PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to provide the guidelines and administrative procedures for the preparation of written communications within the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA).

DISTRIBUTION:

All DMVA Divisions

AUTHORITY:

This SOP is published under the authority of the DMVA Commissioner and is not mandated by State Statute.

DEFINITIONS:

Administrative Communication - Any official item sent between organizations or individuals relating exclusively to the business of DMVA.

Correspondence - A letter, memorandum, memorandum for record, report, meeting minutes, or staff study.

Attachment - Attachment, appendix, annex, and exhibit all mean additional or supplementary material and indicate relative position within a correspondence package.

POLICY:

The procedures outlined in the DMVA SOPs are compulsory instructions.

WRITER RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. All correspondence should be written using plain, clear, concise, direct, organized language and be prepared in the proper format. Plain language means using logical organization; common, everyday words (except for necessary technical terms); "you" and other pronouns; the active voice; and short sentences. Check **http://www.plainlanguage.gov**, for more plain language techniques.

a. Organize material to help the reader. Identify the audience for the document. Write to get their attention and answer their questions. Always start by putting the main message up front. Burying the main message makes it harder on the readers. Present information in the

succeeding paragraphs in a logical order.

b. Avoid words and phrases that the readers might not understand. Spell out each abbreviation or acronym the first time it's used and follow with the abbreviation in parenthesis. For example: Division of Administrative Services (DAS).

c. Avoid ambiguous phrasing, confusing legal terms, and technical jargon that can mislead your reader. Words should be used in a way that does not conflict with their ordinary or accepted usage.

d. Use "you" and other pronouns to speak directly to readers. Do not refer to people as if they were inanimate objects. Address the reader as "you." "You" reinforces the message that the document is intended for your reader. However, avoid using "you" if it makes your correspondence sound accusatory or insulting.

e. Use "we" in place of your organization name. The use of "we" puts the emphasis on the organization.

f. Active voice is the best way to identify who is responsible for what action. To effectively communicate, write the majority (around 75%) of your sentences in the active voice.

g. Numbers less than 10 are spelled out (Example "three"); numbers 10 and above are written as numbers (Example "14"). Avoid using numbers to begin a sentence whether spelled out of not.

2. Short sentences deliver a clear message. Your sentences should average 15 to 20 words (never make them longer than 40 words). Complex sentences loaded with dependent clauses and exceptions confuse the reader by losing the main point in a forest of words. Resist the temptation to put everything in one sentence. Cut out words that aren't really necessary.

3. Use conventional rules of English grammar. When dividing a word, separate between syllables. When quoting numbered paragraphs from another document, cite the source and paragraph numbers in your text.

4. Conserve paper. Consider if you can communicate using other means such as a telephone call or E-mail.

5. Satisfy the minimum distribution requirements only and select the most cost efficient distribution method (Internal Distribution, United States Postal Service (USPS), Private Courier (FEDEX, UPS) that will meet your requirements.

6. Unless critical, do not ask for negative replies or acknowledge receipt of negative replies.

7. When transmitting sensitive or confidential information, apply safeguards that ensure the information is properly protected.

8. Establish a suspense only when you need a reply by a specific date. Notify the action agency of the suspense date as early as possible.

9. Apply record keeping requirements listed in the *State of Alaska General Administrative Records Retention Schedule*.

PROCEDURES:

1. **Formats:** Correspondence destined for other State of Alaska Department's and Agencies, or DMVA Divisions, should normally be prepared as a memorandum using the format found at Attachment 1 to this SOP.

2. **Use of State Letterhead:** State of Alaska letterhead should only be used for correspondence that is destined for agencies or individuals outside of State government. The formats for official letters are located at Attachment 2 to this SOP.

4. **Coordination:** Correspondence should be coordinated with all parties that have a functional interest in the subject of the correspondence. Coordination should be done during the draft stage to keep from revising the final version. When possible, coordination should be done by telephone or E-mail when possible. You may coordinate using DMVA Form 1, Staff Summary Sheet (See Attachment 3) or on the first page of the correspondence.

