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Please stand by for real time captions.

>> Good afternoon everybody. We'll be starting shortly in about two minutes. If you have any technical problems please call us or e-mail us. Thank you.

>> [ Silence ]

>> Good afternoon everyone, this is the goal -- I am the user experience evangelist at GSA. Welcome to webmaster University and we're going to give a wonderful seminar on the plain language and plain writing act of 2010 which is in my view one of the most important developments in open government. It's the bringing of democracy to Eastern Europe to me. I would like to introduce the speakers, Leslie, and Catherine. Leslie's the cofounder -- [ Indiscernible-muffled speaker ] -- an online web writing course for the Department of Veterans Affairs. She is a member of the faculty of Web manager University and she is also the co-author of the writing workbook for customer service agents. She will be joined by Catherine who is a web content editor for the US citizenship and immigration services of the Department of Homeland Security. She is also the chair of the US the CIF plain language program before working on the web team and Catherine spent 17 years as a federal regulations. Katherine is also cochair of the plain which action information network which is the official -- which is the official interagency workgroup for the writing act and you can participate in their meetings by going looking for information at and you can participate in their meetings by going looking for information@plainlanguage.gov and you can participate in their meetings by going looking for information@plainlanguage.gov.

>> I would like to tell you that you may questions throughout the webinar today so please use the checkbox. Leslie. A similar rules -- Leslie. At several intervals and it kicks off a series of plain language activities brought to you in partnership with Web manager University and PLAIN so welcome Leslie.

>> Welcome everyone joining us on the webinar and it is my pleasure to be speaking to you today and also include Catherine in this presentation. We have lots of examples to look at and updates to share with you about plain language initiatives and again we look lovely except your questions throughout the webinar. If you have any lingering questions after the webinar is finished please feel free to contact me or Catherine. Our e-mail addresses are in the presentation on the last slide. Let's get started.

>> Here is the overview. We will talk about the principles of plain language and I will take that section. We'll talk about how to edit content according to plain language principles and to discuss that topic, I will use the samples that I think you, the before and after plain language samples I think you in handouts you received in advance of the webinar.

>> The third section, how the plain writing act could affect your agency's operations, Catherine will be after that. And the last one is additional plain language training and resources. If we have lots and lots of questions today and we are not able to discuss that, I will be sure that these will be valuable for you, that is the fourth section of the pilot -- or the presentation and if we cannot talk you through it you also have access to them.

>> Here we are, I am the lady on the left and Catherine is the lady on the right and here's a little bit about our roles and titles. Let's get started. The principle of plain language. So what is plain language anyway? According to definitions put together by Plain, it is communication are audience can understand the first time they read it or hear it. It's absolutely the most simple and clearest definition of a quite accurate definition. You have written about -- plain language if your readers can understand what is written first time they hear it or read it. I communication is in planning which is the readers can find what they read, understand what they find and act appropriately on that understanding.

>> This is quite important, finding what they need, we talk about web content written in plain language, that is not at ability. That is not at ability -- navigability. And understanding what they find, and the latter item is the highest measure of success in plain writing. Can your reader do what he or she intended to do or needed to do as a result of reading your content?

>> Plain language of the communication philosophy, and it's not brand-new but of course legislation passed last October and the Federal Communications Commission it -- has given it has given it renewed vigor and a transfusion and it's coming into new life.

>> Plain language is a community and what a wonderful thing for those of us who are endeavoring to write in plain language and also nurtures and coaches our colleagues to write in plain language. The federal government's voice on plain language, or PLAIN, there is a lot of different agencies with plain language programs and there is a laundry list on this slide. This is from pre-October 2010 and there are probably many others even in the few months since the law was passed. Plainly which community gives awards for excellence in writing in plain language and again my list may not be comprehensive but the Center for plain language does give a clear mark award at every April, NIH plain language at initiative has an award and a banquet and all of it. It's a community and for those of you who are just at the start of causing change towards plain language in your organization, the part of this community is a wonderful thing. In plain language is a law. There you go and it is a screenshot with the fancy script, the plain writing act.

>> This is passed and not over 2010 and I could not be prouder and happier that this plain writing act has been passed into law. But out in the world, some people respond to this passage of a law with great script -- great skepticism. I was teaching a web writing class this week at a local research organization and when I wrote mentioned this plain language while one of the participants actually snorted. She snorted out loud and I said what is the matter? She said there should not be a law for this and why in the world we need a law to say that federal communications should be comprehensible? As part of the plain language community of course I am quite happy that there is a law because the law self support the best practice in the best intention of communicators.

>> That writing would be understood by people the first time they read it and that the intended reader would be able to act on it. So plain language is that indications philosophy, a community, and a law. Plain language shifts writers decisions at every stage of the writing process. I laid out the three stages of the writing process, the stage when we are planning what's right, the stage when we are drafting our content, and the stage when we are reviewing it before sending it to the reader. I would have to say that most discussion of plain language takes on the issues listed under the reviewing stage.

>> When we talk about plain language, I think too often people go right to these kind of work level and sentence level concerns of plain language. Under the reviewing stage yes we do check writing for plain language rivalry publish it to guarantee is that concise? Is it a concrete wording and have I edited out multiple uses of the word utilized in favor of the more simple word used? Will the readers understand the jargon or acronyms and if there is jargon have I defined it? Those are some of the nickel and dime or bread-and-butter concerns of writing in plain language.

