in the handbook. The acronyms and abbreviations and the terms they represent shall be listed in alphabetical order.

Example:

Approved Acronym/Abbreviation	Term
AIP	Approved Insurance Provider
FCIC	Federal Crop Insurance Corporation
LAM	Loss Adjustment Manual

Writers shall ensure acronyms and abbreviations in their handbook(s) are consistent with the acronyms and abbreviations provided in all other handbooks, policies, the Act, and the SRA.

H. Exhibit 2

Exhibit 2 shall be titled “Definitions,” and shall provide the definitions of terms used in the handbook. Define only the terms needed to interpret the context of the handbook. Reserve exhibit 2 if no definitions are needed.

The terms being defined shall be listed in alphabetical order and underlined. The term being defined and its definition shall form a complete sentence. Do not provide the term and its definition separately.

Example: The term “debtor” would be defined as “Debtor means a person who owes a debt and that debt is delinquent.”

Definitions shall not be included in the other exhibits or parts of the handbook. When the writer believes it is important to draw the reader’s attention to a definition, refer the reader to exhibit 2.

Writers shall ensure the definitions in their handbook(s) are consistent with the definitions provided in all other handbooks, policies, the Act, and the SRA.

I. Exhibit 3

Exhibit 3 shall be titled “Form Standards.” The DSSH provides the form standards for all forms required by permanent plans of insurance and crop insurance programs. Exhibit 3 shall contain only the form standards that are not included in DSSH.

Reserve exhibit 3 if no form standards are provided in the handbook.

J. Exhibit 4 and Subsequent Exhibits

Exhibit 4 and subsequent exhibits shall be used to provide information that supplements the procedure provided in the various parts of the handbook. Exhibits shall not be used to provide procedure. Supplemental information in exhibit 4 and subsequent exhibits includes, but is not limited to:

- (1) maps and diagrams;
- (2) detailed examples of procedure; and
- (3) examples of completed forms or documents.

Starting with exhibit 4, exhibits shall be in the same chronological order as the procedure in the handbook.

Example: An exhibit that references or is associated with procedure in part 3 of the handbook should precede an exhibit that references or is associated with procedure in part 5 of the handbook.

A. General Information

Effective writing requires managing the size of the information so that it is easily understood by the reader. Having standardized segments, format, font, and organization allows writers to focus on the content of the handbook rather than the format. Allowing up to four different segments and up to four levels of designation for sentence continuation:

- (1) assists writers in managing the size of information presented;
- (2) conveys procedure in an effective, clear, and concise manner;
- (3) assists writers in focusing on presenting information in a logical manner; and
- (4) allows readers to quickly find the information they need.

RMA external handbooks shall be divided into the following segments.

- (1) Parts.
- (2) Sections (optional).
- (3) Paragraphs.
- (4) Subparagraphs.

In addition, individual sentences that precede or provide for a series or list of multiple items shall be broken down into levels of designation to present the information in a clear and logical manner. See subparagraph 23B for more information on levels of designation.

B. Part 1

RMA external handbooks may have as many parts as needed to convey the applicable information in a clear and logical manner. However, to provide consistency between handbooks and allow readers to know where certain information is located in all RMA external handbooks, part 1 of each handbook is reserved for certain general information including, but not limited to, the following.

Information	What to Include
Purpose	Description of general purpose of the handbook.
Source of Authority	List the source(s) of authority for the procedures provided in the handbook, such as the Federal Crop Insurance Act, applicable regulations, FCIC Board action, etc.
Related Handbooks	List all other handbooks that relate to the particular handbook and include how the other handbook(s) are related.
Responsibilities	List the general responsibilities, and all specific responsibilities, required by the handbook, including but not limited to RMA, AIP, and field responsibilities.

B. Part 1 (continued)

If applicable, additional general information not provided elsewhere in the handbook shall be included in part 1. Examples of additional information located in part 1 include, but are not limited to:

- (1) the duration of the handbook, if the handbook provides procedure with an established duration period, such as certain pilot programs; and
- (2) the area of applicability, if the handbook provides procedure for a program/product that is not nationwide in scope.

C. Part 2 and Subsequent Parts

Part 2 and subsequent parts shall provide the applicable procedures and instruction related to the subject of the handbook. Each part:

- (1) may be further separated by sections;
- (2) shall contain at least two paragraphs; and
- (3) may include multiple subparagraphs.

D. Sections

Adding sections under a part of a handbook allows the writer to break the topic of the part into manageable pieces that will provide greater clarity and separation for readers.