5. **Correction of Errors:** Correct all typographical errors (spelling or grammar) on all correspondence, but do not redo routine correspondence to correct minor errors, that do not change the writer's intent. Correct these errors neatly and legibly in ink. Redo correspondence only when the correction is important enough to justify the time, purpose, and expense.

6. **Fonts:** Use 10 to 12 point fonts for text.

7. **Margins:** Use 1-inch margins on the left, right, and bottom for most memorandums. For shorter communications, you may adjust the margins. Use these guidelines:

When text is:	Use:
20 lines or more	1 inch margins
10-19 lines	1 to 1 1/2 inch margins
1-9 lines	1 1/2 to 2 inch margins

8. **Spacing:** On a memo the first line of the text begins two line spaces below the last line of the SUBJECT element (and the References element, if used). Single-space the text, but double-space between paragraphs and subparagraphs. For spacing requirements on State letterhead see Attachment 2.

9. **Paragraph Numbering and Spacing**: Number and letter each paragraph and subparagraph. A single paragraph is not numbered. Indent subparagraphs 0.5 inches or five spaces and number or letter them in sequence. Use the following format to subparagraph short sentences or phrases of a half line or less:

Example: [This format has several advantages: (a) It's compact; (b) it highlights ideas; and (c) it saves space.]

10. **Suspense Dates:** If you include a suspense date in the text of the memorandum or letter, emphasize it by placing it in a separate paragraph.

11. **Point of Contact Information:** The point of contact's name, telephone number, and E-mail address should be placed in the text of the correspondence, normally in the last paragraph.

12. **Page Numbering:** The first page of a memorandum or letter is never numbered. You may omit page numbers on a one or two-page memorandum or letter; however, correspondence longer than two pages must have page numbers.

13. **Signature Element:**

a. All correspondence that directly or indirectly states or represents the Commissioner's position or states a departmental policy will be prepared for the signature of the Commissioner. Staff members may sign documents that direct action or announce policy within their areas of responsibility.

b. The signature element should be placed five lines below the last line of text. If dual signatures are required (as would be the case on a Memorandum of Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding), type the DMVA official's signature block at the left margin and the other signatory's signature block 4.5 inches from the left edge of the page or three spaces to the right of page center. Do not place the signature element on a continuation page by itself. See Attachment 2 for the spacing when using a closing such as "Sincerely."

(1) First Line. Type the name in uppercase the way the person signs it. Include grade and service if military. Avoid using legal, educational, or ecclesiastical degrees or titles.

(2) Second Line. Type the duty title. Use the term "Acting" before the duty title of a staff position if the incumbent is absent or the position is vacant. Do not sign "for" or "in the absence of." Do not use the term "Acting" for any command capacity or where prohibited by law or statute

(3) Third Line. Type the name of the office or organization level if not printed on the letterhead or included in the heading. Limit the signature element to three lines if possible.

Examples:

JOHN A. DOE
Commissioner

JOHN A. DOE, Major General
Adjutant General

JOHN A. DOE
Director, Division of Administrative Services

14. **Attachments:**

a. Type "Attachment:" or "Attachments:" at the left margin, three line spaces below the signature element. Do not number a single attachment; when there are two or more attachments, list each by number and in the order mentioned in the memorandum. Describe each attachment briefly, but do not use general terms or abbreviations such as "as stated," "as described above," or "a/s." Cite the office of origin, the type of communication, the date, and the number of copies (in parentheses) if more than one. Include the subject of the attachment if the receiver will not get copies of attachments or if subject is not already referenced in text.

