United States Department of Commerce

Plain Writing Act Compliance Report

April 13, 2012

I.   Designate senior agency official for plain writing.

Jennifer Friedman, Director of Public Affairs is the senior agency official for plain writing.

Plain writing coordinators with the U.S. Department of Commerce are:

- Office of the Secretary (OSec)- Anatta
- Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) - Eugene Cottilli
- U.S. Census Bureau - Neil Tillman
- Economic Development Administration (EDA) - Malinda Matson
- Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA) - Joanne Caldwell
- International Trade Administration (ITA) -Andy Wilbanks
- Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) - Bridget Gonzales and Patricia Tomczyszyn
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) – Jana Goldman
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) -Rochelle Cohen
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) - Gail Porter
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) - Bob Houser

II.   Explain what specific types of agency communications you have released in a format consistent with the plain writing guidelines.

Type of document or posting and how it is made available to the public	Intended user and approximate number of potential users	What has changed by using Plain Writing	Bureau
Press releases, distributed via website, e-mail, other electronic venues	General public to inform of scientific findings, new regulations, other information, potentially millions of readers	Writers and editors are more aware of Plain Writing techniques	NOAA
Leadership messages, distributed via e-mail, posted on websites	NOAA employees (about 13,000), are the primary audience, but these messages are often used in messages to constituents and others easily doubling or tripling the number of recipients	Writers and editors are aware of and using Plain Writing techniques – active voice, fewer words, getting to the point, less bureaucratic	NOAA

OIG Audit & Evaluation/ Investigation Reports and Correspondence are made public primarily via OIG's website	Department of Commerce Officials, members of Congress and General Public	We have tried to maintain plain writing continuously and review all documents for plain language usage	Office of the Secretary
NIST TechBeat-- newsletter, Email alerts, posted on NIST Web site	Science interested, college educated adults interested in NIST research results	Re-emphasizing shorter sentences and accessible language whenever possible.	NIST
Portal pages on the NIST Web site	Science interested, college educated adults interested in NIST research results.	Re-emphasizing shorter sentences and accessible language whenever possible.	NIST
MBDA Annual Performance Report	General public, MBE clients, Congress, state and local governments	Easier to read and understand; improved clarity of messages	MBDA
MBDA Fact Sheets	Website visitors; conference and convention attendees; academia; state and local governments	Statistical information and analysis of data provided clearly and concisely	MBDA
White papers and research Findings	Minority businesses (clients); students; web visitors	General plain language improvements	MBDA
MED Week announcements and publications	General public; business owners; professional associations;	Better formatting with emphasis on key information	MBDA
Press releases	General public, website visitors, media	General plain language improvements	MBDA
Website	General public, website visitors, media	The agency categorized documents using a simpler, more user-friendly taxonomy and added plain language explanations of key agency activities and topics. NTIA received positive informal feedback from a range of stakeholders, who said the new website better explains the agency's work and is easier to	NTIA

		navigate.	
Economic Indicators; Economic Briefings via ESA website	U.S. consumer, international news media; businesses, economists tracking economy	More concise statements; use of active voice; clearly stated statistics	ESA
Comprehensive reports, i.e. Competes Act Report, Report on Intellectual Property and the U.S. Economy	U.S. consumer, international news media, businesses and economists tracking economy	Highlighted principal findings, charts more simple and easily understood language; use of active voice	ESA
Review of press releases by the U.S. Census Bureau	General public; state, local and national media	More clearly reported findings in news media	ESA
Press releases, media advisories, tip sheets, Facts for Features and other media documents – available online and disseminated through wire service and media mail list	Media (22,000 through wire service and email; online use varies greatly by topic) All users (varies greatly by topic)	The Census Bureau has long used plain writing in press materials. Still assessing impact via new usability studies focused on plain language.	Census
Twitter feeds and Facebook postings	Twitter (22,000 subscribers) Facebook (115,000 subscribers)	Still assessing impact via new usability studies focused on plain language.	Census
Blogs	All users (varies greatly by topic; generally blogs attract 200-500 viewers; two recent blogs on 1940 census records attracted 2,700 viewers)	Still assessing impact via new usability studies focused on plain language.	Census
New www.census.gov home page (launched Dec 2011) – first step in major web transformation	All users (20 million page views per month)	Still assessing impact via new usability studies focused on plain language.	Census
New 2012 Economic Census home page (launched March 2011)	Gateway to response to the 2012 Census – representing about 28 million businesses. Currently geared to trade associations and other partners.	Still assessing impact via new usability studies focused on plain language.	Census
Entries in FAQ Center	All users (averages 18,0000 to 20,000 per month)	Still assessing impact via new usability studies	Census

