



National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

Standards for Written Products of the NRCDV

This document offers guidance around the production of accessible, clear, quality materials that are consistent across the NRCDV and reflect its core values and beliefs. These standards have inspired lively discussion and debate across the organization and we welcome suggestions that can help us better honor and reflect the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of survivors and advocates in our products. The writing rules offered here are based largely on APA style guidelines and universal accessibility standards for plain language. Sources are provided where more detailed information is available.

Items are organized into 7 key sections and alphabetized within each:

1. Values
2. Structure & Formatting
3. Punctuation & Special Characters
4. Language
5. Readability
6. Presentation
7. Citations, References & Footnotes/Endnotes

1. Values	
Accessibility	The language and terminology used, as well as the presentation of content, are appropriate for people with a range of reading levels and abilities.
Broad Application	The product could be used by a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes and will be especially valuable to the NRCDV’s primary audience of advocates working to end gender-based violence, including domestic violence and intersecting issues, at local, state, and national levels. There are no identified unintended negative consequences of the product’s release.
Clarity	The language and concepts are simple, clear, and consistent.
Diversity and Cultural Competency	The product meaningfully reflects the experiences of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, exposes or debunks cultural myths and stereotypes, and acknowledges cultural context and oppression.
Movement-based	The product is grounded in the tradition of victim/survivor-centered work with proper attention to addressing the root causes of gender-based violence.
Non-duplication	The product fills a gap, supplements existing resources, and/or meets a need for those working to end gender-based violence.
Quality	The product is interesting, well written, and easy to follow in its organization and presentation.
Timeliness	The product is current and responds to emerging issues in the field.

2. Structure & Formatting	
Alignment	Align text to the left to keep even spacing between words. Use one space between sentences as noted below. (See <i>Spacing</i> .)
Dates	Put a comma between the date and the year, between the day of the week and the date, and after the year when giving a full date. Example: "I ordered a laptop on May 3, 1999, that arrived Friday, May 21." When providing just a month and year (without a day), no commas should be used. And don't include a comma after the year. Example: "April 2014 was the correct month."
Dense or Long Text	Express only one idea in each sentence. Aim to use informative sub-headings, question-and-answer formats and bullet point lists to break up long or complicated passages of text. See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, page 54: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf
Headings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use headings and sub-headings to organize the topics in the form of questions, statements, or topics. • Arrange the headings in a hierarchy. • Apply same heading levels to topics of equal importance. See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, page 15: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf See also APA Style Headings, 6 th Edition: http://blog.apastyle.org/.a/6a01157041f4e3970b011570f0dd68970c-500wi
Margins	Margins should be set at 1 inch all around.
Paragraph Length	Writing experts recommend paragraphs of no more than 150 words in three to eight sentences. Paragraphs should never be longer than 250 words. See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, page 69: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf
References	The reference list includes only and all of the sources actually cited in the text of the document. This is different from a bibliography, which refers to all of the sources that were consulted to write the document, regardless of whether they were actually cited. (See formatting of References in section 7.)
Sentence Length	Sentences should have an average of 15-20 words. Longer sentences are sometimes acceptable, but only if they contain no more than two distinct points and are punctuated correctly.
Spacing	Only one space should be used between the period at the end of a sentence and the first letter of the next. This is also true for colons, semicolons, commas, quotation marks, and dashes.

