

NEW STAFF ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

Guidelines for Writing Official Documents

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Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages | The Secretariat

AY115 New-Staff Orientation | Aug 27, 2026

01

Fundamentals of Official Document Writing

Format, register, and the sign-off workflow

What is a "Gongwen" (official document)?

公文 (gōngwén) — the formal written instrument of a public agency

- A gongwen is **official business correspondence** — a formal document used inside a government agency, so it follows a fixed format and register.
- Tone must be **assertive**, wording **firm**, and language **mutually respectful**.
- Avoid obscure or overly literary language, threatening or emotional wording, meaningless filler, ambiguous phrasing, or internet slang.

Example to avoid

A phrase such as "any recurrence will be dealt with severely" is **intimidating language** and is never appropriate in an official document.

Categories of Official Documents

Excerpted from the Executive Yuan's Document Handling Manual

- **Order (令)**: promulgating laws, issuing regulations, interpretive rulings, or discretionary-standard administrative rules, and personnel orders.
- **Petition (呈)**: for petitions or reports submitted to the President.
- **Communiqué (咨)**: for correspondence between the President and the Legislative Yuan.
- **Letter (函)**: (1) superior to subordinate agency, (2) subordinate to superior agency, (3) between peer/unaffiliated agencies, (4) between the public and an agency.
- **Public Notice (公告)**: used by an agency to announce matters within its authority to the public or a specific audience.
- **Other documents**: any instrument needed to conduct business — memo-letters (書函), meeting notices, phone-call records, directives, staff memos (簽), reports, notes, appointment letters, certificates, licenses, contracts, proposals, minutes, etc.

Letter (函) vs. Staff Memo (簽): what's the difference?

函 (Letter) — External

- The agency's formal statement to an **outside** party.
- Becomes an official document once the head of the agency approves it and it is issued from the final draft.
- **Two parts:** Subject (主旨) and Explanation (說明).

簽 (Staff Memo) — Internal

- An **internal** staff opinion on how to handle a case.
- Gives a superior the background needed to make a decision.
- **Three parts:** Subject, Explanation, and Recommendation (擬辦).

Drafting a Letter: Forms of Address

Direction of correspondence: upward · lateral · downward

Relationship	Superior→Subordinate	Subordinate→Superior	Self-reference
Within the same hierarchy	貴 guì ("your esteemed...")	鈞 jūn ("your honored...")	本 běn ("this/our...")
Outside the hierarchy (no reporting line)	貴 guì ("your esteemed...")	大 dà ("your distinguished...")	本 běn ("this/our...")

These honorifics have no direct English equivalent and are unique to Chinese-language official correspondence. Example: Wenzao writing to the Ministry of Education (within its hierarchy) refers to itself as "本校" (this University) and to the Ministry as "鈞部"; writing to the Ministry of Justice (outside its hierarchy) it still says "本校" but calls it "大部." "本" is always the agency's/head's self-reference, e.g. "本校" (this University).

Drafting a Letter: Closing Request Phrases

Commonly used at the end of the Subject line of a letter (函) or a staff memo (簽)

Addressee	Common closing phrases (Chinese, with sense)
Superior agency	請鑒核 (kindly review & approve), 請鑒察 (kindly note), 請核示 (kindly instruct), 請核轉 (kindly approve & forward), 請備查 (for your records), 請釋示 (kindly clarify), 復請鑒核 (in reply, kindly approve), 請查核 (kindly verify)
Peer agency	請查照 (for your information), 請查照辦理 (please handle accordingly), 請查照轉告 (please inform accordingly), 請同意見復 (please reply with consent), 請查核辦理, 請查照見復, 請查明見復, 請惠允見復
Subordinate agency	希查照 (please note), 希查照轉告, 希辦理 (please handle), 希照辦 (please comply), 希辦理見復, 希轉行照辦, 希依規定辦理, 希切實照辦

Common Miswritten Characters in Official Documents

- 檢陳 (jiǎnchén), 謹陳 (jǐnchén), 陳請 (chénqǐng): used when submitting materials or reports to a superior agency. The correct character is 陳 (chén) — not 檢呈, 謹呈, or 呈請. (呈 chéng is reserved only for petitions or reports submitted to the President.)
- 函復 (hánfù), 回復 (huífù), 惠復 (huìfù): the correct character is 復 (fù) — not 函覆, 回覆, or 惠覆.