		focused on plain language.	
USPTO Web site and social media postings, news releases, public event and activity announcements. (Web content publishers in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer, USPTO, have completed Plain Language training or possess an academic degree in the discipline. Patent and Trademark Application Information: (continually updated to capture Plain Language techniques). Booklets sent to individuals who request information regarding filing patent and trademark applications. • **General Information Concerning Patents (booklet)** • **Declaration to file (PTO/SB/01)** • **Provisional Patent brochure & cover sheet (form PTO/SB/16)** • **Guide to filing a utility patent (booklet)** • **Non Publication Request form (PTO/SB/35)** • **Fee Schedule** • **Fee transmittal form (PTO/SB/17)** • **Utility Patent Application transmittal form (PTO/SB/05)** • **SCAM brochure** • **Patent and Trademark Depository Library**	General Public Intellectual Property Stakeholders Department of Commerce Employees	To be determined: the USPTO.gov redesign project scheduled for November 2012 covers Plain Language procedures. Web content publishers in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer, USPTO, have completed Plain Language training or possess an academic degree in the discipline. Patent and Trademark Application Information (continually updated to capture Plain Language techniques): Booklets sent to individuals who request information regarding filing patent and trademark applications.	USPTO

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Internal communication, information dissemination, announcements, opportunities, etc. (USPTO Intranet). (Web content publishers in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer, USPTO, have completed Plain Language training or possess an academic degree in the discipline).	USPTO Employees and Visitors to the USPTO	(Web content publishers in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer, USPTO, have completed Plain Language training or possess an academic degree in the discipline.	USPTO

III. Inform agency staff of Plain Writing Act's requirements.

Employees have been informed of the Act's requirements through all-hands emails and postings on the Department of Commerce's intranet. Also, those immediately affected by the requirements have been notified of training opportunities.

IV. Train staff in plain writing techniques.

Bureaus provided the following trainings:

Type of Training	Number of employees trained	Date	Bureau
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live	**~1,560**	**Series of trainings from August 2011 to end of March 2012** **Jan 18, 2012 National Ocean Service"Brown Bag" Seminar held in person, slides also viewed offsite via online viewing software, speaker via teleconference.**	**NOAA**
PLAIN-provided training – live	**~215**	**August 2011 to end of March 2012**	**NOAA**
Webinars	**~ 1,345**	**August 2011 to end of March 2012**	**NOAA**

Online training	16	August 2011 to end of March 2012	NOAA
OIG Writer-Editor delivered Plain Language Training which was available for all OIG staff	50	21 September 2011	Office of the Secretary
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live	OIG Senior Staff and other OIG Staff	Working with the DOC Coordinator Anatta to set up training classes	Office of the Secretary
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live	DOC Trainer scheduled to provide NIST training in Gaithersburg.	June 21, 2012	NIST
Online training	NIH Training Module in Plain Writing made available through Commerce Learning Center	March 2012	NIST
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live	259	2-day sessions held May-Oct 2011	NTIA
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live	Potential training for ESA, Census and BEA employees	Pending in June/July 2012	ESA
PLAIN-provided training – live	Potential 25 – Workshop for writers and editors	Pending in May/June 2012	ESA
Online training	one	4/10/12	ESA
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live	375	2007 – Present Next Scheduled Training -- July 2012	USPTO
PLAIN-provided training – live	375	2007 – Present	USPTO

ITA is in the process of constructing an internal webpage in SharePoint for posting plain language information. On February 2, 2012, Clarence Burden, ITA Training Officer, sent an email soliciting staff to attend a plain language training course.

