STYLE MANUAL

LACRALO

2012

Introduction

This LACRALO Style Manual sets out to pose some style guidelines for draft communications, statements and informal messages sent to our mailing list.

Background

This work began after the Costa Rica meeting, in which LACRALO held a
General Assembly and where several working groups were created in order to address the key points that were identified during the meetings. The groups created were: Governance, Strategic Planning, Translation and Communications.

During the Costa Rica meeting there was a call for members and ALS stakeholders formed the working group[1]. Subsequently, the President provided general guidelines for the working plans and began to address what was requested.

The working group identified that the mailing list contained a lot of information sent by its members that lacked structure and, in most cases, aggressive tones were found within the communications, so the group focused on creating guidelines to establish policies aimed to improve the messages distributed through the mailing list, and providing a Style Manual that could be applied not only to this RALO, but rather that could be taken as a reference point for the other RALOs and thus be implemented.

Group discussions led to the result you have in your hands, which consists of a document we have named Style Manual that, in addition to providing the basic Netiquette standards and guidelines for writing an email, includes examples for writing emails and recommendations that apply to mailing lists, writing on the web, sending questions through the lists, among others."

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[1] https://community.icann.org/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=31180275

General Principles

Content should be intelligible, pleasant and reader-friendly.

Content should be clear, accurate and in plain language. There should be no doubt about the message you intend to convey. Please take into account that your message will be read by people with different educational levels and who speak different languages.

Acronyms and abbreviations are to be explained provided that they refer to a term that is not commonly used or that has been introduced recently. In the case of all other acronyms, please refer to the [Spanish](#) and [English](#) glossaries.

It is advisable not to use periods when making reference to other constituent bodies within ICANN. For example, write 'ALAC', instead of "A.L.A.C."

When indicating dates, please do not abbreviate the name of the month. It is advisable to write the name of the month as a full word.

Please observe the syntax, grammar and spelling rules of the source language in which you write your message. Content should be up-to-date, relevant, verifiable and complete.

If you need to send an email in Spanish, please note that you need to send the message to the Spanish language list: lac-discuss-es@atlarge-lists.icann.org; likewise, if you are going to send an email in English, please send it to lac-discuss-en@atlarge-lists.icann.org. Your message will be automatically translated so that it reaches all members in the region.

Basic Recommendations for Writing on the Web

Since most communication is Web-based, it is relevant to consider the following recommendations when writing a text that will be read on the Internet.

Jakob Nielsen, in his article 'Long Vs. Short Articles as Content Strategy', http://www.useit.com/alertbox/content-strategy.htm, November 12th 2007, states that articles may be considered long or short on the basis of the following values:

- Short articles: 600 words. They take three minutes to read, assuming a reading speed of 200 words per minute.
- Long article: 1,000 words. They take five minutes to read, assuming a reading speed of 200 words per minute.

There is a well-known model used for writing on the Web, known as the 'Inverted Pyramid' model, which consists in conveying the most important information first and continue with the remaining information in decreasing order of importance. For instance, if we want to inform the community about what took place in an ICANN meeting, we may want to include the conclusions first, and then include details of developments throughout the meeting. This is exactly the opposite of what is done when writing a legal document, in which conclusions are presented at the very end.

Hence, when writing a message, it is important to convey information in the first two words or the first third of the paragraph. This principle also applies to sub-headings between content sections, items in an enumeration, photo captions, summaries and hyperlinks.

Sample Emails

Sample 1

From: María Gómez <mgomez@xxxxxxxx>

To:

Subject: Call for com.

Date:

Publ. C. for the DSSA WG opens until nxt.   September 15. The cll. includes both SO and AC and current DNS risk level.

Corrections: Clearly, it is not easy to understand the message the sender wants to convey, given the number of abbreviations it contains. The fact that email is a very fast medium of communication is no excuse to write in this way. Also, the email above lacks an introductory greeting, e.g. "Dear x", "Hello x", etc. The subject heading does not help anticipate the email content.