Source

Compiled per Ministry of Education guidance, to keep official-document usage correct and consistent across agencies. For other writing questions, contact the Office of the Secretary-General.

Basic Structure of a Letter (函)

- **Single-part form:** for simple matters, written with only a Subject (主旨) paragraph.
- **Two-part form:** for more complex matters, written with a Subject and an Explanation (說明) paragraph.

Writing the "Subject" (主旨) Paragraph

- The Subject line is the **essence of the whole document** — keep it concise, state the purpose and expected action (or the substance of the reply) directly.
- ① If there is a deadline, state it explicitly in the Subject line.
- ② When replying, never use the original document's issue date and reference number as the Subject — put those in the Explanation paragraph instead.

Example

[Example 1: incoming letter from the Ministry of Education]

Subject: To assess student housing conditions, your University is requested to complete the "AY114 Dormitory Survey" and submit it by Sept 22, 2025 (Monday) — no cover letter required. Please comply.

[Example 2: an incorrect way to reply]

Subject: In reply to your (the Ministry's) letter no. XXXX dated [date]. For your information.

Addressing Different Primary Recipients

When an agency's full name is long, the Subject line may use the relationship term ("鈞部"/"大部") instead, to keep it concise.

Example A · Ministry of Education

[Recipient: Ministry of Education
(within hierarchy)]

Subject: Submitting this University's
outcome report to your Ministry
(鈞部). Kindly review and approve.

Explanation: Per your Ministry's
(鈞部) letter no. XXX dated [date].

Example B · Ministry of Labor

[Recipient: Ministry of Labor
(outside hierarchy)]

Subject: Submitting the closing
documentation for the study
commissioned by your Ministry
(大部). For your information.

Explanation: Per your Ministry's
(大部) letter no. XXX dated [date].

Basic Structure of a Staff Memo (簽)

- **Subject (主旨):** the essence of the memo — state "what" and "how to handle it" concisely so the reader grasps it at a glance. (One paragraph, no sub-items, 60 Chinese characters or fewer.)
- **Explanation (說明):** used when the background facts or rationale need more detail than the Subject line allows — i.e. "explain why" and "spell out how." (No sub-items: follows the heading directly. With sub-items: start a new indented line.)
- **Recommendation (擬辦):** (how to proceed) — used for more complex cases where the concrete request cannot fit in the Subject line; state the specific request or course of action here.

Explanation Paragraph: Never Include a Recommendation

The Explanation paragraph states facts and rationale only — **it must never carry a recommendation**. This is one of the most common mistakes new staff make.

Incorrect example

Subject: To improve official-doc writing, a workshop will be held [date] (day), 9:00-12:00. Kindly instruct.

Explanation:

1. Supervisors report new staff are often unfamiliar with writing conventions; workshop recommended.
2. Workshop fully planned; recommend the Secretary-General give opening remarks.

↑ A RECOMMENDATION -- does not belong in Explanation!

Corrected

Subject: To improve official-doc writing, a workshop will be held [date] (day), 9:00-12:00. Kindly instruct.

Explanation:

1. Supervisors report new staff are often unfamiliar with writing conventions; workshop recommended.
2. Workshop fully planned; project plan attached.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Secretary-General give opening remarks.

↑ Moved to Recommendation -- each section now clear.

