

**BY ORDER OF THE  
SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
INSTRUCTION 36-2903**



**29 FEBRUARY 2024**

***Personnel***

***DRESS AND PERSONAL APPEARANCE  
OF DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR  
FORCE PERSONNEL***

**COMPLIANCE WITH THIS PUBLICATION IS MANDATORY**

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This instruction implements Department of the Air Force Policy Directive (DAFPD) 36-29, *Military Standards*. It provides responsibilities and standards for dress and personal appearance of all Department of the Air Force personnel and, consistent with Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1300.17, *Religious Liberty in the Military Services*, provides guidance for religious accommodation requests. This publication applies to Department of the Air Force civilian and contract employees and uniformed members of the United States Space Force (USSF), the Regular Air Force (RegAF), the Air Force Reserve (ResAF), and the Air National Guard (ANG) and retired and separated personnel. In collaboration with the Chief of Air Force Reserve (AF/RE), Director of the Air National Guard (NGB/CF), Deputy Chief of Space Operations for Human Capital (SF/S1), the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel, and Services (AF/A1) develops personnel guidance for dress and personal appearance programs. This instruction applies to USSF members unless and until separate service guidance is published. In this event, USSF guidance shall prevail in application to the USSF. **Note:** All references to United States Air Force (USAF) terminology, units, grades, and positions will also apply to the equivalent in the USSF, as appropriate. For example, references to Airmen will also apply to Guardians. (**Exception:** Allowance Standard 016, documented amount and type of organizational clothing and equipment items authorized for an organization by applicable commander). This instruction requires the collection and or maintenance of information protected by the Privacy Act of 1974 authorized by Department of Defense Directive (DoDI) 5400.11, *DoD Privacy and Civil Liberties Program*. The applicable System of Record Notice (SORN) F036 AF PC C, *Military Personnel Records System*, is available at <http://dpclo.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNs.aspx>. Vigilance is required to protect Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) when submitting or sending nominations, applications,

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## ***SUMMARY OF CHANGES***

This instruction is substantially revised and must be completely reviewed. Policy language updated for clarity, simplification and to reduce redundancies. Graphics were updated to improve visualization and amplify existing policy. It also incorporates policy changes from the 102nd Air Force Uniform Board and out-of-cycle policy memoranda including updates to tattoo/brands/body markings, mustache wear, the religious accommodation request process, no-hat, no-salute areas, specialized nametag, two-piece flight duty uniform, gym bag, backpack, handbag, and flight duty uniform policy. It authorizes female wear of mess dress trousers or slacks, wear of caps for baldness or hair loss due to medical conditions, permanent wear of EPME badge, Security Forces shield on the OCP uniform, beverage consumption while walking in uniform, wear of cold weather headbands, the purchase of commercial cold weather outerwear, wing commander delegation to approve religious regalia, organizational emblems on the back of morale shirt and heritage morale patches on the flight duty uniform. It clarifies sister service and Joint unit patch wear and graduate patch criteria and added guidance for duty identifiers and tabs process. Removes references to Airman Battle Uniforms and authorization for color morale shirts to be worn with the flight duty uniform.

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## Chapter 3

### GROOMING AND APPEARANCE STANDARDS

**3.1. Personal Grooming Standards.** This chapter outlines personal grooming standards while wearing any Air Force uniform or civilian clothing in an official capacity. Commander's discretion will be used to determine if individual's personal grooming is within standards of this instruction. The personal grooming standards listed are minimum standards that represent common appearance issues and are not all-inclusive. Although Airmen have the right, within established limits, to express their individuality through their appearance, the Air Force defines what is and what is not an acceptable, professional military image for Airmen. Except for minor variations based on gender differences, all Air Force personnel must comply with the same personal grooming standards. Supervisors have the responsibility to determine compliance with this DAFI and to correct the obvious violations regardless of whether the situation identified is clearly written in this DAFI.

