



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

OCT 22 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP  
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS  
DEFENSE AGENCY AND FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Renewed Business Rules and Templates for Correspondence and Read Aheads

References: (a) DoD Manual 5110.04, Volume 1, "Manual for Written Material: Correspondence Management," June 16, 2020  
(b) DoD Manual 5110.04, Volume 2, "Manual for Written Material: Examples and Reference Material," June 16, 2020

The purpose of this memo is to provide business rules for the preparation of Read Ahead (RAH) materials, Action Memos, and Info Memos in order to provide the Secretary of Defense (SD) and Deputy Secretary of Defense (DSD) with the information needed to prepare for events and support effective and efficient decisions on behalf of the Department of Defense.

Clear direction and effective control of the Defense enterprise calls for timely, accurate, and coordinated written materials. Accordingly, standardization and coordination principles will guide the Department in the preparation of these materials. The attached Read Ahead, Action Memo, and Info Memo templates will be formally updated on the Executive Services Division (ESD) website: <https://www.esd.whs.mil/CMD/Templates/> and in DoD Manual 5110.04, "Manual for Written Material": <https://www.esd.whs.mil/CMD/MFWM/>.

### Standardization of Templates

- The rationale for standardization of templates is professional appearance, ease of review by principals, and effective record keeping.
- The Executive Secretary (ExecSec) will enforce the attached standard templates for Read Aheads (TAB A), Action Memos (TAB B), and Info Memos (TAB C) going to the Secretary and the Deputy.
- For brevity, detailed explanations or reference items should be provided at tabs as attachments.
- All info and action memos intended for the Secretary must contain a "DepSecDef Action" coordination line in the upper right-hand corner of the first page of the memo. DSD will review all packages except when her/his chief of staff and/or senior military assistant (SMA) may approve the use of "copy provided."
- In general, DSD's office will receive electronic "copy provided" for SD RAHs for National Security Council (NSC), Principals Committee (PC), and meetings with foreign counterparts, with such RAHs delivered directly to SD without DSD action or review.



OSD009676-21/CMD012419-21

- Updates to products are preferred to late submission of Read Aheads and correspondence. Communicate uncertainty in Read Aheads and updates to submitted products using the following:
  - [Bracketed Information – communicates uncertainty; removing the brackets removes the uncertainty.]
  - **New information added to a product is bolded and underlined.**

### **Coordination of Action and Information Memos and Read Aheads**

- The rationale for coordination of action and info memos is to provide accurate and complete information on an issue from all relevant stakeholders for the Secretary or the Deputy to make decisions, provide guidance, or engage with other senior leaders.
- All OSD Components shall use CATMS for correspondence for the SD and DSD.
- The coordination sheet should be placed at the last Tab of a package and should contain the Name, rank, and organization of the individual and the date of their concurrence, concur with comment, or non-concurrence.
- The Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) is responsible for ensuring coordination from equity-holding components (Office of Coordinating Responsibility) (OCR), including OSD Components, the General Counsel, the Joint Staff, Service Secretaries, and the Military Departments.
- OSD Components shall coordinate with Joint Staff, the Service Secretaries, and the Military Departments when their equities are involved; the Joint Staff, the Service Secretaries, and the Military Departments shall likewise coordinate with OSD Components.
- If an OPR is uncertain whether a component has equity, they should ask the Component Chief of Staff, Special Assistant, Military Assistant, or other responsible official.
- For items going to the Secretary or the Deputy, coordination must be at the Principal Coordinator level (TAB D) of the OSD Components, Military Services, or Combatant Commands, unless otherwise directed. Joint Staff coordination must be at the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Director of Joint Staff, or Vice Director of the Joint Staff.
- OPRs and OCRs will make every effort to enable timely coordination. Offices failing to respond in a timely manner to requests for coordination will not delay delivery of a memo or package.
- OPRs should list the coordination of components that fail to meet coordination timelines as “no response” and notify those components of their “no response” listing.
- If a component “concur with comment” it is the OPR’s responsibility to incorporate the comments to the satisfaction of the component, in which case, the coordination can be

reflected as “concur.” If the comment cannot be adjudicated the OPR should provide an explanation (and notify the component).