Example:

Attachments:
1. DMVA/DAS Memo, May 2, 1998 (2)
2. DOA/Div of Personnel Email, May 28, 1998

b. The first addition to a piece of correspondence is an attachment; an addition to an attachment is an appendix; an addition to an appendix is an annex; and so on. Indicate on the attachment, appendix, or annex if there are appendices, annexes, or exhibits to it. Type or write attachment markings in the same position as on the basic correspondence. If possible, use pencil to allow future renumbering and reuse with other documents. Mark attachments as follows:

(1) Mark each attachment in the lower right corner as Atch 1, Atch 2, Atch 3, etc.

(2) Mark additions to an attachment as Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C, etc.

(3) Mark additions to appendices as Annex 1, Annex 2, Annex 3, etc.

(4) Mark additions to an annex as Exhibit A, Exhibit B, Exhibit C, etc.

(5) For multiple page attachments, number the pages of each attachment in a separate sequence. For example Atch 1 (1 of 3), Atch 1 (2 of 3), Atch 1 (3 of 3), etc.

(6) When sending more than one copy of an attachment, place the copy number (typed or handwritten) to the right and slightly above the attachment number to indicate the copy is the first, second, third, etc.

15. **Courtesy Copies:**

a. When sending courtesy copies to activities other than to addressee, type "cc:" flush with the left margin, two line spaces below the attachment element. If the attachment element is not used, begin typing three line spaces below the signature element. List names or organization abbreviation and office symbol of offices to receive copies. If a courtesy copy is sent without including the attachments, type “wo Atch” after the office. Circle, underline, or highlight the office to indicate the recipient.

Example:

cc:
AKSDF Commander w/o Atch
HQ AKANG Atch 2 only

b. If courtesy copies of a memorandum are not signed, write or stamp "signed" with black or dark blue ink above the signature block.

16. **Arranging Correspondence.** See Attachment 1.1. for the order to arrange correspondence for signature. When using tabs, position the first tab at the lower right corner. Position the next tab slightly higher (see Attachment 1.2.). Staple a memorandum of more than one page, or with attachments, in the upper left corner. If possible, arrange pages so that the

reader can read information without removing the staples or paper clips; for example, turn landscape pages with top to the left. If required, prepare envelopes or facsimile cover sheets, and place them at the left side behind the copies for dispatch. Use a paper clip to hold the packet together before dispatch.

17. **Other Information:**

a. Type or print only on one side of the paper using black or blue-black ink.

b. Avoid dividing a paragraph of less than four lines between two pages.

18. **OTHER TYPES OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS**

a. **Personalized Letter.** Use a personalized letter when your communication needs a personal touch or when warmth or sincerity is essential. You may use it to write to an individual on a private matter for praise, condolence, sponsorship, etc. Keep it brief, preferably no longer than one page. Always use authorized USPS abbreviations (see USPS Publication 28, Postal Addressing Standards) for addresses. Avoid using acronyms. See Attachment 4 for an example of a personalized letter.

b. **"IN TURN" Memorandum.** Use an "IN TURN" memorandum to distribute the official memorandum to several individuals or offices in sequence.

(1) Originators. Prepare an "IN TURN" memorandum when the final addressee or office of primary responsibility (OPR) must see the coordination or action of all addressees. Use the official memorandum format. Type “IN TURN” in uppercase, one line below the last address of the MEMORANDUM FOR element. Align with addresses.

EXAMPLE:

HQ AKARNG (BG Smith)
HQ AKANG (Brig Gen Brown)
Director, DMVA/DAS
IN TURN

Note: For Army Ranks use all caps (BG)
For Air use upper and lower case

(2) Recipients. When you receive an "IN TURN" memorandum, strike through your organization abbreviation and office symbol, sign or initial, and date. Write "Concur,” “Non-concur," "Comments attached," or "Comments sent by separate correspondence to" next to the date. Send the "IN TURN" memorandum to the next address.

c. **Memorandum for Record (MR).** Use the MR to document a discussion or an oral agreement. Prepare a MR using the official memorandum format.