Example: The topic of part 3 of a handbook provides procedure about the eligibility requirements for three different plans of insurance. To provide more separation and clarity to the reader and better manage the amount of information, the writer decides to separate the part 3 into three sections. Each section provides procedure related to the eligibility requirements of a specific plan of insurance.

The use of sections is optional and at the discretion of the writer.

E. Paragraphs

Paragraphs break the topic of the part or section into manageable pieces that provide greater clarity and separation for readers. Most paragraphs will require subparagraphs to provide clarity and separation to readers and meet the most effective size criteria provided in subparagraph 23A.

12 Standard Segments (Continuation)

F. Subparagraphs

Subparagraphs allow the writer to break the topic of the paragraph into smaller manageable pieces. Do not use subparagraphs if all information for a paragraph topic can be clearly provided without dividing the information into subparagraphs.

See paragraph 4 for an example of a paragraph that is not broken down into subparagraphs. The information provided in paragraph 4 does not need further separation into subparagraphs to add clarity or additional related information.

13 Maintaining, Amending, and Reissuing Handbooks

A. Maintaining Handbooks

Each writer shall determine the best method for maintaining and updating handbooks under their responsibility. However, writers must ensure each handbook can be updated and issued in a timely manner.

Two possible options for maintaining handbooks between amendments or reissuance include maintaining a:

- (1) working copy of the handbook as changes are identified; or
- (2) separate log of needed changes.

Maintaining a constantly updated working copy of a handbook:

- (1) ensures the handbook will be ready to issue quickly with little advance notice;
- (2) reduces the possibility of changes and corrections being overlooked or forgotten; and
- (3) allows writers to control their workload throughout the year.

Maintaining a separate log of changes needed provides a reference for writers to use to ensure needed changes and corrections are not overlooked.

Other options for maintaining handbooks exist and each writer must determine which method is the most effective for each handbook under their responsibility.

B. Correcting Errors

Significant errors in procedure shall be corrected in a timely manner. Writers are responsible for identifying and correcting errors within handbooks under their responsibility. Writers shall determine the significance of the error and whether it warrants immediate action to amend the handbook or if other action, such as a program bulletin, will adequately address the error.

B. Correcting Errors (continued)

Insignificant errors usually do not justify issuing handbook amendments or other immediate corrective action. Insignificant errors can be corrected when amending the handbook for more substantial reasons or when the entire handbook is reissued.

Minor errors include, but are not limited to, typing errors, spelling errors, incorrect cross references and incorrect punctuation, unless the error changes the meaning of the associated procedure.

C. Amendments Versus Reissuing

Each writer must determine whether to amend a handbook, sometimes referred to as slip-sheeting, or reissue the entire handbook.

The following are general guidelines to assist in determining when to reissue the entire handbook. If any of the following are met, reissuing the entire handbook is warranted.

- (1) 30 percent or more the pages in the handbook will be changed, not including cover page, transmittal page, or table of contents.
- (2) The handbook has been amended three or more times since it was last reissued.
- (3) Less than 30 percent of the pages in the handbook will not be changed, not including cover page, transmittal page or table of contents, but the amended pages are spread throughout the handbook.

When a handbook is amended, the:

- (1) date on the amended pages must be the date the amendment was approved; and
- (2) amendment number must be added as a suffix to the handbook number on the cover page and on the amended pages.

Example: Handbook “RMA-XXX” is amended for the first time. Both “RMA-XXX” and “RMA-XXX-1” shall be displayed on the cover page, and “RMA-XXX-1” shall be displayed on the amended pages. If the handbook is amended again, “RMA-XXX,” “RMA-XXX-1,” and “RMA-XXX-2” shall all be displayed on the cover page.

D. Identifying Changes

When a handbook is amended, the significant changes contained in the amendment shall be identified on the transmittal page, including the reason for the change. The changes, additions, and deletions are not identified within the handbook procedure.

14-20 (Reserved)

Section 2 Format, Font, and Organization Standards

21 Format Standards

A. Numbering Segments

The following table provides standards for numbering handbook segments.

IF the handbook segment is ...	THEN ...
a part	number consecutively throughout the handbook beginning with part 1.
a section	number consecutively within each part beginning with section 1.
a paragraph	number consecutively throughout the handbook beginning with paragraph 1. The first paragraph in each part and section must be an odd number ending in “1”. See subparagraph 21C for reserving segments within the handbook and ensuring the first paragraph in each part and section is an odd number ending in “1.”
a subparagraph	identify alphabetically in consecutive order within each paragraph using capital letters followed by a period.

Page 5 of this handbook is an example where a part number, section number, paragraph and subparagraph all appear on the same page.