Numeral Conventions

See the Secretary-General's Office webpage, "Rules for Writing Numerals in Horizontal Official Documents"

Rule	Applies to	Examples
Use Chinese numerals	Descriptive expressions	一律 (uniformly), 前一年 (the prior year), 核四廠 (Plant No. 4)
Use Chinese numerals	Proper nouns	place names, book titles, personal names, titles
Use Chinese numerals	Set idioms	週一 (Monday), 十分之一 (one-tenth), 七千餘人 (over 7,000 people)
Use Arabic numerals	Codes	ISBN 988-133-005-1
Use Arabic numerals	National ID numbers	M234567890
Use Arabic numerals	Item numbers	Appendix (Item) 1
Use Arabic numerals	Reference numbers	Tai-79-Nei-Zi No. 095512
Use Arabic numerals	Ordinal counts	4th term, 6th session; 2nd instance; 3rd place

Numeral Examples

Dates / Times

- ROC 114/7/8 (i.e. 2025-07-08)
- the year 114; the 21st century; year 2000
- 7:50 am; the 5/20 inauguration
- the 9/21 earthquake; the 9/11 attacks
- the 2/28 Incident; 3/8 Women's Day
- postponed by 3 weeks

Phone / Address

- Phone / fax:
 - (05) 1234-5678
- Postal code / street address:
 - 10041 Zhongzheng Dist., Taipei City
 - Sec. 1, Zhongxiao W. Rd., No. 70

Measures & Statistics

- 150 cm, 35 kg, 30 degrees
- NT\$20,000; NT\$0.50; 35 m³
- 7.36 hectares; 1.5 land parcels
- Percentages: 80%, 3.59%
- Amount: NT\$634,942,789
- Count: 639,442,789 people

Enclosure Phrases and Self-reference

- **Enclosure phrases** (used when the document has attachments):
 - To a superior agency within your hierarchy (e.g. the Ministry of Education): 檢陳 jiǎnchén (in the Subject line), 附陳 fùchén (in the Explanation paragraph)
 - To a peer/subordinate agency (e.g. another school, a company): 檢送 jiǎnsòng (in the Subject line), 檢附 jiǎnfù (in the Explanation paragraph)
- **Self-reference:** in a draft letter, always refer to your own unit as "本校XX系" ("this University's Department of XX") — never "Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages' Department of XX" or just "Department of XX."

Incorrect example

Subject: Submitting... from **Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages'** Department of XX... (should read "this University's (本校) Department of XX")

Rules for Primary and CC Recipients

- ① Always write the **full legal name** — never an abbreviation or vague phrasing like "attendees as listed."
- ② Order: superior units, then subordinate units; outside parties before internal ones; the lead unit goes last.
- ③ Primary recipients: internal units go last, prefixed "this University's (本校)...". CC recipients: only the first internal unit gets that prefix.
- ④ A CC recipient who also needs the attachment is marked "(with enclosure)" after its name.

Example

Wrong: "Taipei Datong High" / "individuals as listed"

Right: "Taipei Municipal Datong Senior High School" / "Wang Xiaoming, Lin Datong"

Primary: Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Assoc.

CC: Ministry of Education, this University's Office
of the Secretary-General, Academic Affairs (encl.)

Paragraph Formatting: Keep Indentation Levels Aligned

The sequence "1 -> (1) -> a. -> (a)" must step in one level at a time, with consistent indentation throughout, so the document is easy to read and review.

Incorrect

Subject: This University is handling 00000000
000000000000. Kindly instruct.

Explanation:

1. Per the Ministry of Education's 00000000
(1) Per the above, 000000000000
(2) Please assign staff 000000000000000000
a. Workshop 000000000000000000000000000000
000000000000
b. Related info 000000000000000000000000
(a) Date: 000000000000000000000000
(b) Venue: 0000000000000000
2. Ministry of Education's TVE Dept. 0000000000
Recommendation:

↑ Levels are not stepped in – hard to see the hierarchy of sub-points

Correct

Subject: This University is handling 00000000
000000000000. Kindly instruct.