d. **Meeting Minutes.** Prepare meeting minutes using the official memorandum format. Minutes are a clear summary of participants' comments. They document planned or completed action. Date the minutes the day they are distributed. To save space, use two columns to list names of members present. Place information regarding a future meeting in the last paragraph. When a person signs a paper as a member of a board or committee, the signature element indicates that person's status on that board or committee, not any other position the person may hold. Type "Approved as written" two line spaces below the recorder's signature block, followed by the approving authority's signature block.

e. **Staff Study Report.** This is a problem-solution report.

f. **Talking, Bullet Background, and Position Papers.**

(a) Talking papers (also called point papers) are concise, factual, written outlines for oral presentations, memory ticklers, or quick reference outlines. They use fragments to present key points, positions, and facts in a brief, orderly fashion when the user has knowledge of the subject.

(b) Background papers are multipurpose written briefs used to provide information, forward items of interest, or to summarize current or potential problems. They include an introductory paragraph, a basic discussion, and a conclusion.

(c) Position papers are used to advocate or to convince the reader on an argument or position.

g. **DMVA Form 1, Transmittal/Coordination/Summary Sheet**. (See Attachment 3)

(1) Use the staff summary sheet (SSS) to summarize staff work, to request action, or to forward information. Since it often contains several handwritten notes before reaching the approval authority, SSSs do not require the same level of perfection (error-free typing, etc.) as the correspondence they may cover. Correct errors neatly and legibly in ink if the content and meaning are still legible and clear. Generally, limit the SSS to one page. Use plain bond paper if an additional page is required. If more than 10 offices coordinate on the original SSS, use a blank DMVA Form 1, and renumber the TO block, starting with 11. Complete the form through the SUBJECT and attach it behind the original SSS.

(2) Coordination on Staff Summary Sheet is as follows:

(a) When you agree with the proposed action, initial or sign your surname, rank or grade, and date on the bottom line if you are the addressee; sign on the top line, or line associated with your name, if you are not the addressee.

(b) When you do not agree with the proposed action, write a memorandum to the action office stating your reason and write in ink "See Memorandum" in the signature column of the SSS after your office symbol. Attach your memorandum to the SSS and return it to the action office.

(c) When you receive a non-concurrence on a SSS, try to resolve all differences. If you cannot resolve the differences, the action officer writes a rebuttal memorandum to the approval authority which states differences discussed with the nonconcurring official and gives your reason why you cannot change the proposed action. Attach the rebuttal memorandum and the non-concurrence memorandum as the last tab to the original SSS, and annotate in pen the additional tab under the list of tabs. Send the SSS to the next addressee shown on the form.

1. If you resolve differences and no changes are made to the SSS or to any attachments, the previously nonconcurring official shows concurrence by marking through the statement "See Memorandum" and signing surname, rank or grade, and date. The action officer annotates "Differences resolved and no changes needed" on the non-concurrence memorandum, initials the statement, and attaches this memorandum to the record or

coordination copy. Route the SSS to the next addressee shown on the form.

2. If you resolve your differences and changes are made to the SSS or to any attachments, the action officer prepares a new SSS and coordinates it as a new package with all offices.

(3) A SSS will be used to transmit **all** correspondence (regardless of type) that is sent to the Commissioners Office for information, approval, or signature.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Sample Memorandum
2. Sample Formats Official Letters
3. Transmittal, Coordination and Staff Summary Sheet (SSS)

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 1

MEMORANDUM

STATE OF ALASKA

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
Division of Administrative Services

TO: All DMVA Employees

DATE: July 14, 2006

FROM: Rich Writer
Director

SUBJECT: Sample Memorandum

SUBJECT Element.