>> I would like to encourage you to think of plainly which is broadly as possible and if it is to be successful at the word and sentence level, then we must consider plain language issues from the planning stage from the very beginning, before the document is even born and when it is just a glimmer and the writers I. We consider plain language concerns while we are planning a document or content, we ask ourselves questions like does this content meet an actual need? Am I writing because someone actually needs to read this?

>> We ask other writers have I anticipated the readers questions and I mean that lightly really. I mean that literally. Before you craft a single sentence, you must conceive of the readers questions, and I believe you should write them down and use them to structure your document. Does the document have a clear message? We addressed this concern during planning and do we know what we are going to say, do we have a point? If so, is it put it -- does it put in a place where the reader can find it and finally will this enable readers to take action? If that is the intended outcome after reading the document, can the readers take action? Before we write anything to this, plan a paragraph, if we intend to write in plain language we consider the four questions I just described.

>> Once we are drafting the document or we are putting words and phrases into sentences and sentences into paragraphs, we're asking ourselves questions like is the content broken into logical units or chunks? Are the chapters of the right size,

are there in a paragraphs and are they grouped in a logical way? Does the content offered the right amount and type of information for the readers questions? We struggle to write in plain language frequently as we are offering way more information than the reader cares about it possibly not the right type and in government writing it is frequently offering overly technical or sophisticated content for readers who have more basic questions.

>> While we are drafting have we included headings that will enable readers to scan. The best practice would be to write headings that are actually the readers questions verbatim or are very similar. So, as we move on from this section of the webinar where we talk about the principles of plain language, I would just like to say that timing which doesn't happen at the end of any writing process. If we are going to be able to write plainly and to check our writing forward changes, punctuation changes at the reviewing stage, we must have started inking and the plain language way from the very beginning of our writing process at the planning stage.

>> Let's go on. Plain language, we know it when we see it. Like the visitors to the Smithsonian Art Museum who say I may not know a lot about art I know what I like. We may not be able to list all of the precepts and principles of plain language, but we certainly know we see plain language and when we see language or are struggling to read and find which does not plain. Here is an example, a web content example of not plain language. Local veterans employment representatives conduct outreach to employers to engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans, encourage the hiring of disabled veterans and generally assist veterans to gain and retain employment. This is not plain and why?

>> I have underlined some of the most unclaimed language. It uses euphemisms instead of simple words. It says we're going to conduct outreach to hiring executives and the simple term for that euphemism would be employer. It uses unnecessary modifiers. It says at the end that we will generally assist veterans and we certainly do not need generally in front of assist. We could specifically assist veterans but we do not need the word generally and at the end it says to gain and retain employment. I went back and forth on this one. At first it seemed an unnecessary pairing of herbs. Of herbs -- verbs. This is a not plain passage.

>> Here's a plain language rewrite and why experiences it feels like a nice cold glass of water on a hot day. Local veterans employment representatives contact employers to encourage them to hire veterans, including disabled veterans, and generally assist veterans in finding and keeping jobs. We kept the generally assist and we kept finding and keeping but the meaning of those two words, that pairing of words is more specific. Plain language, we know it when we see it or candidly we know the -- we know what we see on plain language.

>> I will take a moment here, does anyone want to ask a question?

>> There are not any questions right now someone away gift folks just a few seconds to see if there are not any questions that might come in.

>> Okay.

>> Let's keep going.

>> All right, wonderful. Now we are in the second part of the webinar. This is about editing content or documents according to plain language principles. As I mentioned before the webinar, I think you a list of samples before and after samples, and we will talk about principles of editing content or practices were editing content according to the plain language principles by looking at the samples. I hope that you have had the chance to look at them and if you have not we will look at them now and you will have the handouts as a reference. You can study the samples further on your own time if you would like.

>> This is a screenshot of the handout document that you received from me or from Jamal earlier this week and I have a method to my madness here in gathering these before and after samples for you.

>> I believe that having before and after samples of documents that were not written in plain language and then were rewritten according to plainly which principles is an essential item in your toolkit if you intend to advocate for plainly was writing in your organization. It's much easier to convince someone that you think a particular document should be rewritten according to the plain language principles if you can simple -- if you can simply show the before and after. It's much easier to advocate for change if you have something concrete in hand to show.

>> One beautiful benefit of the growth of the plain language community is that many organizations are showing before and after examples. I cherry picked a few to talk

with you. Here's the very first one. This is from an Army information security program handbook. I am going to cheat and skip the before and take a look at the after version first and I will circle back around and look at the before version. This is a tiny scrap of writing, a little piece of writing from a much larger document, but it does give us a chance to talk about why this is written in plain language and was back and look at the other version in just one minute.

>> One thing it is after version is noted as being written in plain language because it focuses on using the pronoun you. The relationship between the writer and the reader is very clear. The writer is addressing the reader as you and especially because this is a transactional document it is meant to tell the reader what to do, how to comply with the regulation or a security practice. It is very important to use the pronoun you. It's old-school, bureaucratic writing that says we should not address the reader and we should address them as one and the agency should also be referred to as the agency and that is really not current thought and it's not a principle of plain writing.

