

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 should be 8 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 1.25 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. 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., WHOI) 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).

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.
- “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: Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries. When referring to the National Marine Sanctuary System, all words should be capitalized.
- 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 contained within them. For example, great hammerhead; French angelfish.
- 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.
- We use % throughout all science reports, rather than percent.
- Use scuba, not SCUBA.
- 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.”
- Mallows Bay-Potomac River gets a hyphen between Bay and Potomac, no spaces (not Mallows Bay – Potomac River).

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: Greg McFall/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, site 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

- Generally, we use [APA style](#) for citations. However, any citation style can be used as long as it is consistent throughout the document.
- For the page count in the citation of the paper itself, use the page number that is on the last page of text.

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 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.”
- For more 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.
- 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/>.

Tables: Align text to the left and numeric data to the right. Give column headers the same alignment as the data in the cells below. 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.](#)