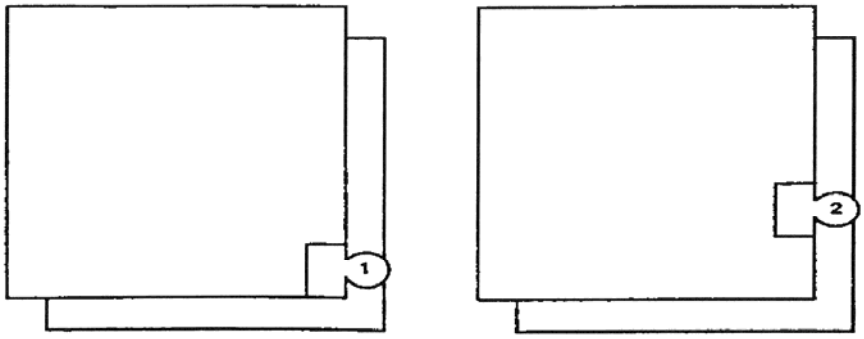
a. After the SUBJECT element, type two spaces followed by the subject title; capitalize the first letter of each word except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Be brief and clear. If you need a second line, align it under the first word of the title.

b. Cite a single reference to a communication or a directive in parentheses immediately after the subject title.

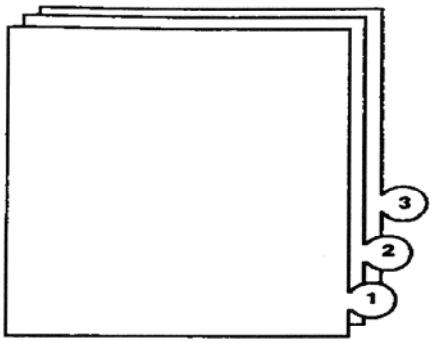
Examples:

SUBJECT: Work Center Standards (Our Memo, June 20, 2006)
SUBJECT: Letterhead Stationery (SUSPENSE: 3 July 1999)
SUBJECT: Appointment of Fire Wardens (S/S Our Memo, 23 Jun 94)

c. Attach a copy of the reference, or instructions to obtain it, if the reader does not have it.



a. Where to Place Individual Tabs



b. Appearance of 3 Assembled Attachments with Tabs

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 2 Format for Letters for DMVA Staff Signature

STATE OF ALASKA

John Incumbant
Governor

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS
Division of Administrative Services

POB 5800
Bldg 49000
Ft Richardson, AK 99505-5800

Mr. Walter Jones
2560 Monte Vista Place
Anchorage, AK 99501

July 17, 2006

Dear Mr. Jones,

Avoid using organizational abbreviations and office symbols in letters addressed to individuals outside the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. These acronyms rarely have any meaning outside the Government and should be spelled out.

Type the "To" address 4 line spaces below the header on State Letterhead. Type the salutation two lines below the "To" address; the greeting is normally "Dear,"

Begin typing the body of the letter 2 line spaces below the salutation. Do not number the paragraphs. Indent all major paragraphs five spaces or 0.5 inches; indent subparagraphs an additional five spaces. Double space between paragraphs.

The complimentary close is normally "Sincerely." Type the complimentary closing 2 line spaces below the text, at the left margin. Place courtesy copy distribution at the left margin 2 line spaces below the attachments. If there are no attachments, type the courtesy copy distribution 3 line spaces below the signature element.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Director

cc:

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 2.1 Format for Letters For the Governor's/Commissioner's Signature

Date (Centered)

Mr. John and Ms. Jane Alaskan
P.O. Box 020000
Juneau, AK 99802-0000

Dear Mr. John and Ms. Jane Alaska: (colon if using last name) or Dear John and Jane, (Comma if using first name)

Letters from the Office of the Governor or Commissioner are modified block style, left justification and 12 point Bookman Old Style font. The date is centered on the page and the closing lines begin at 4 inches; the date is 2 inches from the top. Paragraphs are indented 5 spaces.

Generally these letters are no more than one page with margins set at 1 inch. Short letters might use more lines between the date and inside address and/or 1.5 inch margins. Standard size or longer letters may need to us .75 inch margins to keep the letter at one page. There is one line space between the inside address, the salutation, the body of the letter, the closing, and the carbon copy statements or enclosure. There are four line spaces between the closing and the Governor's/Commissioner's name. Whatever the length of the document, it should be centered on the page. There are two spaces between sentences in the body of the letter.