B. Titling Segments

Titles:

- (1) are used by readers to identify topics that direct them to specific subject matter;
- (2) should be brief and descriptive of the information provided in the segment; and
- (3) shall not be used as lead-ins.

The same title shall not be repeated within a handbook. The first letter of each word in a title is capitalized.

Exception: Do not capitalize articles, prepositions, or conjunctions used in a title, unless they are the first word in the title or they are used in a part title.

The following table provides guidelines for writing titles. See paragraph 22 for font standards.

Segment	Guideline	Location(s) of Title in Handbook
Part	Identify main topic(s) of the part.	Table of Contents. Part number and title at top center of the first page of the part. All parts start at the beginning of a new page. Example: PART 2 ELIGIBILITY

B. Titling Segments (continued)

Segment	Guideline	Location(s) of Title in Handbook
Section	Identify the topic(s) of the section.	<p>Table of Contents.</p> <p>Section number and title at top center of the first page of the section. Display Section 1 and its title immediately after the part and part title. Section 2 and subsequent sections within a part each start at the beginning of a new page.</p> <p>Example: PART 2 ELIGIBILITY Section 1 Payment Eligibility Requirements</p>
Paragraph	A specific description of the purpose or function of the information provided in the paragraph.	<p>Table of Contents.</p> <p>Paragraph number aligned with left margin. Paragraph title indented three-eighth inch from paragraph number.</p> <p>Example: <u>11 Eligible Acreage</u></p> <p>If a paragraph continues from one page to the next, repeat the paragraph number and title on each page and add “(Continued)” after the title on the second and subsequent pages.</p> <p>Example: <u>11 Eligible Acreage (Continued)</u></p>
Subparagraph	A specific description of the subject matter in the subparagraph. Subject matter must be related to the purpose or function listed in the paragraph title.	<p>Subparagraph alphabetical reference aligned with first word of paragraph title. Subparagraph title indented three-eighth inch from subparagraph alphabetical reference.</p> <p>Example: <u>11 Eligible Acreage</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">A. Eligible Cropland</p> <p>If a subparagraph continues from one page to the next, repeat the subparagraph number and title on each page and add “(continued)” on the second and subsequent pages.</p> <p>Example: <u>11 Eligible Acreage (Continued)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">A. Eligible Cropland (continued)</p>

C. Reserving Segments

Writers shall reserve paragraphs at the end of every part and section. The number of paragraphs reserved is based on the writers knowledge of future needs and anticipated changes; however, reserving too many paragraphs is better than reserving too few.

C. Reserving Segments (continued)

The first paragraph of each part and section must be an odd number ending in “1.” Therefore, writers must, at a minimum, reserve the number of paragraphs needed to result in the first paragraph of the next part or section to end in “1.”

The following table provides examples of reserving paragraphs.

IF the last paragraph of a ...	AND the writer determines there is ...	THEN the writer could ...
part is 26	a need to add several more paragraphs to that part in the future based on program changes	reserve paragraphs 27 through 40. Reserving 13 paragraph numbers provides the opportunity to expand the part in the future without using “decimal point paragraph numbers” and results in the first paragraph of the next part being “41.”
	no need to add a large number of paragraphs to that part in the future	reserve only paragraphs 27 through 30. This is the minimum number of paragraphs that can be reserved in this example to result in the first paragraph of the next part to end in “1” (31).

Writers may also reserve parts and sections if there is a possibility of a significant amount of additional or new procedure being added to the segment in the future. Reserving parts and sections is at the discretion of the writer.

Reserving segments within a handbook decreases the need for decimal point parts, sections, paragraphs, and exhibits when adding additional information an existing handbook. See subparagraph 21D for information about how to number segments added to existing handbooks using decimal points.

D. Adding Segments

Writers shall use decimal points to number segments added to existing handbook when there are insufficient segments reserved within the handbook.

Example: The writer needs to add procedure to part 3 of their handbook. The procedure must be located between existing paragraphs 23 and 24. The new procedure comprises three new paragraphs. The writer shall number the new paragraphs as 23.5, 23.6, and 23.7. Numbering the three new paragraphs beginning with 23.5 allows the writer to add the paragraphs without renumbering of all subsequent paragraphs. In addition, such numbering allows for future paragraphs, such as 23.4 and 23. 8 to be added without renumbering subsequent paragraphs.

Do not use decimal points to number segments when developing a new handbook or completely revising an existing handbook.

E. Page Format

Format consistency within and between handbooks is essential and enhances readability. A visual framework is formed by defining a document grid that controls the size and placement of:

- (1) margins;
- (2) white space;
- (3) lines;
- (4) tables; and
- (5) graphics.