**3.1.1. Hair (General).** Will be conservative, clean, well-groomed, present a professional appearance. Regardless of hairstyle, hair must not exceed length and bulk standard, and ensure proper wear of headgear, helmet, or chemical mask to conform to safety requirements. Will *not* contain excessive amounts of grooming aids (e.g., gel, mousse, pomade, or moisturizer), appear lopsided, touch either eyebrow (**Exception:** female bangs), or end below an imaginary line across the forehead at the top of the eyebrows that is parallel to the ground. If applied, dyes, tints, bleaches, and frostings must result in natural hair colors, present a natural appearance and be complementary to facial hair e.g., eyebrows, lashes, beards (if authorized for medical or religious reasons), etc. Examples of natural hair colors are brown, blonde, brunette, natural red, gray, or black. All Airmen are authorized to wear natural color hair regardless of their natural born hair color, but when highlighted or frosted, the colors must blend as to naturally. **Example:** Hair colors may be displayed as a "salt-and-pepper" look as this presents a naturally blended hair color and is, therefore, authorized.

**3.1.1.1. Wigs/Hairpieces/Extensions.** Are authorized and will meet the same standards required for natural hair, be of good quality, fit properly, and comply with safety, functionality, and professional military standards. If synthetic hair or extensions are added to hair, they will be natural hair colors, and must blend with Airmen's hair, as to not create an unnatural appearance (**Note:** Extensions are prohibited for males). Wigs/Hairpieces/Extensions will *not* be used to cover unauthorized hair styles. Synthetic hair or other materials are *not* authorized when prohibited by safety and mission requirements. Commanders may authorize Airmen to wear plain (single color, without additional ornamentation, frills/ruffles, excess fabric that extends down the back) caps (black, navy, or tan) while indoors due to a medical condition (e.g., Alopecia, radiation and/or chemotherapy). Airmen are still required to wear appropriate headgear while outdoors. **Note:** Head scarves are not authorized.

**3.1.1.2. Hairnets.** Worn as required for health or safety reasons. Made of natural or a synthetic material; must be conservative (plain and moderate, being within reasonable limits; not excessive or extreme), solid color similar to the member's hair color, also strong enough to support and control hair and contain no metal fasteners. Hairnets are only authorized when performing related duties as determined by applicable commander.

3.1.1.3. Unauthorized Hair Colors. Hair will not be burgundy, purple, orange, fluorescent, or neon (not all inclusive). Ombre (a gradual lightening or darkening along the lengths of the hair) or black hair with blonde highlights and blonde hair with black are unnatural in appearance and not authorized for wear. Other unauthorized examples include instances where hair and facial hair drastically contrast.

3.1.1.4. Unauthorized Styles: Mohawk, mullet, or etched design. Other cultural or societal trends that reasonably appear unnatural or that display vastly different shades of natural colors, regardless of the universally applied name. Males only: dreadlocks, coils, braids, twists, designs, and/or hair extensions are not authorized; see [Figure 3.1](#) for examples. Females only: Partially shaved sides and/or back of the head with long hair on the top (requiring the wear of a ponytail, bun, or braid) is prohibited. See [Figure 3.2](#) for examples of unauthorized hairstyles.