3. Punctuation and Special Characters

Colons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a colon to introduce an explanation, example, quotation, or list after a complete independent clause. Example: “The breakfast menu contained the clients’ favorite foods: bran muffins, bananas, pancakes and maple syrup, and bacon and eggs.” • If the introduction to a list is not a complete clause, no punctuation is needed. Example: “Dieters preferred low fat breakfast foods such as strawberries, unbuttered whole wheat toast, unsweetened cereal, and applesauce.” • A lowercase letter after a colon is always correct. • Do not use a colon after a verb. • Colons and semicolons should be placed outside quotation marks.
Commas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a comma between two independent clauses. • Separate three or more items in a series with a comma. Use a comma after each item, including the one before the conjunction. Example: “I like orange, yellow, and green.” • Place a comma after introductory modifiers or expressions. • Set off interrupters with pairs of commas, parentheses, or dashes. • Put commas around the name of a person or group spoken to. • Commas and periods should always go inside quotation marks.
Dashes	<p>Use a dash to indicate a sudden interruption in the continuity of a sentence. Example: “These 2 participants – 1 from the first group, 1 from the second – were interviewed separately.”</p>
Hyphens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a hyphen with a participle when it preceded the term it modifies, such as <i>role-playing technique</i> or <i>water-deprived animals</i>. • Hyphenate compound adjectives when they modify nouns, such as <i>high-anxiety group</i> or <i>middle-class families</i>. • <i>Well-being</i> is always hyphenated. • Use a hyphen between two units of equal weight, such as <i>parent-child relationships</i>. • Do not hyphenate compounds including an adverb that ends in –ly such as <i>widely used text</i> or <i>randomly assigned participants</i>. • Terms for race and ethnicity do not include hyphens, such as <i>African American families</i>.
Parentheses	<p>In academic writing, use parentheses to (a) enclose citation material, and (b) enclose letters used for lists, as in this sentence. They are also used (but sparingly) to enclose words or phrases that are not essential, as in the sentence you are reading.</p>
Quotations	<p>Use quotation marks to set off material that represents quoted or spoken language. Punctuation should go inside of the quotation marks.</p>
Semicolons	<p>A semicolon following an independent clause signals that what follows is</p>

	also an independent clause whose meaning is of equal importance and closely related to the first. Semicolons may also be used to separate items in a series containing commas when one or more elements contain other punctuation. Example: “I interviewed Debbie Rios, the attorney; Rhonda Marron, the accountant; and the financial director.”
Slashes	Do not use a slash when a phrase would be clearer. Example: “Each child handed the ball to her mother or guardian.” (Not “Each child handed the ball to her mother/guardian.”)

4. Language	
Acronyms and Abbreviations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not use an acronym unless it will be used 3+ times in the document. Place an acronym behind the first use of the term in parentheses. Example: “National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV)” Limit the number of acronyms used in one document. Spell out everything else, or use nicknames such as <i>the Act</i> or <i>the committee</i>. Use a period when abbreviating the United States as an adjective (U.S. Marines or U.S. Senator). <p>See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, page 37: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf</p>
Active Voice	<p>Be direct with verbs to make the message clearer. Example: “We will decide on your application soon” instead of “A decision on your application will be made soon.”</p> <p>See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, page 21: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf</p>
Consistency	<p>For important concepts, use the same words and phrases consistently even if it sounds repetitive. Example: Do not begin writing about <i>the delegates</i> after using different words, such as <i>attendees</i> or <i>participants</i>, to describe the same thing.</p> <p>See Mencap’s guidelines for accessible writing, page 7: http://november5th.net/resources/Mencap/Making-Myself-Clear.pdf</p>
Contractions	Avoid contractions such as doesn’t, isn’t, can’t, etc.
Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put people first, not their disability. Use the phrase, “people with _____”. Emphasize abilities, not limitations. For example, write, “uses a wheelchair,” not “confined to a wheelchair.” Avoid expressions implying that the person as a whole is disabled. The term <i>deaf</i> refers to individuals with severe to profound hearing loss. The use of <i>Deaf</i> with a capital D denotes a person who identifies as part of a cultural minority group, rather than a person with a disability.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use gender-neutral language unless this language is necessary to reflect