RMA external handbooks shall be written in a single column format using:

- (1) 0.6 inch top and bottom margins; and
- (2) 0.8 inch left and right margins.

The page number shall be located at the bottom right corner of each page. See subparagraph 21F for information on how to number each component of a handbook.

The handbook number shall be located at the bottom center of each page, except for the cover page.

The date the handbook was issued or the date the specific page was amended, as applicable, shall be located at the bottom left of each page, except for the cover page. The date shall be spelled out and displayed using month and year. Do not include the day.

Example: Use “December 2009.” Do not use “December 2, 2009,” or “12/2009.”

F. Page Numbering

All page numbers shall be located at the bottom right corner of each page. The following table provides the standards for numbering pages.

Page	How to Number
Cover page	Do not number.
Transmittal pages	Number consecutively beginning with page 1. Each page number shall have a prefix of “TP.” Example: TP 1, TP 2, TP 3.
Table of Content pages	Number consecutively beginning with page 1. Each page number shall have a prefix of “TC.” Example: TC 1, TC 2, TC 3.
All pages after the Table of Contents and before Exhibit 1	Number consecutively beginning with page 1.
Exhibit pages	Each exhibit shall be numbered separately with the first page of each exhibit being page 1. Number the pages of each exhibit consecutively beginning with page 1.

F. Page Numbering (continued)

When amending an existing handbook results in the need to add a page(s) between existing pages, use applicable decimal point page numbers.

Example: The writer needs to add procedure to their handbook on page number 54. The added procedure will result in two pages being added. The writer shall number the new pages 54.5 and 54.6. Numbering the two new pages beginning with 54.5 allows the writer to add the paragraphs without renumbering of all subsequent pages. In addition, such numbering allows for future pages, such as 54.4 and 54.7 to be added without renumbering subsequent pages.

G. Graphics Format

Graphics, such as an example of a form, computer screen prints, and sample letters, should be provided in an exhibit with cross references between the exhibit number and the applicable paragraph or subparagraph. However, writers may place graphics within a paragraph or subparagraph if it is determined such placement is necessary to the reader's understanding of the graphic.

If graphics are placed within a paragraph or subparagraph, the graphic must be placed immediately after the applicable text related to the graphic.

Graphics must be compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which may require including the text equivalent of the graphic. See paragraph 5 for more information about Section 508 requirements.

If the graphic is an example of a form or letter, it must:

- (1) include a watermark of "EXAMPLE" or "SAMPLE;" and
- (2) be an example of a completed form or letter, as applicable, not including signature blocks/fields or statements, such as the Privacy Act and Non-discrimination statements.

The applicable text related to the form must identify any entries/statements required by the actual form that is not shown in the completed example. See DSSH for Privacy Act and Non-discrimination statements.

H. Table Format

Place tables immediately after the text to which they refer. A complete sentence that provides the purpose or function of the table must be provided as a lead-in to the table. The standard font for text within a table is Times New Roman Regular 12 pt.

Exception: Writers may use a smaller Times New Roman font of not less than 10 pt if the smaller font will prevent the table from extending beyond one page.

H. Table Format (continued)

Table border and cell lines shall be a single solid ½ point line. When no text or data is entered in a cell, use 40 percent shade factor to fill the cell.

The following table provides the standards for table width and depth.

Size	Standard
Preferred width	Align left edge of the table with the left edge of the text to which the table refers. Align right edge of the table with the right margin.
Alternate width	Align left edge of the table with the left edge of the subparagraph letter or paragraph number, and right edge with the right margin. Use this standard: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) when the preferred width does not provide enough space for all the information; (2) to save space; or (3) to keep the entire table on one page.
Depth	The depth of the table is determined by the amount of information in the table.

The following table provides standards for table headers.

Item	Standard	
Font	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt Exception: Writers may use a smaller Times New Roman Bold font of not less than 10 pt if the smaller font will prevent the table from extending beyond one page.	
Capitalization	Capitalize the first letter of each word in table headers. Exceptions: Do not capitalize articles, conjunctions, and prepositions, unless they are the first word of the header. For if-then and if-and-then table headers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) capitalize "IF," "AND," and "THEN," and (2) use lowercase for the rest of the words in the header. 	
Punctuation	Do not use periods or colons in table headers. For if-then and if-and-then table headers, follow the header with a 3-dot ellipsis.	
Justification	IF the table is ...	THEN ...
	an if-then or if-and-then table	left justify the table header.
	other than an if-then or if-and-then table	center the headers.