**Figure 3.1. Male – Unauthorized Hair Examples.**

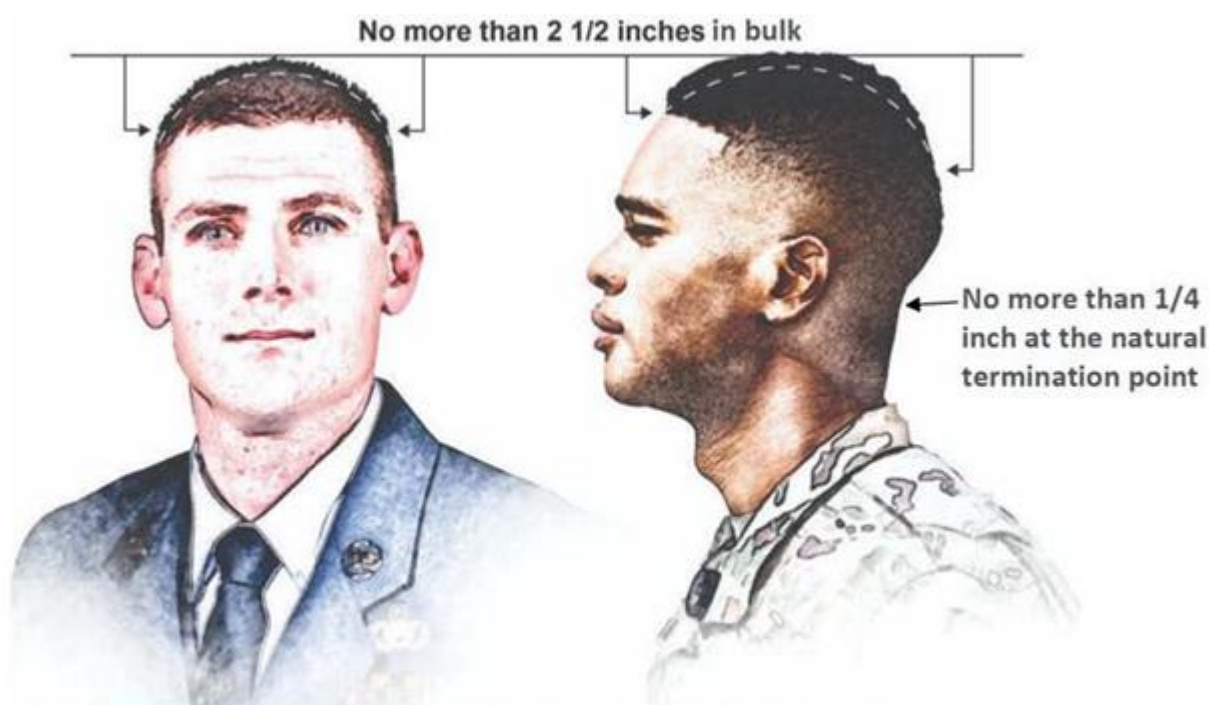


**Figure 3.2. Female – Unauthorized Hair Examples.**



3.1.2. Hair (**Male**). Tapered appearance on both sides and the back of the head, both with and without headgear so that when viewed from any angle the member's hair conforms to the shape of the head, curving inward to the natural termination point without eccentric directional flow, twists, or spiking. A block-cut is permitted with tapered appearance. Hair will not exceed 2 ½ inches in bulk, regardless of length and 1/4-inch at natural termination point; allowing only closely cut or shaved hair on the back of the neck to touch the collar (see [Figure 3.3](#)). Hair will not protrude under the front band of headgear. Cleanly shaven heads, military high-and-tight or flattop cuts are authorized. Airmen may have one (cut, clipped, or shaved) front to back, straight-line part, not slanted or curved, on either side of their head, above the temple. Part will not exceed 4-inches length or 1/4-inch width (See [Figure 3.5](#)). See [Figure 3.4](#) for examples of appropriate sideburns, mustache, and male hair standards.

**Figure 3.3. How to Measure Hair Bulk.**



Bulk is the distance that the mass of hair protrudes from the scalp. It is measured starting at the scalp and outward at a 90 degree angle.

**Figure 3.4. Male Hair Standards Examples.**



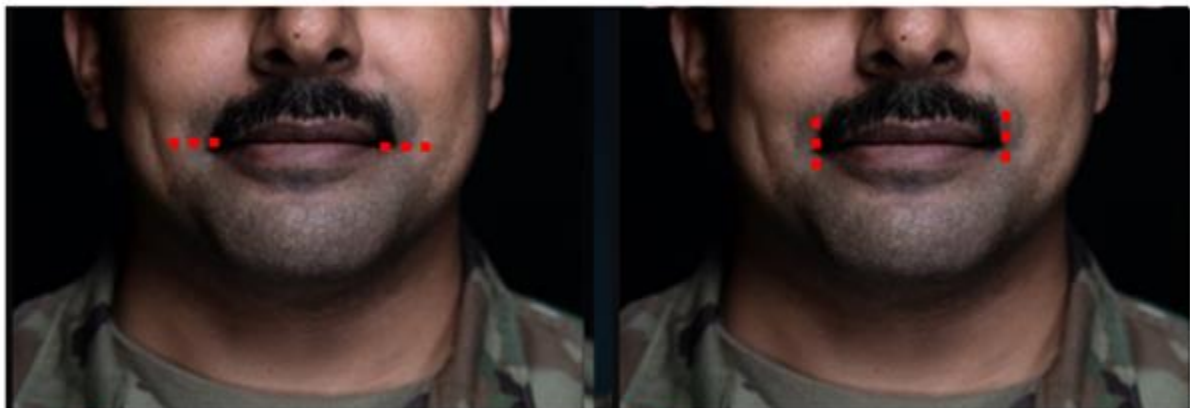


**Figure 3.5. Cut, Clipped, or Shaved Part.**

Part will not exceed 4 inches in length or 1/4 inch in width.