We have plenty of abbreviations in the ICANN world and, hence, a message may end up being incomplete. If abbreviations are to be included in an email, they should be explained immediately afterwards. Regarding how to write the date, in Spanish, dates should be written as follows: dd/mm/yyyy. However, this is not the case in English. Therefore, it is advisable to write the month as a full word in order to avoid confusion.

In summary, the above email does not make the most suitable impression and, given its confusing wording, it will most likely lead to misunderstandings or mistakes on the recipient's part.

The email should read as follows:

From: María Gómez <mgomez@xxxxxxxx>

Para: mailinglist@xxxxx...

Subject: Call for Public Comment

Date: Monday, August 21st, 2012.

Dear colleagues,

The DSSA (DNS Security & Stability Analysis) Working Group opened a Call for Public Comment until next September 15th. Both Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs) are invited to discuss the current DNS risk level.

For more information, please check: www.link.com

Kind regards,

María Gómez

Sample 2

From: Mary Lucas <mlucas@xxxxxxxx>

To: raulherrera@...   soniaduarte@.....   joseperez@....

Subject: Meeting

Date: Monday, December 21st, 2012.

As agreed in our last meeting, we are now confirming that on
Monday you will be receiving the reports with format changes as suggested in our
meeting.

The next step is to review these changes to make sure that they are in line with what was
agreed and make the corresponding comments so that we can then hold our next meeting
at 9:00 a.m. in our virtual meeting space.

Please confirm your attendance.

Corrections: This email needs to be more specific regarding information about suggested
changes, so that recipients can remember what the changes are about.

As far as dates are concerned, the sender assumes that everybody is aware of what dates
are being mentioned, i.e. the date of the prior meeting. Also, as we can see in the second
paragraph, only the time and place of the next meeting are mentioned – but not the date -
and this may also lead to confusion.

The email should read as follows:

From: Mary Lucas <mlucas@xxxxxxxx>

To: raulherrera@...   soniaduarte@.....   joseperez@....

Subject: Review of changes in preparation for our next meeting

Date: Monday, December 21st, 2012

Dear colleagues,

As agreed in our last meeting, held on December 18th 2012, next Wednesday you will be
receiving the changes proposed in the holiday reports in Excel format.

Please make sure that these formats are in line with what was agreed upon; should there
be any difference, please write down the corresponding comments and share them in our
next meeting, which will be held on December 28th, 2012 at 9:00 a.m.

Please confirm your attendance.

Netiquette Guidelines

Netiquette is not new; and yet, today new ways of improving virtual interaction are still developed. In 1995, RFC 1855 set the first behavior standards for digital media. Plenty of these recommendations are observed to date.

This document sets out to propose some basic recommendations in order to make ICANN virtual meetings more agreeable in spaces like the Adobe Connect Room, the e-mail exchange lists and the Wiki.

- Try to enter the Adobe Connect Room at least five minutes prior to the beginning of a session. This will enable you to greet participants already in the room.

- Enter the AC room using your first and last names. Do not use a nickname. Thus, everyone will know who they are interacting with.

- Once you have entered the AC room, perform audio and video checks (a video check is not needed or recommended) by clicking on the corresponding setting-up icons (these checks are necessary if you intend to participate and use the room audio at a later stage).

- When a speaker/lecturer is delivering a presentation, it is advisable not to use the chat so as to avoid any distractions or interruptions. It is also advisable to keep your video camera off.

- Questions can be posted on the AC chat during the presentation, but will be replied once the presentation has concluded. If you wish to make a comment and use audio, "raise your hand" by clicking on the corresponding icon in the upper left-hand section of your window. Please wait until the moderator gives you the floor, and then enable your microphone. Make your comment and then make sure you have muted your microphone. Please note: to turn your microphone on/off, click on the icon in the upper left-hand section of your window.

- Show respect by addressing other participants by their names, so that everyone will know who you are addressing.

- When requesting the floor, please use your name, so that participants who do not know you can make reference to you, if needed.

- Remember that sessions are recorded.

- Schedules are set in GMT UTC time (Greenwich Meridian Time), and each participant has to adapt them to their own local time zone by using the link included on the agenda so as not to be late or miss a session.