22 Font Standards

In combination with a consistent format, the application of standard fonts:

- (1) establishes a consistent visual framework;
- (2) enhances the readability of the information; and
- (3) helps control the size of handbooks.

The following table provides standard fonts to be used in RMA external handbooks. See subparagraph 21H for standard fonts used in tables.

Handbook Component/Segment	Item	Standard Font
Cover Page	Handbook title	All Capitol Times New Roman Bold 40 pt
	Additional information, if applicable	Times New Roman Bold 26 pt
	Handbook number	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	Responsible division	
	Language for applicable emblems	
Transmittal Page	All titles	All Capitol Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	All text except for text providing reason for amendment or new handbook	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	Text providing reason for amendment or new handbook	Times New Roman Regular 12 pt
Table of Contents	Table of Contents header	All Capitol Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	Page number header	
	Part numbers and titles	
	Section numbers and titles	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	Reserved parts, sections, and paragraphs	
	Exhibit numbers and titles	Times New Roman Regular 12 pt
	Paragraph number title and page	
Parts and Sections	Part numbers and titles	All Capitol Times New Roman Bold 14 pt
	Section numbers and titles	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
Paragraphs and Subparagraphs	Paragraph numbers and titles	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt underlined with underline extending from left to right margin
	Subparagraph alphabetical reference and title	
	Subtitles	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	Examples: Examples of subtitles include “ Example ” and “ Exception ”	
Text in paragraphs and subparagraphs	Times New Roman Regular 12 pt	
Exhibits	Exhibit number	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt
	Exhibit title	Times New Roman Bold 12 pt underlined with underline extending from left to right margin
	Text in exhibit	Times New Roman Regular 12 pt

A. Managing the Size of Information Within Segments

Managing the size of the information within each segment, including sentence length, is an effective way to develop clear, simple, and concise procedure that is easily understood.

The following table provides guidelines designed to manage the size of the information presented.

Segment/Sentence	Most Effective Size	Guidelines for Subdividing When Exceeding Most Effective Size
Sentence	15 to 30 words	Break into two or more sentences
Subparagraph	3 to 15 sentences and 1 to 2 tables	Create another subparagraph
Paragraph	2 to 15 subparagraphs	Create another paragraph
Section	3 to 15 paragraphs	Create another section
Part	3 to 15 paragraphs	Create sections
	2 to 9 sections	Create another part

B. Levels of Designation

Sentences that contain or lead to a series or list of items/information are often difficult to read and confusing to readers. Breaking such information into levels of designation:

- (1) presents the information in a clear and logical order; and
- (2) allows writers to provide sufficient information to ensure the readers understands.

Levels of designation use an alternating series of numbers and letters, indented accordingly, to provide information that is directly related to the information that precedes the series of numbers and letters. Use levels of designation to:

- (1) present a series of items in a sentence that would otherwise be separated by commas or semi-colons; and
- (2) list multiple items/information that relate to a lead-in sentence or table header immediately preceding the levels of designation.

Do not:

- (1) use levels of designation to list a single item or two single words items; and
- (2) capitalize the first word in a listed item unless:
 - (a) the first word is a proper noun; or
 - (b) all the items in the level are simply a list of items being referenced by a lead-in that is a complete sentence by itself.

B. Levels of Designation (continued)

Items listed using levels of designation:

- (1) never stand alone;
- (2) must follow a lead-in or table header; and
- (3) must form a:
 - (a) complete sentence in combination with the lead-in when the lead-in is not a complete sentence by itself; or
 - (b) logical group of words or information related to the lead-in when the lead-in is a complete sentence by itself.

The following table provides the hierarchical structure when using levels of designation.

Level	Description
1	A consecutively numbered list beginning with the number “1” shown parenthetically. The parenthetical number is aligned with the same left margin as the text to which level 1 is related. The text of level 1 is indented three-eighths inch from the parenthetical number.
2	A consecutively lettered list beginning with the lower case letter “a” shown parenthetically. The parenthetical letter is aligned with the first word in the level 1 sentence to which level 2 is related. The text of level 2 is indented three-eighths inch from the parenthetical letter.
3	A consecutively numbered list beginning with the lower case Roman Numeral number “i” shown parenthetically. The parenthetical lower case Roman Numeral is aligned with the first word in the level 2 sentence to which level 3 is related. The text of level 3 is indented three-eighths inch from the parenthetical lower case Roman Numeral.
4	A consecutively lettered list beginning with the upper case letter “A” shown parenthetically. The parenthetical letter is aligned with the first word in the level 3 sentence to which level 4 is related. The text of level 4 is indented three-eighths inch from the parenthetical letter.

B. Levels of Designation (continued)

The following table provides the punctuation rules when using levels of designation.