- A “Non-Concur/Alternative View Points” section will be added to the end of each memo or Read Ahead if there are non-concurs or comments that are not fully accepted. This section will indicate the office that non-concurs, the substantive reasons for the non-concur, and proposed alternative courses of action or viewpoint.
  - Progress of packages to SD and DSD should not be delayed because of non-concurs. OPRs are not required to achieve consensus in order to advance materials to DSD and SD for information or action. They are accountable, however, for fair representation of divergent and/or alternate views.

### **Timeliness and Routing**

- Packages will arrive with sufficient time for the Deputy and the Secretary to review them and make a considered decision. Component heads will backwards plan to meet these requirements.
  - Read Aheads must arrive 48 hours prior to an event or the prep for that event.
  - Components must clearly articulate when a decision is needed by a date certain.
- There will be no “special routing” or exceptional processes for individual components or organizations, except in cases of classification requirements or as required by law. All info and action memos must be coordinated with equity-holding organizations, regardless of memo originator.
- The Correspondence Management Division (CMD) of Washington Headquarters Service will assign a suspense in accordance with Action Suspense Timeline Table established in the DoD Manual for Written Material (TAB E). If operational urgency requires, an exemption to the designated suspense timeline may be authorized by the ExecSec.
- CMD will have primary responsibility for ensuring that routing through the DSD and SD office is done properly, under the direction of the ExecSec.
- The ExecSec maintains a standardized Correspondence Routing Form that shall be used by SD and DSD front offices to ensure common review standards and transparency by the two offices.
- The ExecSec shall enforce “expedited” coordination procedures for items requiring coordination within 48 hours.
  - Components requesting expedited coordination must provide justification, through the ExecSec, to SD or DSD Chief of Staff or Deputy Chief of Staff for approval.
  - Once approval is received, the ExecSec will action the request and oversee the expedited timeline to ensure consistency in the coordination process.

## Conclusion

- The timelines on suspenses, rules of coordination, formatting, and standards for routing will be strictly enforced by the ExecSec and the immediate office of the SD and DSD.
- Any business rules listed in existing ExecSec guidance documents and not enumerated or adjusted above shall remain in force.
- These business rules shall be reviewed by the Chiefs of Staff and SMAs to SD and DSD with the ExecSec every six months; changes will be approved by the Chiefs of Staff.

Please reach out to the Office of the Executive Secretary with any questions about the business rules and templates via [ExecSecMA2@sd.mil](mailto:ExecSecMA2@sd.mil).



Kelly Bulliner Holly  
Executive Secretary

### Attachments:

- TAB A – Read Ahead Template
- TAB B – Action Memo Template
- TAB C – Info Memo Template
- TAB D – Principal Level Coordinator List
- TAB E – Action Suspense Types and Timelines

# Tab A

**CLASSIFICATION**

**READ-AHEAD FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
OR DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
PC, Bilat, Meeting on [Topic]  
Date, Time in Regular Time, Room Location via SVTC or Zoom**

**From:** Name, Title (for SD/DSD must be ASD or higher)

**Meeting Purpose:** Articulate reason(s) for and desired outcome(s) of the meeting; 2-3 lines maximum. In general, “discuss” is not a sufficient desired outcome. This section can be deleted for NSC-hosted meetings.

**Attendees:** List all attendees. Can be title only if well known (e.g., USDP, CJCS). If external agency or foreign counterpart list name and title, attach bios. This section can be deleted for NSC-hosted meetings.

**Background and Key Issues.**

- **Issue 1.** Format Matters - use simple, straightforward issue/topic titles. Consistency helps senior leaders process materials more efficiently because they know where to find information.
  - Sentences should be pithy and concise. Portion mark every bullet, insert two spaces after a portion marking.
  - All bullets should be 3 lines or less. Background and Key Issues may be a maximum of 4 pages; Talking Points may be a maximum of 2 pages.
    - Use Times New Roman, 12-pitch, two spaces after a period, and the oxford comma.
- **Issue 2.** Link issues to the purpose - what does the Principal need to know about what happened before this meeting and why we are having it now?
  - Each issue should be linked to the meeting purpose, desired outcomes, and grouped / sequenced in the anticipated order of discussion. For NSC meetings, use the agenda to organize.
  - Describe the issue, articulate the DoD position. Identify the key issues for THIS meeting.
    - Bureaucratic State of Play. Explain key stakeholders views, positions and where the issue is currently in the process. For example, provide a brief summary of previous Deputies Committee meetings/bilats /DMAG/DWCs etc and X, Y, and Z.
- ***If Raised Topic.*** “If Raised” issues should be grouped logically, preferably consolidated under the related topic or under one heading.