Explanation:

1. Per the Ministry of Education's 00000000
(1) Per the above, 000000000000
(2) Please assign staff 000000000000000000
a. Workshop 000000000000000000000000000000
000000000000
b. Related info 000000000000000000000000
(a) Date: 000000000000000000000000
(b) Venue: 0000000000000000
2. Ministry of Education's TVE Dept. 0000000000
Recommendation:

↑ Each level steps in consistently – the hierarchy is clear at a glance

When to Use a Staff Memo vs. a Direct Draft

- **(1) Memo first, draft later:** for novel, complex, or high-stakes cases that need detailed justification, or where a letter is only needed after approval is obtained.
- **(2) Memo and draft together:** when the draft itself needs extra explanation, or past handling needs discussion (or there is no time to seek instructions first) — attach the draft letter behind the memo.
- **(3) Draft stands in for a memo:** for routine, simple, or purely pass-through cases.

Preparing a Memo or Draft

- When a document comes in, first assess how to handle it:
 - If it's "draft stands in for memo," create a new **draft letter** directly.
 - If it's "memo first, draft later," first create a **memo** or **routing sheet**, then create the **draft letter** to issue.
 - If it's "memo and draft together," create the **memo/routing sheet** and the **draft letter** at the same time.

Reminder

When routing an incoming document, note the intended handling method in the blank space at the top of page 1 — e.g. "handle per memo," "handle per routing sheet," "handle per draft letter," or other notes — and stamp/initial it.

Routing-Sheet Sign-off and Co-review Rules

Requirement	Detail
Subject line	When using a routing sheet, the Subject paragraph is required and the closing request phrase (期望語) may never be omitted.
Co-review order	List reviewers uniformly as: handling unit -> co-review units -> approving unit, top to bottom.
Stamp placement	Name the handling, co-review, and approving units explicitly so signatures/stamps land in the right place.

Layout convention: Handling unit's supervisor stamps first -> Co-review units (e.g. Personnel, Accounting, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, General Affairs, R&D) stamp left to right -> Approving supervisor / "approved" stamps last. See the routing-sheet template on the Secretary-General's Office webpage for the full example, including second-level co-review and acting-head approval.

Protecting Personal Data in Memo/Draft Examples

- The co-review and stamping process for a memo or routing sheet often involves personal data belonging to the handler and approving supervisors — **names, titles, and contact information**.
- Non-essential personal data (such as **national ID numbers, private phone numbers, or home addresses**) should never appear in a memo. If another person's information must be cited to support a case, it should be **appropriately masked** (redacted, left blank, or replaced with a placeholder).
- When retaining or circulating sign-off records, staff must still comply with the Personal Data Protection Act and the University's related regulations, and avoid exposing non-essential personal data to unrelated parties.

Reminder

If a paper attachment to an official document contains personal data — such as a trainee roster or a list of students receiving scholarships/grants — be sure any necessary personal-data masking has been completed, or seal it in an envelope, before retaining or circulating it.

The Four Qualities of Good Official Writing

- **Concise (簡)** — say it in fewer words without losing meaning: use as few words as needed for the reader to fully understand.
- **Plain (淺)** — avoid obscure characters, esoteric allusions, or archaic references: don't use strange or overly erudite language.
- **Clear (明)** — make the Subject unambiguous, so the point is obvious at a glance: avoid vague phrasing.
- **Accurate (確)** — dates and figures must be precise and true: correct, clear, concise, prompt, consistent, and complete.

In short

Use the **fewest, clearest, most accurate, and most complete** information so the reader fully understands.

Before You Start Drafting, Confirm That You Have...