MBDA's plan for training and ongoing compliance with the Plain Writing Act includes:

a.   Identify staff responsible for writing and/or compiling content for public and business center use. These individuals will be required to complete plain language training.

b.   Identify and prioritize documents that should be reviewed by our plain language coordinator prior to publication and release to the public (print or web).

c.   Update MBDA operating procedures and style guide to include a plain writing review cycle.

d.   Require all contract writers, copywriters, illustrators and graphic designers to practice plain writing.

ESA has noticed increased use of its website, and increased media coverage of ESA reports released in 2012. They have received positive public comments regarding the creation and ongoing maintenance of the ESA Economic Briefing/Blog. Additionally, many news sources and individual media blogs extensively quote ESA's blog and news releases. These sources include the National Journal, CNN, Reuters news service; and the Dow Jones News Service.

ESA employees are scheduled for a plain language training from PLAIN during the second quarter of 2012. ESA will have further documentation and measurements once the lessons learned in that training are fully implemented in upcoming months.

In June 2012, the **Census Bureau** plans to launch a half-day course entitled *Writing With a Purpose: Applied Communication Techniques*. Students will apply plain writing techniques to existing web content, resulting in a fresh take on the content at the end of the class, to be shared with content owners.

The Census Bureau provided the following trainings: (FY11)

Type of Training	Employees trained	Date
In house (agency staff or contractor) – live		
BASIC WRITING	7	12-Apr-11
CLEAR WRITING THROUGH CRITICAL THINKING	8	19-Oct-10
MANAGEMENT WRITING WORKSHOP	11	15-Feb-11
MANAGEMENT WRITING WORKSHOP	12	6-Apr-11
PROOFREADING SKILLS	5	28-Oct-10
TECHNICAL WRITING FOR PROFESSIONALS	9	3-Nov-10

TECHNICAL WRITING FOR PROFESSIONALS	11	30-Mar-11
TECHNICAL WRITING FOR PROFESSIONALS	11	21-Jun-11
WRITING EFFECTIVE PROCEDURES, REQUIREMENTS, AND SPECS FOR NON-SUPERVISORY SPECIALISTS	9	26-Oct-10
WRITING EFFECTIVE PROCEDURES, REQUIREMENTS, AND SPECS FOR NON-SUPERVISORY SPECIALISTS	14	27-Apr-11
PROOFREADING & EDITING FOR PROFESSIONALS	22	14-Jun-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIRECTORATE	10	19-Oct-10
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIRECTORATE	10	16-Nov-10
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIRECTORATE	9	7-Dec-10
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DECENNIAL MANAGEMENT DIV	10	26-Apr-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DECENNIAL MANAGEMENT DIV	9	3-May-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DECENNIAL MANAGEMENT DIV	7	24-May-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DECENNIAL MANAGEMENT DIV	8	9-Aug-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIRECTORATE	9	11-Jan-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIRECTORATE	9	1-Feb-11
WRITING THAT WORKS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIRECTORATE	7	12-Apr-11
EMAIL ETIQUETTE FOR TECH AND ADMIN	23	30-Mar-11
POWERFUL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR TECH AND ADMIN	11	10-Aug-11
TOTAL	241	

The United States Patent and Trademark Office provided the following training:

Through the USPTO Leadership Development Program (LDP), instructor-led training in Plain Language is a part of the course schedule. The LDP is a framework of leadership development opportunities available to all USPTO employees in supervisory and non-supervisory positions. The LDP helps strengthen effective leadership values and behaviors at the USPTO by providing appropriate learning opportunities and other resources for leaders at all levels. LDP Plain Language training is four (4) hours in length.