>> It's direct to address the reader as you. This is an example of plain language because of the subject and verb are so close to each other and that is the sentence core, the unit of meaning that the reader is gaining for and it is really helpful for readers is the subject and a verb or nearby.

>> You may use, you should follow, you should ensure, mail should meet, all of those pairings make the writing is your job is to. Make the writing easier to understand. The last thing is that the author has used a vertical list, and A&B lists or 123 lists and that makes it easier to read and makes it more plain.

>> Let's go back and look at the before. I think we can handle it now. This is a difficult sample of writing. It doesn't even call itself out as handbook content. We are not actually sure by reading this but it's to recognize on how to behave or what to do. The whole first paragraph is kind of an abstraction about who established a procedure, but not what the procedure is. There is no doer mentioned at all, there are no people in here, no person, and therefore it's really difficult to tell this is a set of instructions which of course it is.

>> Let's move along now and look at the next sample. This is an airworthy regulation and I do like to share this example when I can because it is reassuring to me the -- to know that even reference materials like regulations, materials that do not have narrative and the, but readers do not pick up and page through for pure fun, these two can be written in plain language. These are -- there are several features that make it more difficult than it needs to be. The typography is difficult, that Mr. -- the mixture of all uppercase and lowercase, the hyphens make it different to read. This content does have short headings like applicability, airworthiness directives, but it is used to head General. -- had a general areas which is difficult. The writer had the instinct but the headers are not useful yet and the reader is still struggling. The headers are not very complete.

>> Here is the after version. It's one of those cleanups where the improvement is easy to see right away. I show you this today because this sample employs one of the best plain language strategies, one of the most practical plain language strategies, and that is to use the reader's questions in the document. A writer may use the reader's questions to help plan the document, but it is also possible to use the reader's questions right in the document it again tremendous benefit that is what is happening in this example. Not all of the headings are written in the form of the reader's questions, but more than half of them are. 39.9% -- 39.9, what if I operate an aircraft or product that does not meet requirements of airworthiness directives? This is in the reader's own words.

>> I want to mention briefly that the presence of questions and documents is very satisfying to readers, besides being practical, it reassures the in the way that I think most overwhelmed readers are glad to be reassured, it says I have thought about you, I am the writer and I have thought about you, and I am going to represent your questions in your own words. This reassuring quality of questions is apparent and how much people rely on FAQs online. This is the only type of web content known by an acronym. Without -- we do not call the contact us page to see you -- be CU page but with a FAQ, we see our content represented in our own words. Harness the power of questions if writing in plain language because it is a tremendous power from the reader's point of view.

>> Here is the next sample, and I debated showing this to you, and I think on your monitor it must look like a wall of words. It certainly looks that way on my

monitor. This is a passage from an application to NIH for funding for a study and I am not going to read this out loud to you, but I will feature briefly some of the struggles the reader will have with this because the content is kind of tipped over. A good application for funding describes why, what I want you to give me money for which is a great idea. This one straddles that topic and the topic of why the problem of substance abuse and truck drivers in Nigeria is a problem.

>> This struggle to balance the description of the problem with the description of the solution which is why I want you to give me money, that struggle is one many many writers face. I think this writer is kind of buried under it. The opening of this passage is probably too heavy on data for the reader to actually grasp of what is going on and what is being asked for. The writer continues that way with a high level of specificity about the population they are going to study into little -- and much too little about the reason the study will solve the problem. And down the section about public health relevance, the writer does not answer the question why should I fund this research? The writer is answering the question what do you propose to do, but the reader is probably still asking why should I fund this research?

>> Here is the after version. I think probably if you want to get the full differences with the writer achieved in the before and after, you should probably study this on your own desktop so you can read it more carefully. You can see that the after version is a little bit shorter which is always nice, or almost always nice. I want to point you to the end where the writer explains the public health relevance. This really shifted from describing the problem to describing why they need to study the problem. Substance abuse and addiction places a significant burden on families and individuals. The health-care costs for treating substance addiction can be staggering. His research will contribute to the cost effective methods for reducing substance use. I admire this revision.

>> I think that shifting from describing the problem to describe the solution is one of the hallmarks of shifting towards plain language and serving the readers needs. So often we get sucked into describing what we know in our document is in describing the problem, and we do not have the nerve or the self-control to describe the solution or in many cases what the reader wants to know. The shift from the poor to be after in this example is rather subtle but I think it's a really good one.

>> I have a few more samples to show you, but I think I am going to take a break right here and ask if there are any questions. I have at least four more samples to talk with you about but does anyone have a question?

>> There are a couple. The first question is do you have any advice for writing FAQs for websites?

>> I do have lots of advice for writing FAQs for websites and you would like you can go to my website and download a style guide that our company developed for the energy information administration on how to write FAQs. We have a specific style guide for that task alone. The style guide is illustrated with examples from the energy information administration so you'll have to build a rope bridge of your own content but the advice of their. I will run over a few points right now and then we can move on.

>> The most purple piece of advice is -- the most practical piece of advice is answer the question. I know that sounds silly but raised the question in a way that you can't answer it and answer it with as few words as possible. Secondly, choose the questions words very carefully because the question words, who, what come a win, where, why, and how are some of the most concrete words we have available to us. If you choose the question words carefully the likelihood of answering it completely is much greater.