	<p>a gendered analysis. In these cases, explain why gendered language is used.</p> <p>See sample disclaimer regarding the use of gendered language: http://www.vawnet.org/img/GenderedLanguage.jpg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid combination forms such as he/she. Instead, rephrase pronouns or use plural pronouns. • Use the terms <i>transgender</i> or <i>trans</i> when referring to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth, not the incorrect term <i>transgendered</i>.
Jargon and Technical Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the use of jargon and technical terms. • Clearly define any jargon and technical terms used.
Latin or French Expressions	<p>Use <i>for example</i> instead of <i>e.g.</i>, <i>that is</i> instead of <i>i.e.</i>, and <i>such as</i> before a list instead of <i>etc.</i> after it. Where possible, aim to use English equivalents of <i>pro rata</i>, <i>inter alia</i>, <i>in lieu</i>, <i>vis-à-vis</i>, and similar phrases. Such lists should include more than one item.</p>
Non-discriminatory language	<p>Words or terms used must be sensitive to gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation/identification, immigrant status, physical or mental abilities, geography (rural and urban), age, and other aspects of identity and culture.</p>
Numbers	<p>Use figures for numbers, rather than words (accessibility rule), except at the very beginning of a sentence (APA rule).</p> <p>See APA guidance on expressing numbers as words: http://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/numbers-as-words.aspx</p>
Racial and Ethnic Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the designation preferred by the people, community, or culture being referenced. If you do not know the preferred designation, be as broad as inclusive as possible. • Capitalize names of races (African American, Caucasian, Asian, Native American, Latino/a and other racial groups). • White and Black can be capitalized or lower case as long as there is consistency throughout the document. If inconsistency is intentional to reflect a racial analysis, provide an explanation or disclaimer. • Be specific to country or region of origin when information is available. For example, Cuban or Central American for people from Cuba is more specific than Hispanic.
Sexual Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The term <i>sexual orientation</i> is preferred over <i>sexual preference</i>. • The words <i>lesbians</i> and <i>gay men</i> are preferred to the word <i>homosexuals</i>. Avoid the label <i>homosexuality</i>. • When using an acronym to describe LGBTQ communities, be consistent throughout the document. Do not include a letter if the content does not reflect that communities' experience. • As lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer communities continue to

	define themselves this language will continue to evolve.
Verbs	Use the simplest and most direct verbs possible. See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, pages 24-27: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf

5. Readability	
The NRCDV will make final formatting and design decisions including font style and size.	
Font	Use a clear sans serif typeface such as Arial or Helvetica and avoid ornate fonts. <i>Note:</i> Some Plain English guidelines suggest the use of a serif font (Times) for paragraphs and sans serif (Arial) for headings.
Font Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a minimum type size of 12. • The most commonly used large print size is 18.
Plain Language	Material should be written in plain language, which is clear, succinct writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly and completely as possible. The NRCDV embraces the principle of <i>universal design</i> which values accessibility by the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special accommodation.
Tone	The tone of the resource should be appropriate for both the medium and the intended audience, whether it is technical/formal or casual/conversational.

6. Presentation	
Appendices	Appendices will be appropriate for some resources and should be developed in consultation with the NRCDV point person.
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use statistics from current studies (published within the last 5 years), and be sure to cite the original source. If current studies are not available, address this gap in the narrative. • Use reports/studies about diverse population, diverse situations and contexts. • Avoid stereotyping and generalizing ideas about any individual or groups of people.
Topic Sentence	Paragraphs structured with a topic sentence to introduce the content will increase reader comprehension. Establish a context before details are provided. See Federal Plain Language Guidelines, page 66: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/fullbigdoc.pdf

6. Citations, References & Footnotes/Endnotes

Must be accurate, complete, and follow the 6th edition APA publication standards. A free citation generator is available at: <http://www.citefast.com/>

The following resources provide information about APA style:

- Frequently Asked Questions: <http://www.apastyle.org/faqs.html>
- APA Citation Style "How To": <http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/apa.php>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