Classified By/Derived From:  
Reason(s):  
Declassify By:  
Prepared By: Name, Office  
Phone Number:

Controlled by:  
CUI Category(ies):  
Limited Dissemination Control:  
POC:

**CLASSIFICATION**

(Depending on classification, use the appropriate declassification instructions and/or CUI designation indicator)

**Non-Concurs/Alternate Viewpoints.** *(By exception)*

- If needed (and not already covered in the bureaucratic state of play), identify whether there is significant intra-DoD or interagency divergence, potential landmines, or alternate viewpoints. Provide counterpoints, if appropriate. If a stakeholder concurs with comment or has a different view explain concisely and provide a counterargument.
  - OPRs are not required to achieve consensus, but OPRs are accountable for fair representation of divergent views. Therefore, please make certain to fully coordinate with all relevant DoD stakeholders in advance of submission.

**Attachment(s)**

TAB A – Talking Points - always go at TAB A, no exceptions. All meetings require a run of show and talking points.

TAB B – Agenda or slides, if relevant.

TAB C – Additional Background as needed (e.g., DC SoC, white paper, etc)

TAB D – Coordination (GC coordination required)

**TALKING POINTS FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**  
**PC, Bilat, Meeting on [Topic]**  
**Date, Time in Regular Time, Room Location via SVTC or Zoom**

**Run of Show.**

- Title – Topic
- For example: SD – Opening comments
- CJCS – Operational overview
- USDP – Policy considerations
- *Note:* For NSC-led meetings, this section should be taken directly from the agenda and should include the Department/Agency expected to contribute on those topics. For example, “Intelligence Update – DNI”.

**Strategic Framing Points**

- Provide 3-5 talking points the Secretary or Deputy Secretary will use to begin his/her engagement, articulate the context for the meeting, and frame the discussion for the issues below.

**Key Issues.**

- **Issue 1.** Each talking point should be no more than three lines in length, and preferably are only two lines each.
  - Underline (but do not highlight) key phrases or parts of the talking points.
  - Talking points should be written in full sentences and be ready for the Principal to speak.
  - Use Times New Roman, 14-pitch, two spaces after a period.
- **Issue 2.** Do not reiterate content from the background section in the talking points.

# Tab B

## ACTION MEMO

FOR: SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

DepSecDef Action \_\_\_\_\_

FROM: Name, Title (Principal, Principal Deputy, or ASD if appropriate)

SUBJECT: How to Prepare an Action Memo for Signature or Decision

- **Purpose.** Use this format to request SecDef approval of a concept, or to sign a letter or memo. What are you asking the principal to do? This memo seeks your approval of a letter (TAB A) to Congressman X in response to his letter (TAB B) asking about Y.
- Explain why it is important and appropriate for the recipient to take this action. Products should be based on analysis, strategic thinking, and mastery of the details; but should not include details irrelevant to the decision you are asking the principal to make.
- **Background.** Provide an abbreviated history, various perspectives on the issue, who else cares and why, where is there alignment and disagreement.
- **Format Matters.** Sentences should be tight, short, and concise. Avoid passive voice.
  - Follow the DoD Manual for Written Material (<https://www.esd.whs.mil/CMD/MFWM/>).
  - Use Times New Roman, 12-pitch, two spaces after a period, and the oxford comma. Bullets should be 5 lines or less.
- (CUI) Portion mark every classified bullet, insert two spaces after a portion marking. Follow published guidance on use of CUI and other classifications.
- **Non-Concurs/Alternate Viewpoints.** If there are non-concurs or comments that are not fully accepted, use this section to indicate the office that non-concurs, the substantive reasons, and alternative viewpoint. OPRs are not required to achieve consensus, but OPRs are accountable for fair representation of divergent views.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Provide a clear, concise recommendation statement. For example, Secretary of Defense sign letter at TAB A or Secretary of Defense approve subject matter, e.g., course of action, release of funds, by initialing below.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