IF the lead-in is a ...	THEN use a ...
complete sentence	(1) period after the lead-in sentence; and (2) period after each item listed.
clause or sentence fragment	(1) colon after the lead-in; (2) semicolon after each item listed except the last item; (3) conjunction, such as “and” or “or” as applicable, after the semicolon in the next to last item in the list, or where appropriate; and (4) period after the last item listed.

Single space items if all items in all levels are one line.

Example: A test is performed to determine whether the:

- (1) sample obtained contains the required traits; and
- (2) planting requirements were met on the acreage sampled.

Double space items if:

- (1) any item in the list is longer than one line;
- (2) the items in the list are separated by a subtitle, such as “**Example:**” or “**Exception:;**”
or
- (3) more than one level of designation is used.

Example: Reviews may be conducted at anytime to verify:

- (1) compliance with the terms and conditions of the policy; and
- (2) the information provided on the certification form is accurate and meets the requirements of the program.

24-30 (Reserved)

PART 3 LANGUAGE USE, WRITING GUIDELINES, AND CITATION STANDARDS

31 Language Use

A. Clear and Simple Language

Using clear and simple language increases the readability and effectiveness of procedure. Writers can improve the clarity and simplicity of language by:

- (1) omitting needless words;
- (2) using definite and specific language;
- (3) using simple everyday words;
- (4) avoiding gender-specific terms; and
- (5) keeping sentences short.

The following table provides examples of how to simplify language.

Instead of saying ...	Say ...	Instead of saying ...	Say ...
accomplish	do	in order to	to
adequate number of	enough	in regard to	regarding or about
afford an opportunity	allow	in the event	if or when
a number of	some, many or several	in the majority of instances	usually
ascertain	find out	in the matter of	in
at the same time	when	in the near future	soon
by means of	by	in view of	because
commence	begin	is directed	shall
deem	consider	is authorized to but not required	may
determine if	determine whether	is entitled to	may
due to the fact that	because	is to or are to (do something)	shall (do something)
due to	because of	is the duty of	shall
during such time	while	it would appear that	apparently
e.g.	such as, or the subtitle Example:	make every effort to	try
for purposes of	for	may at their discretion	may
he/she	use the noun that the pronouns replace, or rewrite to eliminate the singular pronouns.	on occasion	occasionally
hold a discussion	discuss	on the basis of	based on
i.e.	that is	pertaining to	regarding or about
in accordance with	according to	prior to	before
in a manner similar to	as	pursuant to	according to or under
in case of	if or when	until such time	until
in lieu of	instead of	whenever or whenever	if or when
in order for	for	with regard to	regarding or about

B. Active Voice

Voice is determined by whether the subject of the sentence is the agent or the receiver of the action of a transitive verb. Sentences written in active voice are generally more clear and direct than those written in passive voice. Accordingly, passive voice should only be used in limited situations.

The following table provides examples of sentences written in active and passive voice:

Active Voice	Passive Voice
AIPs must submit the report to RMA.	The report must be submitted to RMA by AIPs.
AIPs must conduct a field review to determine production.	A field review must be conducted by AIPs to determine production.
AIPs are responsible for explaining the worksheet.	The worksheet must be explained by the AIP.

C. Use of Articles

Writers shall not use the articles “a,” “an,” or “the” unless use of such articles is absolutely necessary for the reader to understand the sentence. Such articles shall not be used with standard organizational abbreviations or acronyms.

Example: Write “RMA released the information”, not “The RMA released the information.”

D. Choosing Correct Auxiliary Verbs

Choosing the correct auxiliary verb is critical to providing complete and accurate procedure, especially when providing responsibilities or actions to the reader.

The following table provides common auxiliary verbs and the nature of action they indicate.

Auxiliary Verb	Nature of Action
shall	Use “shall” to indicate mandatory action.
will	Use “will” to indicate future action.
can	Use “can” to indicate the possibility of something happening.
may	Use “may” to indicate something is allowed, but not required.
should	Use “should” to indicate something is recommended, but not required.

When writing program procedure or instructions, provide only the procedure and instructions the readers must adhere to. Do not include personal opinions or procedure/instructions that are not required actions. Accordingly, limit the use of the auxiliary verb “should” to only those situations where absolutely necessary.

31 Language Use (Continued)

E. Use of Names and Identification Numbers

Writers shall not use a person's name or any number that could be an actual identification number when providing examples. Instead of:

- (1) a person's name, use a generic term, such as "insured A" or "applicant X;" and
- (2) an actual number, use a series of X's to indicate an identification number.