- All attendees (participants, moderators, speakers) will act on the basis of collaboration and good faith.

- Listen attentively to other speakers.

- It is advisable to mute your microphone while other speakers are taking the floor, so as not to make background noises that will affect communication among participants as well as the interpreters' work.

- If you are going to post a comment on the chat room, please remember to do so in

two languages. If this is not possible, please wait until your comment is translated, or understood by other participants who do not speak your language.

- It is important to let staff know how you will be connecting to the call. If you are not using Adobe Connect, please let staff know at least a day in advance so that they can include you on the dial-out lists.

Recommendations Regarding E-mail

It is important to note some aspects that will result in a more effective and efficient communication. On many occasions, details are overlooked and, hence, an email does not meet the recipient's expectations and may lead to confusion. Please remember that an email is still a letter, similar to any other letter, the only difference being the communication medium through which it is sent.

Here are some important tips to take into account when sending an email:

- **Make sure the recipient's e-mail address is correct.** With some many registered domains, changing only one letter may result in the message reaching an unintended recipient. Also, the message may reach a company, but not the intended department or person.

- **Send only the message you want to convey, or the material you have been asked to send.** Do not use a free communication system to send unnecessary documents or attachments that create more traffic on the web and waste the recipient's time.

- It is important to **complete the e-mail subject heading.** This enables the recipient to have a clear and concise idea of the email content.

- **Your e-mail should have an opening greeting, a body and a complimentary close,** just like a traditional letter. There is no reason why you should use different formulae in this type of messages. Your register should not be more formal or more familiar [than that of a letter], unless you are writing to an intimate friend or a person that is close to you, in which case your register will be more informal.

- Do not use other people's e-mail addresses to send unsolicited correspondence or files. **E-mail privacy must be respected.** Do not give someone's email address to third parties, unless you are authorized by the intended recipient.

- **Write clearly, concisely** and correctly (without spelling mistakes) and do not write your entire message in capital letters. Also, avoid using several font types, colors, smileys or emoticons.

- When sending an e-mail to multiple recipients, **use the blind carbon copy field** to avoid disclosing recipients' e-mail addresses.

- **Sign.** Do not send anonymous or incomplete messages. At least, state your name after your message. You may include additional information, like your address, phone number, web site, etc.

- If you have engaged in previous e-mail correspondence with the recipient, you may **use the same e-mail string** so as to keep details, important points or points of

interest at hand.

- As in a signed letter, **initial and closing greetings** are in order. Include your contact information at the end of your message.

- **Using upper case is really bad-mannered**. Upper case looks as if you were shouting. Therefore, avoid writing full paragraphs in upper case. If you think the importance of a message justifies it, immediately reply briefly to an email message, to let the sender know you got it, even if you will send a longer reply later.

- If someone asks you to send them a file, **it is important to let them know the file size before sending it.** Take into consideration that not everyone has broad band access or a 5-Gigabyte email box.

- **Avoid sending chain messages.** Virus and chain message alarms are intentional and aim at saturating servers as well as the net.

- **Watching cc's when replying is very important.** If the person sending the message addressed a long list of recipients, you should not follow suit.

- **Remember that the people with whom you communicate, including the webmasters of the pages you are browsing, are not paid or under the obligation to reply.** These people are mostly volunteering their work.

Recommendations for E-mail Lists

In the case of discussion lists used to manage discussion forums based on email exchange, following appropriate netiquette guidelines is especially important, given that these services are particularly sensitive to abuse. Disorderly use may weaken the list, or else put an end to the list's prestige or usefulness in an amazingly short time. This derives from the significant information flow circulated on the lists, their multiplier effect… and, above all, from the fact that lists are prone to sterile debates, fostered by abuse and poor management, which tire and deviate audiences from their focus of interest.

- A good style guide is, therefore, an indispensable tool for an effective discussion list.

- However, the first guideline regarding lists starts with your own area of interest. Lists generate considerable message traffic and demand plenty of attention, as well as computer resources and message management tools. Therefore, you should subscribe only to those lists of high interest to you, or in which you will be able to participate.

