

Symbols

One of the first things you will notice at Foreign Affairs and International Trade is the prominent use of Department symbols. You'll see them everywhere: in the hallways, the telephone directory, throughout the computer network, and, of course, in the mailroom.

Every bureau and division has its own symbol which serves as a kind of shorthand for a range of information. Before computers were in widespread use, symbols were used somewhat like postal codes to simplify the routing of internal messages. Each symbol could be decoded to provide precise information about the office it represented. Though some of that theoretical underpinning is no longer valid, there are rules of thumb which will help you decipher symbols.

First, symbols indicate office — some organizational element of Department Headquarters. It could be a bureau, a division or another specialized grouping.

SMS - Corporate Management Systems Division

Letters in the symbols are neutral. Unlike letters in acronyms, they don't necessarily correspond to a word beginning with the same letter.

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Symbols representing bureaus end with a D. So if you receive a memo from LGD, for instance, you are hearing from the office representing the bureau: the Office of the Director General. In the case of LGD, the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau.

Symbols representing divisions within the bureau will repeat the first letter of the bureau symbol. For instance, LMR is the symbol for Mexico Division which reports to LGD.

Special offices headed by senior officials have an X in their symbol.

SIX - Office of the Inspector General

NAX - Office of Chief Air Negotiator