Correspondence Preparation Notes

1.　Letterhead:　Be sure the letterhead is appropriate for the signer.

2.　Do not use "justified" margins.

3.　Always use title (Dr., Mr., Mrs., Ms.) on letters.
　　Do not use two titles on same line (Dr. John Doe, President - not acceptable).

4.　Do not abbreviate State name in the inside address.　Always show the zip code in the address.

5.　Do not use titles on the TO: line in memos (TO: Dr. John Doe - not acceptable).

6.　Correspondence of a single paragraph and 10 lines or less:　Double space the body of the letter.

7.　Acronyms:　The first time referring to a word to be abbreviated, write it out with the acroynym following in parentheses.　For example,　Agricultural Research Service (ARS); fiscal year (FY).

8.　Federal Government - always capitalized.

9.　State is capitalized when referring to States in the United States (State of Maryland; State, Federal, local).
　　Do not capitalize when used in a general sense (state of mind; a foreign state)

10.　Dates - a comma is needed after the year when you have the complete date in a sentence (In your letter dated April 22, 2003, you requested information . . .).　When only month and year are used in a sentence, no commas are used (April 2003).

11.　Agency is capitalized when referring to our Agency (ARS).　When referring to other agencies, put in lower case.

12.　ARS' (not ARS's) when showing possession.

13.　We do not use "the Department" in outgoing correspondence.　The USDA acronym is to be used.

14.　Comma (,) before conjunction in a compound sentence.

15.　Use a comma (,) after each member within a series of three or more words, phrases, letters, or figures used with and, or, or nor.

16.　"Agencywide" is one word, not "Agency wide."

17. Try to avoid typing part of a personal name at end of sentence. If you must divide name, title, first name, and middle initial should be on same line.

18. Always include a legend line on the file copies.

19. On the yellow file copy that will be returned to the originating office, please have the author initial and date near the legend line, as well as cleared by appropriate level of authority within office.

20. If document is returned for corrections, **always** include the old yellow file copy– no matter how many times it has been returned for corrections. Always add another legend line with current information.

For example:

Draft:ARS:OA:CLonaberger:lg:720-3656:4/9/03:h/bebest.wpd
Final:ARS:OA:CLonaberger:lg:720-3656:4/10/03:h/bebest.wpd
Rewrite:ARS:OA:CLonaberger:lg:720-3656:4/12/03:h/bebest.wpd