>> For example, the instead of writing are there ways to sweet -- to treat swine flu? That is an old raised question, it should be how do pediatricians treat swine flu? That is an example but again if you would like to download the style guide is available and you have any questions about it I would be glad to answer those.

>> Great, thank you. Here's a follow-up to the FAQ question. Which is easier to read, and FAQ questions or a faxed sheet with statements?

>> It depends upon the length and complexity of content but overall, and FAQ document were FAQ content online is more likely to be appealing to readers because the questions can be written in their very own words.

>> Ray, thank you. Another question. When is it okay to use plain language and professional writing? Does it depend upon the task was situation?

>> If you take the notion that plain language is simplified or dumbed down, you could get quite worried that the accuracy and authenticity of your writing would be diminished by plain language. But if you take the proper definition of plain language which is writing that your intended reader can understand, then it is appropriate at all professional situations. Subject matter experts should write to other subject matter expert in plain language. Novices will not be able to understand that content if it's not intended for them that is not a problem. Writing in plain language does not cost expertise, it does not mean that the content should be less sophisticated. It should be only as sophisticated as the intended reader can understand.

>> If you are an academic at the most erudite place in the whole world of your discipline, you should write in plain language to other people just like you. As long as your intended reader can understand it, it's written in plain language. Now unfortunately, most of the time, we have more than one intended reader and those intended readers differ quite a bit and what they can understand and that is where the challenge appears.

>> Thank you Leslie. We'll be putting the link to the FAQ style guide in the chat box. One more question. While translating complex language into plain language is useful, what advice do you have for breaking up huge paragraphs or extremely text heavy pages?

>> I like the way you phrased your question, you said you'd paragraphs and extremely text heavy pages. If anything is huge or extreme, it's probably going to be a burden to the reader. I would say that in general, workplace writing is written in smaller units now than it was a generation ago. Paragraphs are shorter. Writers use far more headings than they did a generation ago. Readers expect them in print documents and Web content like readers expect to be able to and proactively. If the paragraph appears huge or extremely long it's probably too long and should be broken into smaller units and identified by headings.

>> It is possible to over fragment your writing and use too much whitespace but it's so rare I do not think you need to worry about it in most cases.

>> I think I will jump back into the samples and take questions again after a bit. The next example is from the Washington State Department of Labor and this is a confirmation letter. You are looking at the before version. I included this in the samples because this is a slim, trim piece of writing and there are no huge paragraphs and it's not loaded with bureaucratic language was unexplained acronyms nor does it have incredibly long sentences. This is, I would say, pretty okay. This is not problematic piece of writing, but, it's not easy to scan and it's not easy to tell at a glance that under certain conditions, the reader is supposed to do something. There is not a whole lot of do and why -- implied.

>> This is the after version on the -- and in this version the writer has used a couple of headings. The letter opens we have received your public records request and are now assembling the materials you requested. One of the two dues out of this letter is that the recipient may have to pay for the copies, so the writer has simply added the heading how do I pay for my copies which is a very practical thing to do. Because the writer has added this heading I would say that there is a good chance that the writer has offset a lot of follow-up phone calls from recipients who do not realize that they might have to pay for copies and how they should pay for copies if it is necessary to pay for them.

>> Pardon me, there is also more we and you writings in the after version and I was in the beginning. We have received, we expect to mail, we accept personal checks and in the end, if you prefer, you may place your order, etc. very I imagine some people might say is it okay to start all those sentences with the word we in the middle paragraphs under how do I pay for my copies and I would say yes it is in this case. Not every sentence begins with we. There is one before that begins with a different word however, but because this is about what the Department of Labor and industries is going to do and what they want the letter recipient to do, we and you wording is really appropriate.

>> On the right-hand side you are seeing a flyer kind of document that was inserted with a letter. I wanted to highlight this because so often we struggle as writers with the challenge of figuring out how much is enough? How much did I put in his letter, on this webpage, in this document? How I handle the fact that there may be follow-up questions? I think it's very practical that the Department of Labor and industries in Washington added a second document, conifer reference the document

also written in plain language said they were able to keep the message very short. For anyone who needs more, here is more and quite a bit more detail but it's not all folded into the same, single document.

>> This is a good example for us to have in our collection. I also wanted to feature samples from agencies that are not federal which is important as well. Here is an example from the Florida Department of children and families and I know you cannot read it, but I think we should just all together use what happened from before and after. We have some massive shrinkage on the before and then the after in this example speaks for itself, doesn't it? One study to be for so much but we will take a quick look at the after.

>> This is an interesting example. This is not actually a transactional example. The reader is not intended to do something, but this is an example where the writer is letting the reader know that we heard you, we receive your feedback. This is a good example of plain language that controls its tone and plain language that manages and relationship, but does not intend to cause any other communication. Thank you for your letter the writer says, it shows your compassion and understanding and I agree with what you said and if you need any to bashing the need to say anything else you may contact me directly. This is a good example of where caring language will probably end this communication in a way that satisfies the reader. That is really important I think.