3.1.2.1. Sideburns. If worn, sideburns will be straight and even width (not flared) and will not extend below the bottom of the orifice of the ear opening. Sideburns will end in a clean-shaven horizontal line. See [Figure 3.4](#).

3.1.2.2. Mustaches. Male members may have mustaches; No portion of the mustache will extend below the lip line of the upper lip. The mustache will not go beyond a horizontal line extending across the corners of the mouth and no more than 1/4-inch beyond a vertical line drawn from the corner of the mouth ([Figure 3.4](#) and [3.6](#)). Mustaches must present a natural appearance to the Airman's hair color of the head. Mustache handlebars, twist, curls, and goatee are prohibited.

**Figure 3.6. Mustache.**

✓ Does not go beyond a horizontal line extending across the corners of the mouth

✓ No more than 1/4-inch beyond vertical line drawn from corner of mouth

3.1.2.3. Beards. Beards are not authorized unless for medical reasons, when authorized by a medical official, or as authorized pursuant to a request for a religious accommodation. When authorized for medical reasons, members will keep all facial hair trimmed to the same length and it may not to exceed 1/4-inch in length. Individuals granted a shaving profile may shave or trim their facial hair to present a neat, clean, professional military image ([Figure 3.7](#)). Members may not overly shave, shape, or taper beard to achieve

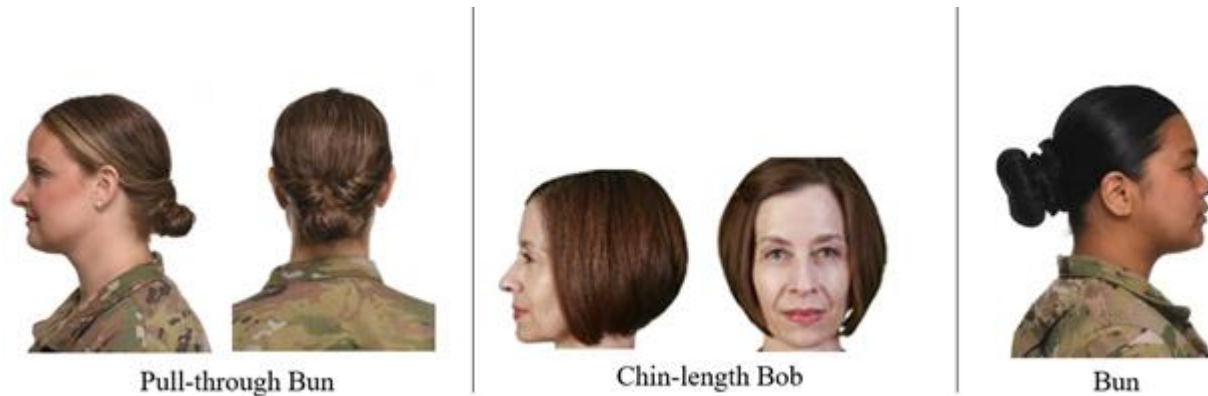
different styles of beard (e.g., goatees, faded beards, etc. are not authorized). Beards must present a natural appearance to the Airman's hair color of the head. Beards are not authorized to be bleached or dyed. Beard wear authorized for religious reasons are governed by [Chapter 11](#) of this instruction.

**Figure 3.7. Shaving Waiver Example.**



Facial Hair neatly trimmed to present neat, clean, professional image.