Area	What it means	Best practice
Grasped the case	Understand the full background of the case, weighing the 5 W's: who, what, when, where, and the matter itself.	Ideally the Subject line alone conveys everything essential.
Gathered enough information	Consider the laws/regulations involved and any relevant precedent cases.	Make full use of the knowledge base and SOPs; pull prior cases when they exist, and attach comparable precedents to reassure your supervisor.
Understood your role	Drafting a document, you represent the agency's position and the head's standing, so word choice and register (upward / downward / lateral) must be judged precisely; the goal is effective communication, so also review the draft from the recipient's point of view.	Think at least two organizational levels above your own when deciding how to frame and route the case.

02

Electronic Document Practices

Stay on schedule, use delegates, avoid delays

Electronic Document Practices (1/3)

- ① Keep track of processing deadlines for every document.
- ② Avoid delays — put the **delegate (proxy reviewer) mechanism** into practice; confirm it is activated before taking leave.
- ③ Always date your signature to show accountability.
- ④ A document returned to the handling unit is **not necessarily finished** — confirm that co-reviewing units and your supervisor have no further comments or instructions before routing it further or filing it (check any noted remarks or in-line comments).

Electronic Document Practices (2/3)

- ⑤ For an e-document with a "paper attachment sent separately," process both **in step** — send the paper attachment to the next reviewing unit promptly after sign-off, **no later than 2 hours**.
- ⑥ When replying, use the **same document number**; even if the original has been filed, still attach it (or the relevant regulation) or place it in the "reference folder" for the approving supervisor to check.
- ⑦ When processing an incoming document, **summarize its intent concisely** — never simply write "see attached" or "noted, filed for reference" as the entire memo.

Electronic Document Practices (3/3)

- ⑧ For meeting minutes, regulation amendments, etc., extract and summarize the key points with page references beforehand, to speed up review.
- ⑨ If you notice a missing signature/stamp, help route it back for completion.
- ⑩ After a copy-for-information routing closes, the handler should consolidate the input — merging comments from each unit and resolving any inconsistencies found in the original memo.
- ⑪ Documents containing personal data must be sealed in an envelope and hand-delivered as confidential (e.g. exam-committee member lists, withdrawn/dropped-student lists).
- ⑫ For documents that need to notify or request support from related units, send a **CC notice** to those units after final approval, so they have a record for follow-up.
- **Reminder:** any memo, contract, etc. involving funding must always be routed to 【Accounting Office】 for co-review and input.

Preparing Attachments, Forms, and Meeting Minutes

- **Forms:** must have a header (e.g. "AY114 Enrollment Rate by Program") and a date of preparation.
- **Minimum requirements for meeting minutes:**
 - 1) meeting session & name 2) meeting date 3) meeting time
 - 4) attendees (do not address people by given name alone)
 - 5) note the distinction between 紀錄 (the noun, "minutes") and 記錄 (the verb, "to record")

Reference

See the full template on the Secretary-General's Office webpage, "Official Document Practice Guide."

03

Delegated Authority & Sign-off Levels

Who can approve, and what must go up the chain

Delegated Authority Schedule

- The "Delegated Authority Schedule" was created to strengthen "work simplification," define responsibilities, and improve administrative efficiency; it is the reference every level of staff uses when handling business. All handling staff must follow this schedule and the University's document-processing procedures.
- The schedule has three main parts:
 - Common items (covering all units university-wide, plus "routine business" seal requests that a unit head may approve directly)
 - Administrative units
 - Academic units
- The rules under "Common items" apply to **every** staff member university-wide.

Download

The "Delegated Authority Schedule" can be downloaded from the Secretary-General's Office webpage (Office webpage / Hot Links).

Organizational Division of Authority

- The paper document routing slip (digital file) is posted on the Secretary-General's Office webpage under 【Downloads】/(Other) — each unit should download and print as needed.
- Per the Delegated Authority Schedule, aside from documents a unit head may approve directly, any document destined for the Vice President's or President's approval **must first be routed through the 【Secretary-General's Office】** .

04

Using AI to Assist Official Document Writing

Use AI where it helps — responsibility still rests with the handler

Why Learn About AI-Assisted Document Drafting?

- Generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, etc.) are increasingly common, and used well they can speed up document drafting.
- Official documents are an agency's **formal, external or upward-facing** instruments with real bearing on its position and legal standing — using AI to help draft them calls for extra care.

Core principle

AI is a **drafting-assistance tool**, not a decision-making or approval tool. The accuracy and register of the final content still depend on the handler's **professional judgment** and the supervisor's approval.

Where AI Can Help — and Where It Applies

- **AI can help with:**

- Drafting: turning a plain-language request into gongwen format (Subject / Explanation paragraphs)
- Polishing: checking whether wording matches the required tone, and flagging inappropriate phrasing
- Format checks: verifying numeral conventions and forms of address (貴/鈞/大/本) are correct
- Summarizing: consolidating key points from meeting minutes or several incoming documents

Appropriate | Not appropriate

Appropriate: routine notices, meeting minutes, wording suggestions, format checks. **Avoid, or use extreme caution:** confidential, personnel, legal-liability, or final external-position matters.

Worked Example: AI Draft -> Human Revision

Scenario: the office copier keeps breaking down, so a memo is drafted to propose buying a new one. Same task, different outcome — what changed?

AI draft (unrevised)

Subject: To improve copying efficiency, a new office copier is proposed.

Explanation:

1. Current copier breaks down often, past its service life.
2. Vendor quote obtained; funded from this unit's budget.

Recommendation: Recommend approving the purchase; handler will place the order directly.

Problems:

- Content is not concise or specific
- No closing request phrase (期望語)
- Doesn't follow procurement procedure

After human revision

Subject: To improve office efficiency, approval is requested to purchase one multifunction copier. Kindly instruct.

Explanation:

1. Current copier is old and now breaks down often, affecting daily printing, copying, and scanning; repeated repairs have not fixed it and costs keep rising.
2. A multifunction (copy/print/scan) unit is proposed; model and quote attached as Enclosure 1.

Recommendation: Upon approval, proceed with price inquiry, procurement, and asset registration per University rules.

Takeaway: an AI draft is a useful starting point, but tone, closing phrases, and formatting must still be corrected item by item to match gongwen conventions.

Risks to Watch When Using AI to Draft Documents

- **Data-security & privacy risk:** never enter content containing personal data, confidential material, or not-yet-approved decisions into a public AI tool (e.g. student records, staff performance data, unapproved policy).
- **Accuracy risk:** AI can produce plausible-sounding but wrong "hallucinated" content (incorrect legal citations, reference numbers, dates) — verify every detail before using it.
- **Tone & format risk:** AI output may not match official-document conventions (closing phrases, forms of address) — it must still be checked against the rules in this guide.
- **Accountability:** AI is only an aid. The accuracy and legal responsibility for a document's content always rest with **the handler and the head of the agency** — "AI generated it" is never an excuse.

Institutional and External Guidelines

- Government agencies using generative AI must follow the relevant usage guidelines and data-classification principles, **must not input confidential or sensitive data**, and must always apply human review.
- Follow Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages' information-security and personal-data-protection policies; where campus-specific generative-AI rules exist, follow those first.
- Prefer AI tools approved by the institution, or internally hosted deployments, over unreviewed public AI services for handling business data.

Reminder

If you have questions about campus policy, check with the Secretary-General's Office or the 資教中心 (Information & Educational Technology Center) for guidance on personal-data protection or information security — never decide on your own to process sensitive data. (For AI-tool-specific questions, contact the AI Development Center.)

Self-check List for AI-Assisted Drafting

1. Before input

- Remove confidential or personal data first, and confirm what is safe to share.

2. While using it

- Treat the output only as a draft/polish reference, never a final version — keep applying professional judgment.

3. After using it

- Check every legal citation, date, reference number, form of address, numeral convention, and formatting rule.

4. When routing for approval

- Follow the normal sign-off workflow — the handler bears full responsibility.

Thank You

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