>> The next example, this is a screenshot of the handouts I say it was on page 2 on the handouts package. How is this content difficult for readers? I was showing you a content sample of a Aflatoxin. [ Indiscernible-muffled speaker ]

>> When we look at the first version of this content, I think this is difficult for most readers, but it's certainly difficult for non-expert readers. I think this is difficult for expert readers as well, expert needed headers just like the rest of us to, but I think this is really tough going for non-expert readers and it is intended for their use as well. It includes unfamiliar terms, even the term carcinogen might be unfamiliar to novice readers. It dead ends. Online readers have expectations and there are no headers. I do not know if we're looking at huge or extreme paragraphs, but the third and the fourth are rather long.

>> It does not have any understandable features or in a vertical list that are numbered and there is no use of bold or italics for emphasis and it contains wordy phrases that are not really appropriate for novices or experts alike. The opening to the fourth paragraph, of particular importance was the finding is not a good example of the pairing of the subject and a verb. This content is difficult.

>> Here is the after and that is actually published now. I look at this just for the webinar to be sure that it is still a period -- but it is still up. The title is Aflatoxin in liver cancer and the writer is reading both of those audiences. You may not associate Aflatoxin in liver cancer and the header does that job. It is a naturally occurring toxin produced by mold. Here's a good example of inaccurate definition that has not been dumbed down. The experts will not need this in -- this definition but it's really one on them to look at it for a moment. The second line where the writer says that the discovery of genetic changes resulting from Aflatoxin has led to a better understanding of the link between Aflatoxin and cancer risk in humans.

>> There is a wonderful use of a graphic and this is interesting to expert certainly, and it's understandable to novices. Novice readers may not care about this graphic is much as the experts will, but it is understandable. And then the paragraph under the graphic, I used to read Eric to point to about how the writer says that they grow on whole grains such as corn and then it lists a whole grains and other items because a non-expert readers would be very interested in that kind of information I would need that list to make the content meaningful for him or her.

>> Here is the last example I would like to show you. I will talk about about the publication, energy and brief and then I will tell you what you're looking at. This is a publication that I cut -- that I think comes out every two months from the energy information administration and that is the same group for whom we received or produced the FAQ style guide and it is intended to be a one-page, simple, direct answer to sophisticated questions about energy. It is intended for non-expert readers, sophisticated readers, but not experts on energy topics.

>> Here is the first draft of the energy and brief. How is my electricity price to? This is a nice artifact to show you and here is the first draft, and it starts out

with kind of an academic sounding exit -- and academic sounding answer.

>> The answer is a major component of the price of your electricity is the cost and availability and I know that all of you wordsmiths are taking out your virtual red pens and copy editing that now. This also affects the price of your electricity and causes it to fluctuate. You really do not have an answer. Before full how you pose these questions because you need to be prepared to answer it. It is followed by a rather complex graphic. Only those who have a deep passion for this topic I think we'll be able to make good use of the difference in the paths of the Gold line and the purple line. The graphic is rather complex for the intended reader.

>> Here is what was published and I think this is a lovely case study. Many factors affect the price you pay for electricity. The writer decided to answer the question in the header and I think that was very clever because then they were able to elaborate on the factors. So they are not simplifying the information, they are providing a vertical list on all the complex factors that do affect what you pay for electricity. You will notice the sentences are shorter than they were in the original draft. The writers integrated familiar language like on peak hours. And then the paragraph below the bulleted list says it can affect supply, particularly for renewables and then they define that. This is a great artifact for you to have.

>> I think this walk or all of these examples in my language gives us certainly a good look at how content can be improved. I think amongst us who are interested in this topic, we know the effort that it takes to write in plain language. We know that the actors of the samples we have looked at just now required a great deal of effort on the writer's part. I'll take another deep breath right out of NASA for any questions.

>> There are quite a few questions. If we do not get to everyone's questions, we are going to make sure that all the questions get answered and Leslie has graciously let us know that she will be answering all of them. Here's a question. In your example of the Aflatoxin Utah probably roll of the graphic, can you talk about the role of graphics and design and developing clear information?

>> I will talk about it just briefly because that is a really big and interesting topic and it also points out one of our challenges as plain language writers. We could say that someone asked us for the stone cold truth and we're struggling with the words here. The words are hard enough and the graphics are a whole other issue that it really is not a whole other issue. We're trying to meet the needs of two separate audiences, we can offset some of the difficulties of using language alone to meet the needs of a range of readers by using graphics.

>> If your content is highly sophisticated and you're struggling to meet the needs of your less sophisticated readers, you can use graphics to show things more simply. The sample we looked at in this case, the words actually were most useful to the novice readers but the graphic to help meet the needs of the more sophisticated or expert reader. And of course, graphics are a combination of words and text and it's very important that the labeling, the captions and the titles are written in plain language so that people can understand. Just a short answer to one of the biggest questions of person could ask. Or, ask me a second question.

>> Thank you. Plainly which principles, how can this be applied to social media?

>> That is a really interesting question. I had not really thought about that because I think social media more rarely suffers from a plane -- from not plain language and the social media is the wild wild West of communication and if you laid a communication aid and social media, no one responds. I think the communication market of social media actually encourages people to write in plain language and if ever there was a communication environment where you are using language that would connect with your followers or fans or friends it would be in social media. It's a perfect laboratory or in mind that for writing in plain language. I cannot give any justification for not writing in plain language and social media.