Example: Use "Tax ID No. XXX-XX-XXXX" instead of "Tax ID No. 123-45-6789."

32 Acronym and Abbreviation Use

Acronyms and abbreviations used within a handbook shall be listed in exhibit 1 of that handbook. See subparagraph 11G for more information about acronyms and abbreviations to be listed in exhibit 1 of handbooks.

Writers shall not spell out approved acronyms or abbreviations, including the first time the acronym or abbreviation is used.

Example: The first time the acronym "RMA" is used in this handbook is subparagraph 1A. The first time the acronym is used, it is not spelled out. Readers will refer to exhibit 1 when they are unsure what an acronym represents.

33 Guidelines for Sentence Construction

Sentence construction affects the readability, clarity, directness, and logical flow of the message being presented. A properly constructed sentence will increase the reader's understanding of the subject matter and reduces the number of questions received. See subparagraph 23A for managing sentence length.

The following table provides sentence construction guidelines and examples.

Guideline	Incorrect Example	Correct Example
Write in complete sentences. Do not leave parts of a sentence implied, write all that is meant.	When step 3 is completed, the "total" field on the RO report must match the AIP report. Otherwise, repeat the process.	The "total" field on the RO report must match the "total" field on the AIP report. When the "total" field on the RO and AIP report do not match, repeat steps 1 through 3.
Express coordinate statements in similar form.	Agents shall report to AIP by July 1. RMA must receive reports from AIPs by August 1.	Agents shall report to AIP by July 1. AIPs shall report to RMA by August 1.
Make positive assertions.	Do not approve payments that are not proper in every way.	Approve only proper payments.

33 Guidelines for Sentence Construction (Continued)

Guideline	Incorrect Example	Correct Example
Do not use parenthetical statements. Write clear, concise, and simple sentences that do not require a parenthetical statement to explain the sentence meaning. Write sentences to avoid interjectory phrases. If an interjectory phrase is unavoidable, enclose with commas rather than parentheses.	Eligible acres are reduced by the number of acres planted after the final planting date (including insured and uninsured acreage). If more than one year's production history (including zero planted) is added to the databases, cups do not apply.	Eligible acres are reduced by the number of insured and uninsured acres planted after the final planting date. When more than one year of production history, including years with zero planted acres, is added to the database, cups are not applicable.
Use one tense.	RMA prepares the printout quarterly. RMA will provide AIPs with the printouts annually.	RMA shall: (1) prepare the printout quarterly (2) annually provide AIPs with compiled printouts.

34 Citation Standards

A. Cross Referencing

Write at a level of detail that provides the information the reader needs. However, do not repeat the same procedure in multiple locations. When needed, cross reference to existing procedure rather than repeat the same procedure in multiple locations.

B. Cross Reference Format

The following table provides the format for cross referencing within and between handbooks.

Segment/Component of Handbook Being Referenced	Format When Referencing Within Same Segment/Component of Same Handbook	Format When Referencing Within Same Handbook but a Different Segment/Component	Format When Referencing to a Different Handbook
the handbook itself	"this handbook"	"this handbook"	Identify the handbook by title. Example: See LAM .
part	"this part"	Identify the specific part. Example: See part 3.	Identify the specific handbook by title and the specific part. Example: See LAM, part 3.
section	"this section"	Identify the specific part and section. Example: See part 3, section 1.	Identify the specific handbook by title, the specific part and specific section. Example: See LAM, part 3, section 1.

34 Citation Standards (Continued)

B. Cross Reference Format (continued)

Segment/Component of Handbook Being Referenced	Format When Referencing Within Same Segment/Component of Same Handbook	Format When Referencing Within Same Handbook but a Different Segment/Component	Format When Referencing to a Different Handbook
paragraph	“this paragraph”	Identify the specific paragraph. Example: See paragraph 9.	Identify the specific handbook by title and the specific paragraph. Example: See LAM, paragraph 23.
subparagraph	“this subparagraph”	Identify the specific subparagraph. Example: See subparagraph 9B.	Identify the specific handbook by title and the specific subparagraph. Example: See LAM, subparagraph 9B.
exhibit	“this exhibit”	Identify the specific exhibit. Example: See exhibit 5.	Identify the specific handbook by title and the specific exhibit. Example: See LAM, exhibit 5.

The following table provides examples of the correct format for cross referencing laws and other information resources.