- Once you have joined a list, do not plunge into it - wait and take some time to observe how the list works, the tone of participants' interventions, the topics addressed and the overall environment. Pay attention to what subjects are considered off topic. Start participating only after you feel sure you are treading on firm ground and are at ease within the group.

- Read the general information on the list and identify the forum topics. Identify the scientific, academic, professional and other topics specific to the list. And restrict your communication to these topics. Ignore, and avoid responding to, provocative

interventions or digressions that simply lead to off topic replies. If you want to reply, do so on a personal basis and off the list.

Many times we subscribe to a list without a clear idea of its content because the list is an open subscription one.

If the list is a Listserv list, or has a data base of archived interventions, consult the data base and find out about the topics of your interest; even before your own intervention, you can check whether there are prior interventions on the same topic to avoid redundancy.

Before sending an open question to the list:

- Check if there is a FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) section. Check if your question is on the FAQ list.
- Consult the list owner in private.
- Post your question only if it is related to the list topics. Senior members tend to get upset when seeing the same questions posted frequently.
- Feel free to express your opinion on the list, but remember that this freedom has to be scrupulously respected in the discussions of proposed topics. This entails respecting: a) the topic list for the discussion, b) the rules of procedure and time limits indicated. However, this freedom should not be mistaken with questioning the list's rules of procedure. You are to respect these rules at all times and observe the list owner's application thereof. The list owner sets forth local netiquette specifications for their list.

  Remember that discussion lists have members from many countries. In particular, discussion lists conducted in Spanish have members from the Latin American community and from Spanish-speaking communities in other countries.

- Do not assume that participants will understand local references, references to films, football/soccer, cuisine, music, festivals, proverbs, etc. or the latest news in your country or region. If you still choose to make a reference along these lines, please provide an explanation.

- Do not take it for granted that people will understand geographic, idiomatic, cultural or climatic references of local, regional or national nature.

- Quite frequently, someone subscribes to a list only to send an invitation, spread an idea, or publish a commercial announcement, with no intention to engage in a debate or exchange ideas/experiences. This is called bombing.

- Bombing is a common practice quickly detected by users, and seldom overlooked or forgiven.

- Do not engage in this practice; if you do, take into account that list owners will usually react by limiting your access to the list or net, either totally or partially.

- Do not make off topic comments or questions. Remember that list members have subscribed to address the list topics. If you do not respect this, then you are taking advantage of an audience which is not your own and are wasting everybody's time. Likewise, if somebody makes an off topic comment or question, do not reply or engage in a public discussion on account of this, or on the off topic subject, or on the appropriateness of the off topic intervention. If at all, use your private e-mail to do this.

- Sometimes, messages without a substantive content are posted on discussion lists. For instance, "I agree with...", or "Bravo, so-and-so! It was high time somebody said...,"' [followed by so-and-so's exact message, be it verbatim or paraphrased, but without any substantive contribution to the previous idea]. Expressions of this nature do not contribute to the list's objectives, do not increase shared knowledge, reflection or experience... and foster a biased, confrontational and sectarian environment where, ultimately, opinions are inhibited and some members feel intimidated or without the freedom to express their views.

- Therefore, do induce people to take sides, do not take sides groundlessly, avoid being sectarian and do not encourage "partisanship". This sterilizes [*sic*] the list and sets a bad climate. A list is not an assembly or a political ballot. It is not about seeking confrontation, but participation, input, and reflection on science, technology, or research. One idea is not better than others simply because it has a larger number of supporters, but because of its value as an idea per se, as a contribution or complement to existing knowledge. This is not about crushing or excluding, but about contributing.

- If you are going to be absent for more than a week, please use one of the tools available to suspend your e-mail correspondence or to receive only list summaries; thus, you will avoid a large amount of messages upon your return, as well as possible accidents [sic].

Questions to the List

Do not pose questions or ask for information that you can easily obtain and is readily available after some research.