>> Great, thank you. This person had a question about how do they went over there engineers that they work for that seem to think that the more complex their language is, the smarter they appear?

>> I think I know the period -- I think I know them. [ Laughter ]

>> I would say that at the start of your campaign to write in plain language, you should let your engineers write and the most sophisticated language they want and let that overly sophisticated and in conference will language stay in the document also, but make sure that the parts of the document but the reader is going to read most likely, like the executive summary, is written in plain language. Plain and not



plain language can coexist as long as the not plain language is aggregated and does not get it to these all over the plain language -- is separated and that it does not get its cooties all over. When you're trying to convince people to shift thinking about the writing is a very hard shift so I would say that make sure that the initial part of your campaign, make sure that they not plain section coexist with the plain section and that the plane section is in a better place where it gets more attention. Over time advocate were taking to not plain exceptions out.

>> Would you like to take one more question and then we can move onto Katherine's portion?

>> We should go there now because she has a lot of important information to convey and if there are time for questions at the end that will be great. I do not need to hang up the phone at 2:30 and I can stay on at the end of that we were. Let's go on to Katherine.

>> Hello everyone. I will talk briefly about how the plain writing act could affect your agency's operation. Here is an overview of the act it felt -- the act itself. This requires thorough agencies to use clear communication to the public can understand and Leslie whatever the two definitions of plain language. It includes all documents that are needed to get federal benefits or the services or for filing taxes, provide information about benefits or services, or documents that explain how to comply with requirements administered or enforced by federal government. Those are documents going out to the federal public.

>> The act is looking towards public documents. This includes documents on the web. There are many key dates for the writing act in the first, OMB Mr. issue final guidance I April 13. By July 13, agencies must designate a senior official for plain writing and that person is going to be in charge of that ministry the whole program basically.

>> They will figure out what the agency planned is an -- sending compliance reports back. He also needed to submit an implementation plan to OMB sell you have to work together and come up with a plan on how you're going to start to comply with the act. You also need to create a plain writing webpage may be on the open government page may be linked for that. But we have also created a language you can use and you can find out what was on plain language.gov. We have some draft language you can use them back and be the first start for your webpage. Your webpage will need to include your point of contact and your compliance reports for the act.

>> On October 13 you must all be using plain language and new or substantially revised documents going out to the public. We really need to have your program on the okay going in and have writing as clearly as possible and you also need to start writing annual compliance reports and post these reports on the plain language webpage.

>> Next slide. Your action items. You guys are all wet a ahead of the game. You're taking this webinar right now and of course there is another place to find a plain language training and I am the cochair of plain language.gov and we offer seminars on plain language to any government agency such as out online -- so check us out online. We have classes that are focused on print writing, print writing and web writing, and we can do whatever works best for you guys. You also need to start working on posting a plain writing act page for your agency and like I mentioned that could be on the open government page.

>> We have the language you can use for your page they are. You can also start applying OMB approved federal plain language guidelines to documents and webpages.

>> Of course, when you start working on your new documents or revising documents, think about the key content that your agency puts out. What are your top tasks, what documents do you really care about so start focusing on those documents and start implementing plain language and to them. You want to get as much as possible out of the act from the get go.

>> Next slide. Here are some quick references. They have been mentioned but we have a complete webpage on our website on the writing act and it has everything you possibly want to know on there so check that out. You can find the OMB preliminary guidance from December and you can find it directly at the White House website or our website and of course web manager University, will have a series of these webinars to team up between them so we're looking forward to that and hope that you are as well. Before I stopped babbling, let me talk briefly about regulations.

>> The act does not cover regulations, however, 13563 was published yesterday about improving regulation and regulatory review. It says that our regulatory system must

assure that regulations are acceptable, consistent, and written in plain language and easy to understand. There is a new shift to thinking about using plain language and regulation. These are not easy to comprehend the first time sometimes even on the third or fourth time reading them, they are usually very dense. It also is saying to focus on clear writing and your regulations but 1356 races up front to use plain language. [ Indiscernible-muffled speaker ]

>> And 1288 12888 says each regulations must apply its effect and clear and plain language. Another thing I did not add to the side with the best practices for federal agencies. Best practices document came out back in November back in November 2010 that state agencies should use plain might -- plain writing and regulatory document to nature that stakeholders have a clear understanding of agency requirements and intentions and the plain writing should also be used when conducting detailed analysis and comparisons of alternative solutions and increase understanding and reduce uncertainty. When people say we do not need to use plain mileage and regulations because they're all technical and they need to be very legalistic and all of that, that is a topic that everyone likes to say, we are all subject matter experts and we are all very busy, but we don't have time to translate. This is coming directly from the White House, start using my mileage in your regulations and make sure that people can read them clearly were you to not have to sit down and read over and over again before you finally get it. It's a great idea and a very good best practice to use plain language and any kind of document including regulations.

>> Next one. Very briefly, and as Leslie mentioned, we had a great plain language community. I work with many different agencies on daily basis and they are very excited about the new act. It's going to be a bigger and better community as things develop. We mentioned that obviously GSA has classes and then there is the NIH time I was program, and then we saw examples from the FAA. And then for my own as there is with the USCIS we asked plain if we could have classes and we adopted the program to meet the needs of documents that are agency rights. That is a great model for those of you out there trying to come up with a way to start your own plain language program. We did a basic class at PLAIN anyone to look at that training and adopt it, here is a planet which and how it relates to your own document it really comes home because it is not just a philosophy and becomes an actual practice that applies to your work.