In Text Citations	Within the text of the resource, include an in-text citation when referring to, summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting from another source. For every in-text citation, there must be a corresponding entry in a reference list.	
	No Author	(short title, 2014)
	One Author	Author (2014) found that... (Author, 2014), (Author, 2014, p._)
	Two Authors	Author and Author (2014) reported that... (Author & Author, 2014), (Author & Author, 2014, p. 110-125)
	Three to Five Authors	Author, Author, and Author (2014) found that... First cite: (Author, Author, & Author, 2014), (Author, Author, & Author, 2014, p. 110-125), Next cite: (Author, et al., 2014)
	Six or More Authors	First Author, et al. (2014) reported that... (First Author, et al., 2014)
References	The reference list should appear at the end of the paper, providing the information necessary for a reader to locate and retrieve any source cited within the body of the paper. Each entry in the reference list must be cited within the text.	
	Periodical	Author, A. A. (2014). Title of article. <i>Title of Periodical</i> , volume number (issue number), pages.
	Non-Periodical	Author, A. A. (2014). <i>Title of work: Capital letter also for subtitle</i> . Location: Publisher. For "Location," list the city and the state using the two letter postal abbreviation without periods (New York, NY).
	Part of a Non-Periodical	Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (2014). Title of the chapter. In A. Editor, B. Editor, & C. Editor (Eds.), <i>Title of the book</i> (pages of chapter, pp. xxx-xxx). Location: Publisher. (See note above for "Location.")
	Online Periodical	Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C.C. (2014). Title of article. <i>Title of Online Periodical</i> , volume number (issue number if available). Retrieved from

		http://www.someaddress.com/full/url/
	Online Document	Author, A.A. (2014). <i>Title of work</i> . Retrieved from http://www.someaddress.com/full/url/
Footnotes/ Endnotes	<p>Footnotes or endnotes may be used in place of in-text citations or in conjunction with in-text citations. The main difference between footnotes and endnotes is where the notes are placed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A footnote is placed at the bottom of the page that contains the respective reference. • Endnotes appear collectively at the end of a paper (usually after the References page), starting on a separate page and labeled as “Endnotes.” <p>Both footnotes and endnotes are noted with consecutive, superscript numerals placed at the end of the sentence, phrase or quotation in which they appear to minimize the interruption in the flow of words. They can follow almost any punctuation mark.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exception: Footnote or endnotes numbers should not follow dashes (—), and if they appear in a sentence in parentheses, the footnote number should be inserted within the parentheses. Example: “Many victims – and most people in general¹ – do not believe it is beneficial or realistic to break all connections made during a relationship.² (In fact, some victims have no choice about remaining in contact with their abusers.³)” 	
	Bibliographical Information	<p>For some NRC DV publications such as fact sheets and policy briefs, authors may choose to use footnotes/endnotes rather than in-text citations so that the document can look more concise and reader-friendly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When mentioning a piece of work for the first time, include a complete citation. Afterwards, place just the author and page number. • When there are two or more consecutive references to the same work, even if separated by several pages, use “Ibid.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If the second reference is from the same page as the previous note, simply use “Ibid.” ○ If the second reference is from a different page as the previous note, then use “Ibid.” and page number. Example: “Ibid., 65.”
	Copyright Permission	<p>When reproducing a graphic, chart, or table from some other source, provide a special note at the bottom of the item that includes copyright information. Begin the citation with “<i>Note</i>.” Example: <i>Note</i>. From “Title of the article,” by W. Jones and R.</p>

		Smith, 2007, Journal Title, 21, p. 122. Copyright 2007 by Copyright Holder. Reprinted with permission.
	Sources	Footnotes or endnotes can point readers to information that is available in more detail elsewhere. Example: ¹ See Davies (2009), especially section III, for an insightful discussion of the victim-defined approach to advocacy.
	Supplemental Information	This information may include explanations, expansion of specific ideas or thoughts, or background information. When providing supplemental information, be brief and focus on only one subject. Limit comments to one small paragraph.