\*\* do not include approve/disapprove/other if TAB A is a signature item \*\*

Attachment(s):

TAB A – Signature Item (if applicable)

TAB B – Incoming Correspondence (if applicable)

TAB C – Supplemental Information (if needed)

TAB D – Coordination (always last tab; must include General Counsel; coordination at Principal or Principal Deputy level in OSD or Top 4 on Joint Staff)

Classified by/Derived From:

Reason(s):

Declassify by:

Prepared by: Name, Office

Phone Number:

Controlled by:

CUI Category(ies):

Limited Dissemination Control:

POC: (Name and phone number)

# Tab C

INFO MEMO

**FOR:** SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

DepSecDef Action \_\_\_\_\_

**FROM:** Name, Title (Principal, Principal Deputy, or ASD if appropriate)

**SUBJECT:** How to Prepare an Info Memo

- **Purpose.** Use this format to convey information to the SecDef, the DepSecDef, or the ExecSec on important developments not requiring action at the time (e.g., for background and issue papers).
- Explain why it is important and appropriate for the recipient to be informed.
- Sentences should be tight, short, and concise. Avoid passive voice.
  - Follow the DoD Manual for Written Material (<https://www.esd.whs.mil/CMD/MFWM/>).
    - o Use Times New Roman, 12-pitch, two spaces after a period, and the oxford comma. Bullets should be 5 lines or less.
- (CUI) Portion mark every classified bullet, insert two spaces after a portion marking. Follow published guidance on use of CUI and other classifications.

**Attachment(s):**

TAB A – Supplemental Information (if needed)

TAB B – Coordination (always last tab; must include General Counsel; coordination at Principal or Principal Deputy level in OSD or Top 4 on Joint Staff)

(If Classified)  
Classified by/Derived From:  
Reason(s):  
Declassify by:  
Prepared by: Name, Office  
Phone Number:

(If CUI)  
Controlled by:  
CUI Category(ies):  
Limited Dissemination Control:  
POC: (Name and phone number)

# Tab D

Please contact

[whs.pentagon.esd.mbx.cmd-correspondence@mail.mil](mailto:whs.pentagon.esd.mbx.cmd-correspondence@mail.mil) or

call 703-693-7965 for an updated Authorized Principal and Principal Deputy-Level Coordinators for Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense Packages.

# Tab E

**Table 1. Action Suspense Types and Timelines**

<b>Standard Action Types</b>	<b>Suspense (Business Days)</b>
Answer SecDef Note (ASN)	5
Answer DepSecDef Note (ADN)	5
Prepare Reply for ExecSec Signature (PRE)	10
Comments and Recommendations (C&R)	5
Prepare Reply for SecDef Signature (PRS)	10
Prepare Reply for DepSecDef Signature (PRD)	10
Reply Direct by the Component Head (RDC)	14
Reply Direct (RD)	14
For Appropriate Action (FAA)	-
Information and Retention (I&R)	-
<b>Situation or Category-Specific Action Types</b>	<b>Suspense (Business Days)</b>
President, Vice President, White House Chief of Staff	1 calendar day
Cabinet Heads, U.S. Governors, and Senior White House Staff	5
White House Referrals	6
Members of Congress	5
Ministers of Defense	5
White House Bulk RED-DOT Cases (RD)	5
Non-Congressional Correspondence (PRS or PRD)	10
Congressional Constituent Inquires Addressed to ASD/LA) (RD)	10
White House Bulk Cases (RD)	14
Invitations Tasked for C&R	14
Detail Requests from Outside DoD	30

### 3.3. ROUTING INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE.

a. To forward incoming SecDef, DepSecDef, and ExecSec correspondence to the OSD and DoD Components, CMD will use CATMS to:

- (1) Disseminate action and information copies to the appropriate offices.
- (2) Indicate what action the office of primary responsibility (OPR) will take and establish a suspense date for the action. See Table 1 for a complete list of directed actions and standard suspense times.
- (3) Identify required coordination.