>> People tend to have a hard time saying how does this apply to me that once you take a training class, it makes it relate to the work and it really works. So PLAIN it's worth it -- is offering a trainer trainer program so we come to your agency and you can talk to our trainers and get the materials and adopted or adapted to your own needs. We have a great program at USCIS and we do training in person or WebEx or videoconferencing or educational videos. We have had to plain language awards already so anything is possible. It's daunting at first but if you jump in there and you look at what your top tasks and top documents that your agency rights, you could really put together a plain language program that is good. I think that is it. Any questions question

>> Yes, there are. How will the plain language act be enforced? If the agencies ignore the act what are the ramifications?

>> That is an excellent question and I do not know the answer. Like I said, OMB must under the act must sit at the final guidelines by April 13 to the federal government and as far as I know they have not stated anything yet as to the plant on how people will be penalized. There will be report that they be debt -- but they do need to send.

>> This process is a work of viral site that is a.org and not a.gov so is the plain language guide is for them?

>> If it is a federal website directing information to the public about the government, then I would think that it definitely would end as I said before it is a best practice is to use plain writing anyway. Hopefully, the.org is already using plain language taxes on their website.

>> And do all the agencies have to make their own planet was webpage?

>> Yes, it's a plain language webpage that might be off the webpage or wherever you decided to put it in there has not been specific guidance yet. We are still waiting for the April 13 information to come out like I said play mileage.glove -- plain language of.gov has a lot of information that you can use to go there and take a look at that. You have to have your point of contact for your program and list your

compliance point and I am not sure what a -- what else OMB would like to have.

>> Could you clarify who needs to comply with the act's?

>> It says the executive agencies so I think they're going for top-level agencies that I think it's going to be passed back -- as practices for everybody to use it. Let me see what actually says in the guidance. Of course, my computer froze. There he go. They are we go.

>> [ Silence ]

>> Should I ask another question why we were looking for that information question of -- does it --

>> Display which refer to historical documents? For example, publication about this is procedures with instructions from 1930.

>> No, it only applies to these newly written from October 13 applies to these newly written from October 13, 2011 on in anything you're substantially revising. So, if there is a massive document is not a historic document, or newer that you're going to revise, that will need to be in plain language but if it is something from the 30s, no, that can be in the regular form.

>> You mentioned also that free courses are offered in are those in person or online?

>> They are in person right now that we are striving -- we are trying to work with GSA to come up with good ideas for webinars but right now, it's only in person.

>> Also come to add-on from the GSA perspective, we are planning a course hopefully in April or May of 2011 it will be an online course so that will be another resource for people outside the DC area.

>> Great. I just found the answer on the writing aspect of this act. The term agency needs an executive agency as defined under section 105 of title five United States code. So if anybody what to look that up, that is what to refer to.

>> Thank you. We have several questions and why don't I open it up for questions that are either for Leslie or Catherine, feel free to jump in either one of you. This person says they have some technical manuals felt more specific, internal audiences and they are required to make the manuals public because of transparency. How should they apply play mileage in this case, or do they need to -- how should they apply play in language in this case or do they need to?

>> I will jump in first. For practical purposes they are not intending to rewrite the technical annual, nor should they. What they should create I would say is a webpage threshold or for your or something, and entry written in plain language to the content that is highly technical, and not useful for all readers.

>> As we saw the first slide, so people can be able to find, understand, and out upon plain language content so you should be able to find or navigate to the technical manual from the webpage but I suggest you create. They should be able to understand what the technical manuals contain his on the plain language webpage that you create. If there are any general or public readers that needs to as on anything in the technical manual, they should be able to understand what actions they may have to take impossible to which section of the manual covers the actions they might have to take, but they should not be required, you should not rewrite the technical manual because you have to meet the need of the primary reader which is other people who are technical. Catherine, what do you think?

>> I agree completely. I think you should have a Gateway page on your web to the manual with plain language summaries and if you have a lot of technical terms that are not defined and the technical manual may include a glossary on that page or attached to that page it says here is a summary of what the manual and tales and here are some of the words we use in it. If you feel the people will read the whole manual and want to know what the technical words mean but I would not rewrite the manual either.

>> What about plain language for legal documents?

>> I will answer a bit and then Catherine UK jump in -- you can jump in. I know that the legal community has a very strong plain language movement and it is older than the October legislation. The legal community itself has a strong plain language movement, but as we all know, many legal documents are not written in plain language but it's not for the lack of leading figures in the leading -- legal community advocating for plain language. If you have legal content that you wish were written in plain language, you should get into the resources of the legal community have the offer. They have their own plain language organizations and many good books on plain language. But if what you're saying that people with legal background are Connelly

writing in the not plain fashion, and all kinds of documents and not just legal ones, there you have every right to advocate for plain language.

>> I agree Leslie. There is a great myth that it's not accepted in the legal community to use plain language but that is completely the opposite. There is a huge plain language of Bush and the legal community site anywhere you can come up with a happy balance and keep your citations, right around it in clear language which that your audience can understand -- and clear language which your audience can understand.