- Do not reply to questions on the list unless it is unavoidable and your reply is of general interest. For instance, if you are providing and address where to find solicited information.

- If your reply is of interest only to the person that posted the question, then use their e-mail address for a private response. If twenty people respond to a question posted on a large list, e-mail boxes may collapse, especially if each reply triggers off a follow-up argument and counter-argument.

- When responding to another participant, do not reproduce the entire message string, especially if the string contains all prior messages related to the same topic. Keep only those aspects of the message that are being referred to in your reply and delete any other section that is not relevant or related to your reply.

- Take your time to edit your reply and, if possible, compose your reply in a dialog format, intercalating original paragraphs with their corresponding replies.

- Nobody likes reading lengthy messages, already sent on three or four previous occasions, only to find a brief line at the end that reads: "Me too".

- Most lists do not allow attachments to avoid virus risks and system overload. If you need to send a lengthy text, it is not advisable to include it the body of your message. The best course of action is to post it somewhere else and send a brief
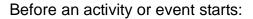
summary to the list, together with a link to access the original text.

- If you need to make reference to previous work, the best course of action is to send the URL address from which to download this material together with a brief summary and a note on its relevance. Avoid lengthy and convoluted messages. If you cannot avoid them, include an announcement at the beginning of your message letting your audience know that a lengthy message follows.

- Use full stops and leave a blank line between paragraphs; this makes text look less saturated.

- Sometimes, the same message is sent to several lists. Remember that, just like you, other people may have subscribed to all or several of these lists and may be receiving the same message repeatedly. In this case, keep the subject heading but include a warning note, indicating that the same message may be received through several conduits.

- When posting a question on the list, ask participants to send their replies to your personal e-mail address. Afterwards, send a summary of the input you received to all respondents, or to the list as a whole.

- When responding to a message sent to a discussion list, verify that you are sending your reply to the appropriate recipient and not to the entire list. If you send a personal message to the whole list, then a very delicate situation arises.

- Save the subscription message for the list you join. It contains instructions to manage the list, unsubscribe, or suspend your subscription on a temporary basis while you are on holiday or change your e-mail address.

- Use your personal and exclusive e-mail account to subscribe to the list. Do not use a shared e-mail account, an office account, a departmental account, a friend's account, or your spouse's account. Although they may volunteer their accounts, they ultimately get tired of receiving your messages.

- From time to time, beginners that are not familiar with netiquette rules, inadvertently send unsubscribe messages or request to be deleted from the list. Please be tolerant of this mistake and, in any case, give them some useful advice instead of being intransigent or sarcastic with them.

- If you would like to unsubscribe, do not send such messages to the list. Read the initial subscription message you received for instructions. If you failed to save this message, search for the relevant information on the list or consult the list owner about how to unsubscribe. Usually, this entails sending a brief message to the list server (automated management operation), such as:
Unsubscribe [list name].

Recommendations regarding the Use of Cell Phones during Face-to-face Meetings

Cell phones have become a permanent communication tool. As such, they require the observance of the following etiquette rules, especially in public places, events, dinners and ceremonies.

Before an activity or event starts:

- Turn off your cell phone or turn it to vibrate mode.

- Do not use your cell phone photo or video cameras without prior authorization.

- Avoid speaking on your cell phone.

- Make sure your cell phone is not visible by others.

- During important meetings, your cell phone must be off. Do not take calls while you are attending the meeting.

- If you have to take a call during a meeting, apologize, leave the room, and then take the call. Do not take the call in public.

- Do not avoid taking a call whenever possible.

- If you need to contact someone on Skype or on their mobile phone, it is advisable to check if that person is available to take your call.

Working Group Members:
Dev Anand Teelucksingh

Jacqueline Morris

Jose Arce

Juan Rojas

Group Coordinator: Juan Manuel Rojas P.

The Working Group proposal is available here:
https://community.icann.org/display/LACRALO/Propuesta+de+trabajo+para+el+Grupo+de+Trabajo+de+Comunicaciones

The report on the Working Group meetings is available here:
https://community.icann.org/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=31180275