**3.1.3. Hair (Female and Male with approved unshorn hair religious accommodations).** No minimum hair length, to a maximum bulk of 4-inches from scalp and allows proper wear of headgear. Minimum hair standards must present a symmetric (around the axis of the head) or tapered appearance when viewed from all angles. Hair will end above the bottom edge of collar and will not extend below an invisible line drawn parallel to the ground, both front to back and side to side unless pulled back and secured or worn in an authorized ponytail or equivalent or long braid(s). When hair is pulled back and secured behind the head (will not be gathered at the crown or worn on the top of the head), radius will not exceed 6-inches to the left or right from the point where the hair is gathered for a total of 12-inches in width, 6-inches in bulk and must allow for proper wear of headgear. One or two braids or a single ponytail or equivalent may be worn down the member's back with length not extending below a horizontal line running between the top of each sleeve inseam at the under arm through the shoulder blades. The braid(s), ponytail or equivalent shall extend down the member's back and cannot be worn over the shoulder or pulled in front of the body. Bangs, or side-swiped hair, may touch eyebrows but will not touch or cover eyes. When in doubt, assess the correct length of hair with the Airman standing in the position of attention. See [Figure 3.8.](#), [Figure 3.10](#), and [Figure 3.11](#) for examples of female hair standards. **Exception:** While wearing the Physical Training Gear (PTG), long hair will be secured but may have loose ends and may extend below a horizontal line running between the top of each sleeve inseam at the under arm through the shoulder blades.

**Figure 3.8. Female Hair Examples.**

3.1.3.1. Pinned-up hair should be styled in a manner that prevents loose ends from extending upward on the head and may not start at the crown of the head or be worn on the top of the head. When hair is in a bun, the bun must be a single bun; all loose ends must be tucked in and secured. Hair must allow for proper wear of headgear.

3.1.3.2. Hair accessories. If worn, hair accessories (e.g., fabric scrunches, hairpins, combs, clips, headbands, elastic bands, barrettes, etc.) must be black or match hair color. Invisible hairnets and hairnets that match hair color are authorized. Headbands or fabric scrunches will not exceed 2-inches in width. Ornaments are *not* authorized (i.e., ribbons, beads, jeweled pins). See [Figure 3.9](#).

**Figure 3.9. Female Hair Accessories.**

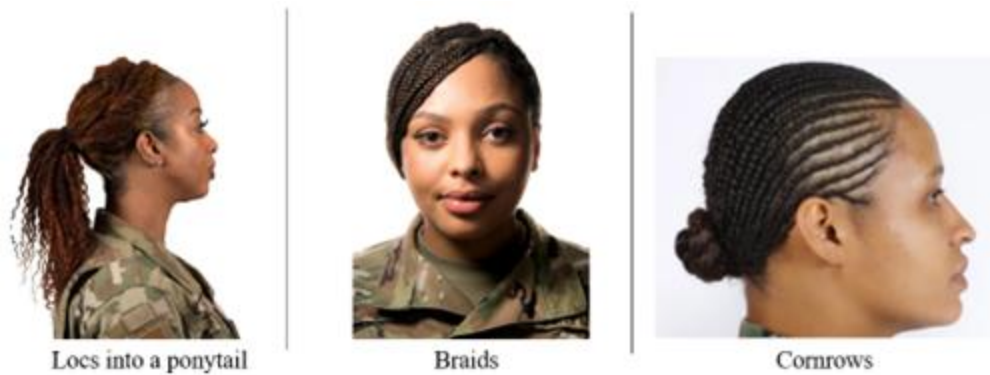
3.1.3.3. Locs, braids, twists, micro-braids, french braids, dutch braids, and cornrows are authorized. A braid or twist is two or more portions of interwoven hair. If adding additional hair, it must be a natural-looking color, matching the individual's hair color. Multiple locs, braids, twists or cornrows may come together down the back in one or two braids, or a single ponytail as described in [paragraph 3.1.3](#). All locs, braids and twists, when worn will be of uniform dimension, no wider than one-inch, with natural spacing between the locs, braids, and twists and must be tightly interwoven to present a neat, professional, and well-groomed appearance. When worn, multiple locs, braids, or twists shall be of uniform dimension, no larger than a 1/4 in diameter, show no more than 1/4-inch of scalp between the locs, braids, or twists and must be tightly interwoven to present a neat appearance.