Letters requiring more than one page need at least one full sentence at the top of the second page (See Page 2 for format). Paragraphs split between pages need at least two lines on each page.

Use the Gregg Reference Manual Eighth Edition as a guide for proper grammar. Information regarding punctuation, use of titles, sentence structure, letter set, and many other topics are covered in this handbook.

The information below the cc line including the bcc information, signer/signature authority/author(s)/typist initials, coding and comments are typed only ion the file copy not on the letterhead. Letters drafted by a department/agency will include the initials of the department/agency drafting the letter.

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 2.1 Continued (Page 2 Format)

Letters prepared for the Governor's/Commissioner's signature are proofread by their staff's before being sent to the Governor or Commissioner for signature.

Sincerely yours,

S/S GOVERNOR'S STAMP ON COPIES

JOHN H. DOE
Governor (or Commissioner)

Enclosure

cc: Timothy Brown, Commissioner, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

FILE COPY ONLY HAS THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

bcc: Staff Agency personnel

FHM/BH/DMVA/MM/sf
Appropriate Subject CODE
COMMENTS/Short description

FILE NAME of document
tracking #

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 3

TRANSMITTAL/COORDINATION/SUMMARY SHEET

TO:		ACTION:	SIGNATURE/DATE IN & OUT:
1	John Doe Director HLS&EM	Coord	
2	Mary Green Special Assistant to the Commissioner	Review	
3	Susan Brown Special Assistant to the Commissioner	Review	
4	Roger Wilco Deputy Commissioner	Coord	
5	Tom Jones Commissioner	Appr/Sig	
6			
7			
8			

NAME/TITLE OF ORIGINATOR:	DIVISION:	PHONE:
Jim Smith/Director	Admin Services	428-XXXX
SUBJECT: Preparation of the Staff Summary Sheet	DATE:	FILE NAME:

1. The SSS introduces, summarizes, coordinates, or obtains approval of signature on a staff package. It should be a concise (preferably one page) summary of the package. It states the purpose, pertinent background information, rationale, and discussion necessary to justify the action desired.

2. The SSS is attached to the front of the correspondence package. If an additional page is necessary, prepare it on plain bond paper. Use the same documents attached or any tabs that are not self-explanatory. If they are self-explanatory, say so. Attach a copy (or extract of appropriate portion) of any document you reference.

3. List attachments to the SSS as Tabs. List the document for action as Tab 1. List incoming letter, directive, or other paper, if any, that prompted the preparation of the SSS as Tab 2. If you have more than one document for action, list and tab them with as many numbers as you need and then list the material to which you are responding as the next number. For example: Tabs 1 and 2 for signature; tab 3 incoming document). List supplemental documents as additional tabs, followed by the record/coordination copy and the information copies. If non-concurrence is involved, list it and the letter of rebuttal as the last tab.

4. VIEW OF OTHERS. Explain concerns of others external to the staff (i.e. other State Departments or Agencies). For example: "DNR may disapprove of this approach."

5. OPTIONS. If there are significant alternative solutions, explain the options. For example: "Buying off-the-shelf hardware will reduce costs 25%, but will meet only 80% of our requirements."

6. RECOMMENDATION. Use this caption when the SSS is routed for action (approval or signature). State the recommendation, include action necessary to implement it in such a way that the official need only coordinate, approve, or disapprove the recommended action. For example: "Recommend Commissioner sign proposed letter." Do not recommend alternatives. Do not use this caption if the SSS is being provided for information only.

DMVA Form 1

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 3.1

NOTES: DMVA Form 1, Staff Summary Sheet and Instructions:

1. List offices or individuals in the order that they should coordinate, approve or sign.

2. Show the action desired in this column (Coord [Coordination], Appr [Approval], Sig [Signature]).
Use Info (Information), when the SSS is submitted for information only.
(***NOTE:*** Usually show only one Appr entry and one Sig entry.)