As a part of the USPTO.gov redesign project planning, it was agreed that all web content publishers and writers will be scheduled for Plain Language training before assuming those duties (if new), and ASAP (if existing).

All employees in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer, USPTO, have completed Plain Language training or have earned an academic degree in the discipline.

The on-line training courses regarding Plain Language are still in development. Currently, we have on-line Skillsoft courses available through the Commerce Learning Center that cover plain language techniques.

Plain Language courses that were given in September 2011, and in January 2012, were simultaneously webcast, and future training courses (July 2012) will be as well.

USPTO has had no dedicated Plain Language webinars. Future USPTO Plain Language Training is scheduled for July 2012.

V.   Maintain ongoing compliance and sustain change.

Contact Jennifer Friedman or Mike Kruger within the Office of Public Affairs with compliance questions. The Office of Public Affairs reports use of plain writing within the Department of Commerce based on reports from bureau plain writing coordinators.

NOAA plans to continue training and offering specific training as requested by participants. NOAA's Learning Development Staff is producing an online Plain Language course to be hosted/accessed via the NOAA@CLC (Commerce Learning Center) learning management system. Expected publication date: summer 2012. NOAA's Fisheries Service requested an e-learning class be developed for FY 12-13.

VI.   Use agency's plain writing website to further plain writing compliance.

The Department of Commerce's Plain Language page is available at http://www.commerce.gov/plain-language. It contains contact information, links to compliance reports and OMB and PLAIN websites.

VII.   Evaluate customer satisfaction after experiencing plain writing communications.

NIST has used plain language in NIST TechBeat for many years. We use the American Customer Satisfaction Index, implemented by Forsee Results, to gauge the satisfaction of the public with our Web site. NIST's current survey results show that customers rate our content very highly, with a score between 82 to 84, out of 100, from July 2011 to Feb. 2012.

NIST plans to add a question to the survey so more specifically gauge our customers need and appreciation for plain language in the future. And will continue to train additional staff in Plain Language in hopes of raising our content score even higher.

MBDA currently has no indication that a formal evaluation is needed because very little of their material is instructional in nature. They will encourage the public, business center clients to provide them with informal, qualitative feedback.

The **Census Bureau** uses usability and cognitive testing on an ongoing basis to measure customer satisfaction with our web site. They routinely consult their web logs to study how successful users are in searching our site.

Since 2007, the Census Bureau has used an ongoing pop-up survey to measure the customer satisfaction. This survey will eventually test for plain writing. The Census Bureau also conducts more detailed studies of key sites such as the American Community Survey and the American FactFinder data tool and use the results to improve user access.

The Census Bureau has developed special usability tests to establish a baseline for our efforts to simplify language on the site. Although we have conducted customer satisfaction surveys for many years, with questions on plain writing, we expect to have much more data on this as we proceed further in our testing. Feedback from tests is given to content owners and used to develop content for our new training (see IIa above).

The United States Patent and Trademark Office continually updates its Web site, as well as specific information requested by its stakeholders regarding patents and trademarks, to include: General Information Concerns, Guide to Filing a Utility Patent, Guide to Filing a Design Patent, and Basic Facts about Trademarks. All USPTO Web content publishers in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer, USPTO, have completed Plain Language training or possess an academic degree in the discipline. USPTO utilizes ForeSee Results Analytics to gauge public satisfaction with our Web site. The average public satisfaction score for USPTO Web site content is 78 on a scale of 100. The components measured are as follows: Freshness of Content, Quality of Information, and Accuracy of Information on the Web site. The USPTO Web site redesign scheduled for November 2012 will encompass Plain Language techniques, and additional customer feedback is expected as a result.