3.1.3.4. A braid/twist must continue to the end of the hair without design and following the contour of the head and may be worn loose or in a secured style within hair standards



in [paragraph 3.1.3](#) above. *Exception:* Micro-braids or twists are not required to continue to the end of the hair. See [Figure 3.10](#) for examples of braids, twists, micro-braids.

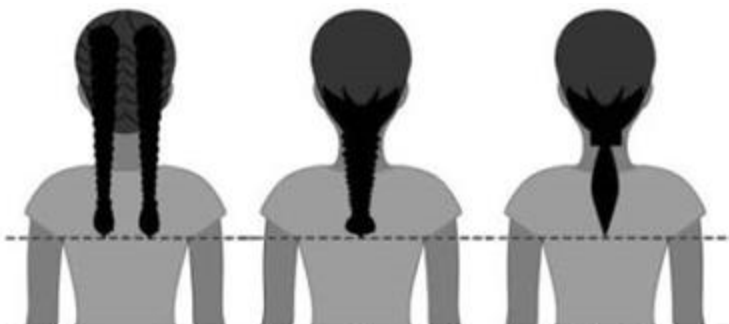
**Figure 3.10. Authorized Female Hair Styles Examples of Locs, Braids, and Cornrows.**



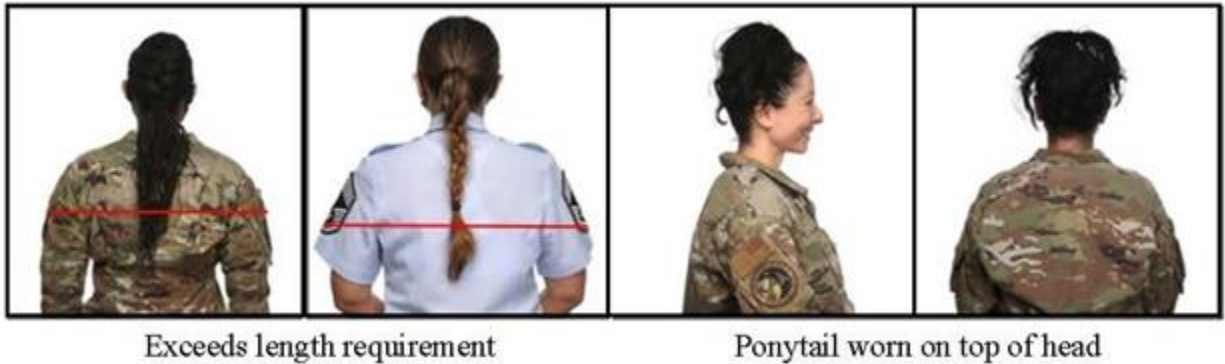
**Figure 3.11. Authorized Ponytails/Equivalent and Long braid(s) Hair Styles Examples.**