Type of Information	Example Format
CFR segments. References are:	“7 CFR” is an example of a reference to CFR title.
(1) title	“7 CFR Part 709” is an example of a reference to a CFR title and part.
(2) part	“7 CFR 709.3” is an example of a reference to a CFR title, part and section.
(3) section; and	“7 CFR 709.3(b)(1)” is an example of a reference to a CFR title, part, section and paragraph.
(4) paragraph.	
Executive Orders. References are:	Executive Order 69432 of March 5, 1990
(1) Executive Order’s number; and	
(2) date it was published in FR.	
FR. References are:	55 FR 8609, June 4, 1990
(1) volume number;	
(2) page number; and	
(3) date published.	
Public Laws. References are:	Pub. L. 98-100
(1) congressional session number; and	
(2) law number.	
United States statutes-at-large. References are:	69 Stat. 868
(1) volume number; and	
(2) page number.	
United States Code. References are:	30 U.S.C. 226
(1) title; and	
(2) section.	

Acronyms and Abbreviations

The following table provides the acronyms and abbreviations used in this handbook.

Approved Acronym/Abbreviation	Term
AIP	Approved Insurance Provider
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DAPM	Deputy Administrator for Program Management
DSSH	Document and Supplemental Standards Handbook
FCIC	Federal Crop Insurance Corporation
FR	Federal Register
LAM	Loss Adjustment Manual
RMA	Risk Management Agency
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Definitions

External handbook means a handbook that provides procedures to external RMA customers, such as NCIS and Approved Insurance Providers. External handbooks include handbooks developed by private product submitters and persons under contract with RMA if the handbook(s) provide procedure to external RMA customers. External handbooks do not include handbooks that provide procedure to RMA employees only, such as the Correspondence Manual.

Other writer means a person other than a RMA employee, such as submitters of private products or persons contracted by RMA or FCIC, who is responsible for writing and submitting an external handbook(s).

RMA contact person means a RMA employee assigned to work with other writers in the development, clearance, and approval of the other writer's external handbook.

RMA writer means a RMA employee responsible for writing an external handbook.

Examples of Transmittal Pages

The following is an example of a transmittal page when issuing a new handbook.

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250**

TITLE: ABC CROP INSURANCE STANDARDS HANDBOOK	NUMBER: 12345
EFFECTIVE DATE: 2010 and succeeding crop years	ISSUE DATE: August 31, 2010
SUBJECT: Provides the procedures and instructions for administering the ABC crop insurance program	OPI: Handbook Standards Division
	APPROVED: August 31, 2010 /s/ I M Approving Official Deputy Administrator for Handbook Approval

REASON FOR ISSUANCE

This handbook is being issued to provide procedures and instructions for administering the ABC Crop Insurance Program for the 2010 and subsequent crop years.

Examples of Transmittal Pages (Continued)

The following is an example of a transmittal page when amending an existing handbook.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250	
TITLE: ABC CROP INSURANCE STANDARDS HANDBOOK	NUMBER: 12345
EFFECTIVE DATE: 2010 and succeeding crop years	ISSUE DATE: August 31, 2010
SUBJECT: Provides the procedures and instructions for administering the ABC crop insurance program	OPI: Handbook Standards Division
	APPROVED: August 31, 2010 /s/ I M Approving Official Deputy Administrator for Handbook Approval

REASON FOR AMENDMENT

Subparagraph 21E was added to provide procedure for selecting policies for review.

Paragraph 29 was removed because the XYZ policy was changed to remove the requirement the crop must be grade NO. 2 or higher.

Subparagraph 35 was amended for clarity and to include an example.



0.6" Top and Bottom Margins

Format Example

The following includes formatting examples to assist in issuing a handbook. Refer to part 2 for more detailed instructions. When applicable, always indent three-eighth inch.

PART 1 GENERAL INFORMATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

(Parts are 14 pt. Times New Roman bold centered at top of first page of reference)

Section 1 Standard Components and Segments

(If applicable, Sections are 12 pt. Times New Roman centered directly under parts)

1 Paragraph

(Paragraphs are 12 pt. Times New Roman bold with 3/8" indent and underline extending from left to right margin)

A. Subparagraph (Subparagraphs are 12 pt. Times New Roman bold with 3/8" indent)

- (1) First level of designation is numeric parenthetical, 12 pt. Times New Roman with 3/8" indent.
 - (a) Second level of designation is lower case alpha parenthetical, 12 pt. Times New Roman with 3/8" indent.
 - (i) Third level of designation is lower case Roman numeral parenthetical, 12 pt. Times New Roman with 3/8" indent.
 - (A) Fourth level of designation is upper case alpha parenthetical, 12 pt. Times New Roman with 3/8" indent.



0.8" Left and Right Margins

Example: Examples are 12 pt. Times New Roman bold aligned under paragraph, subparagraph, or level of designation for which the example applies.