3. Show coordination or approval with signature or initials and date in the signature column.

4. Enter originator's name and position title.

5. Enter originator's office symbol.

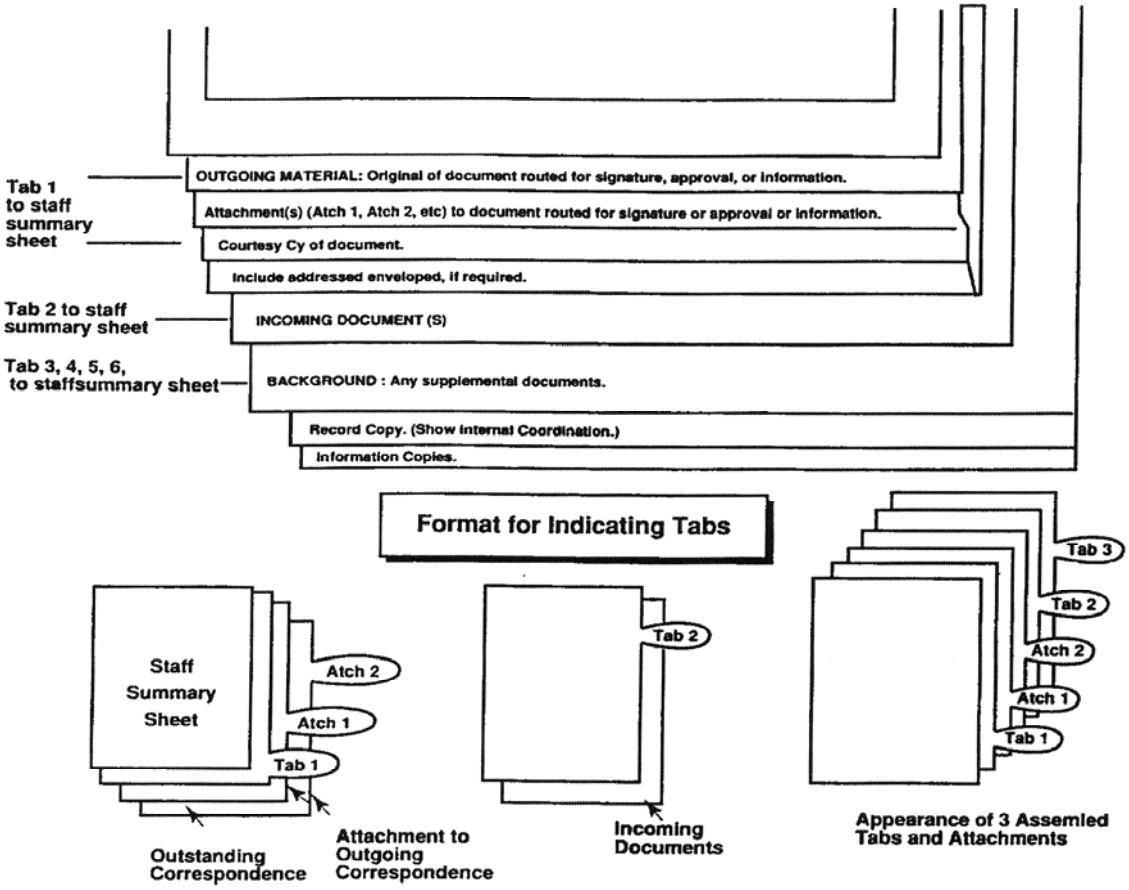
6. Enter the originator's telephone number

7. Enter the initials of the typist.

8. Enter the suspense date, if any.

9. Enter subject; use the same subject as for the attached correspondence.

10. Date at time of dispatch from the originator's office.

11. Number, letter, and space paragraphs the same as on other correspondence.

DMVA SOP 22 Attachment 3.2