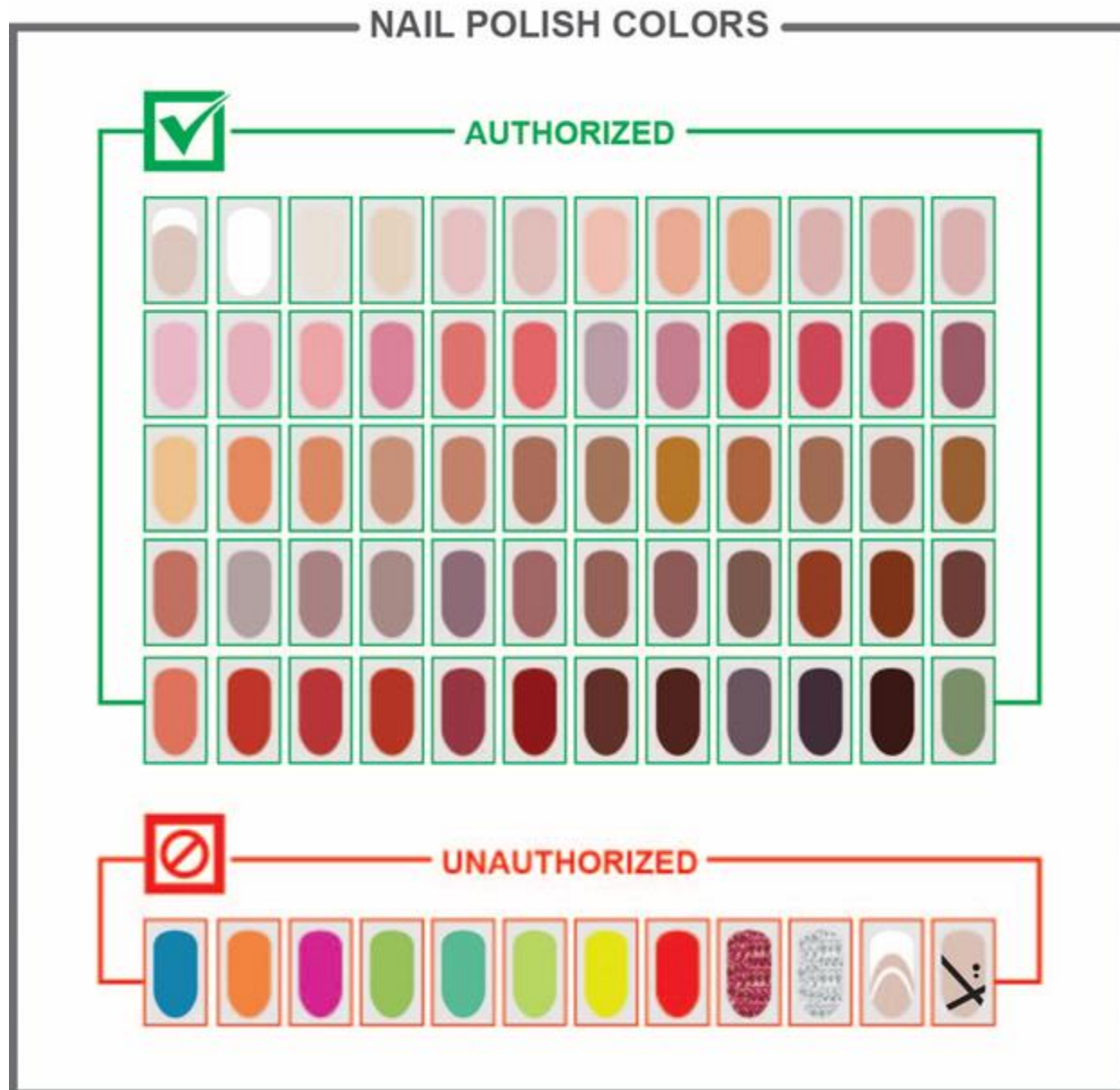
**Figure 3.12. Ponytail/Braid Length.**



Hair may not extend below line below a running between the top of each sleeve inseam at the under arm through the shoulder blades.

**Figure 3.13. Unauthorized Ponytails.**

3.1.4. Fingernails. Fingernails must not exceed 1/4-inch in length beyond the tip of the finger and must be clean and well groomed. Fingernails must not interfere with the performance of assigned duties or hinder proper fit of prescribed safety equipment or uniform items. Male Airmen are not authorized to wear nail polish. If worn by females, nail polish will be a single conservative color that does not detract from the uniform. Do not apply designs to nails or apply two-tone or multi-tone colors; **Exception:** white-tip French manicures are authorized. See [Figure 3.14](#) for examples of authorized and unauthorized nail colors.

**Figure 3.14. Authorized and Unauthorized Nail Polish Colors (Not All-Inclusive).**

3.1.5. Cosmetics. Male Airmen are not authorized to wear cosmetics. Female Airmen may wear conservatively styled cosmetics. Eyelash extensions, if worn, will be female Airman's natural eyelash color, will not exceed 14 millimeters in total length or touch the member's eyebrow, and must present a natural appearance. Eyelash extensions will not hinder wear of protective eye wear or any type of headgear. Lipstick, if worn by female Airmen, will be a conservative shade that does not detract from the uniform. Eyeliner, if worn by female Airmen, cannot extend past the corners of eye opening (i.e., winged liner not authorized). Cosmetics will not be worn during field conditions.

**Figure 3.15. Authorized and Unauthorized Eyelash Extension Examples.**

**3.2. Tattoos/Brands/Body Markings.** For purposes of this instruction, a tattoo is defined as a picture, design, or marking made on the skin or other areas of the body by staining it with an indelible dye, or by any other method, including pictures, designs, or markings only detectible or visible under certain conditions (such as ultraviolet or invisible ink tattoos). A brand is defined as a picture, design, or other marking that is burned into the skin or other areas of the body. Body markings are pictures, designs, or other markings as a result of using means other than burning to permanently scar or mark the skin. Failure to obey the mandatory provisions in paragraphs [3.2.1](#), [3.2.1.1](#), and [3.2.2](#) constitutes a violation of Article 92(1), UCMJ—failure to obey lawful general order or regulation. Article 92(1) of the UCMJ does not apply to members while in Title 32 status (that is, activated for state duty under state command), but ANG members may be subject to an equivalent article under a state military justice code. Violations may also result in administrative disciplinary action without regard to otherwise applicable criminal or civil sanctions for violations of related laws.

**3.2.1. Unauthorized content/locations.** Tattoos/brands/body markings will not be on the head, face, tongue, lips, eyes, and scalp. Tattoos/brands/body markings anywhere on the body that are obscene, commonly associated with gangs, extremist, and/or supremacist organizations, or that advocate sexual, racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination are prohibited in and out of uniform. Indecent tattoos/brands/body markings are grossly offensive to modesty, decency, or propriety, or shocks the moral sense, because of its vulgar, filthy, or disgusting nature, or its tendency to incite lustful thought. It is indecent if it tends reasonably to corrupt morals or incite libidinous thoughts. It must not violate community standards. Commanders should contact their servicing Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) unit for additional information on potential identification of gang/hate group, tattoos/brands/body markings.



Extremist tattoos/brands/body markings are those affiliated with, depicting, or symbolizing extremist philosophies, organizations, or activities. Sexually discriminative tattoos/brands/body markings are those that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on gender. Racially discriminative tattoos/brands/body markings are those that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. Religiously discriminative tattoos/brands/body markings are those that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on religion. Tattoos/brands/body markings with unauthorized content that are prejudicial to good order and discipline, or the content is of a nature that tends to bring discredit upon the DAF are prohibited both in and out of uniform. Airmen and Guardians may not cover up tattoos, brands, and/or body markings with bandages or make-up in order to comply with unauthorized content tattoo policy.

3.2.1.1. Members who have or receive unauthorized content tattoos/brands/body markings are required to initiate tattoo/brand/body marking removal/alteration. At the commander's discretion, members may be seen, on a space and resource available basis, in a Department of Defense (DoD) medical treatment facility for voluntary tattoo/brand/body marking removal. When DoD resources are not available, members may have the tattoo/brand removed/alterated at their own expense outside of DoD medical treatment facilities. Permissive Temporary Duty is not authorized for this purpose.

3.2.2. Authorized content/locations. Tattoos are authorized on the chest and back (below the open collar uniform), arms, legs, feet, hands, and neck. One tattoo on the neck is authorized and will not exceed 1-inch in measurement in any direction. The neck tattoo will only be placed behind a vertical line at the opening of the ear orifice around the back to a vertical line at the opening of the other ear orifice and includes behind the ear (See [Figure 3.16](#)). Ring tattoos are limited to a single band on one finger of each hand, no more than 3/8-inch in width below the knuckle and above the finger joint (portion closest to the palm). In addition to the ring tattoo, a single tattoo is authorized on each hand; the tattoo will not exceed the size of 1-inch measured in any direction. Hand, arm, leg, neck, and ring tattoos can be exposed and visible while wearing any uniform combination(s). Chest and back tattoos will not be visible through any uniform combination(s) or visible while wearing an open collar uniform. Members may request an exception to policy (ETP) for location or size of tattoos in accordance with [paragraph 15.5](#) prior to receiving applicable tattoo. Approved tattoo ETPs will be documented on the DAF Form 4428, *Tattoo/Brand/Body Marking Screening/Verification*. An ETP request for tattoos with unauthorized content will not be considered.