>> Anything else?

>> Yes, can you please point out important considerations needed when writing in plain language for a desk site and a mobile site? What would be the most important to consider?

>> Now, can I say whoa! The most plain language you can use at a mobile site is a stripping down the navigation and content and I have participated in developing content for mobile sites, through web manager University and my own personal take away from that class as a web writer with that you prepare your mobile site to include the greatest hit first on the navigation and the second on navigation or second on content and you prepare the mobile site so that almost all of it is transactional. The part that your site -- the parts of your site that are purely informational will probably not get a whole lot of play in the mobile site as it might at the desk site.

>> The mobile site is the highest example of purely transactional Web content, namely, what will people who are holding a very small device, looking at it in bright sunlight while they are buffeted a chilling winds or something, what will they want to do with the content? It really is an exercise in plain language. Katherine?

>> I don't know if I have any thing additional that you honestly want to keep everything extremely streamlined on the mobile site. I agree with what you're saying. We have really not started working on a mobile site yet for USCUS.

>> This is a question for Catherine. What is the plain language law, the demographics of the US or technical writing professionals?

>> I think there is a great desire from the public to understand what the government is doing. Plain language as a civil right, people elect government officials and the officials take over office and in a -- and they put in laws and they don't understand what it means that you have all of these regulations out so this is a great benefit to have everybody on the same page and understand what everybody is doing. If we can write fairly, it only helps. I think that is what pushed it. People are frustrated at not understanding government documents and having to comply with the requirements and getting pings sent back to them -- and getting things set back to them and having to reread things all the time. It was not one specific group but many people in the public thing they need to be changed and people inside the government or working in thing this is ridiculous, how are we communicating with the public? We need to step up and write so that everybody understands.

>> I would like to add onto that a bit. I think what she said is absolutely true and I think our cultural hunger for clarity and language comes because they're actually reading and writing a whole lot more than we were a generation ago. I teach writing classes, lots of times it's the older participants who have had a work life pre-e-mail and they come out with the kids these days, that kind of grumbling. Kids these days don't know how to write and all they know how to do is text. But what we know about the writing and reading behaviors of people in their teens and early 20s is that they engage with words and language a lot.

>> They do not do and very formal ways and they do not do it in the luminous ways that they engage with text a lot. Just as we expect to have it easy access to information, especially online, what Catherine said is very true, we expect to understand it and that is because the reading and writing and finding a lot more. That has been a profound change with our lives online. We read, write, and find a lot more and we want to be able to understand.

>> Thank you. Can we speak of the about the use of -- [ Indiscernible-muffled speaker ]

>> Sure, I can do that and I will speak about active voice very quickly and I'll get back into the presentation to show the remaining slides and we can take any questions that are still to be asked at the end. Active voice simply means the subject of the sentence is doing the action of the verb, that is all active voice means. The relationship between the subject and a verb. An example of this event

written in active voice would be John gave a gift to marry. John is doing the giving edit to the present tense, past tense, or future tense and still be active voice. John gives, that is present tense, John gave, that is past tense, and John will give, that is the future. The subject is doing the action of the verb.

>> The passive version is the gift was given to vary by John. The gift is not doing anything and it's actually receiving the action of the verb. The whole difference between active voice and passive voice is that active voice put the subject and the verb physically near each other which is very helpful for readers. The relationship between subject and verb in the active voice makes responsibility clear and causality care -- clear.

>> Passive voice is not wrong, it's just less concrete and the ways I have described. If the meeting is canceled it is presently -- it's perfectly acceptable to say the meeting was canceled in the passive voice. The mail was delivered is also passive voice that we usually know who delivered the mail so we can say that sentence and passive voice. But the active voice has the tightness, the cause and effect, and the clarity that many readers expect.

>> All right, let's jump into the last section of the webinar and there will be a little more time for questions again. Here's part four. Where to find additional plain language training and resources and I have listed three or four options for plain language training. Catherine spoke about the first one. She asked he spoke about plain language.gov or plain language training options and they have a page that lists free online training and I gave you the URL there. USA.gov also has classes are plain language pages. Also, web manager University is evolving an online course in plain language that should be available this summer and I gave you the coals -- I gave you Nicole's contact information.

>> Now here is my mind was resources and I talked about the notion of a toolkit, or bag of tricks so that you can nurture plain language writing in and your colleagues. On this screen I am showing you all kinds of guidelines published by different organizations. For example, the second bullet is an easy to read NYC, New York City's guidelines for clear and effective communication and it's a handbook of about 25 or 30 pages. Many organizations have developed their own climate which guidelines.

>> You may be able to find someone else's plain language guidelines and use them as a basis for your own plain language guidelines for your own organization. I showed you before and after examples. Plain language.God has a searchable database of before and after examples which is incredibly impressive. Here are the plain language organizations that I have mentioned. I did not mention clarity which is the international organization which is promoting plain, legal language which is good for those persons asking about warriors in plain language.

>> Here's a whole list of guidelines.. Here is our contact information slide. I have listed my blog on this last green and I'm eager to tell stories so now I guess we are open for questions again.

>> This is a question that came up at the beginning of the webinar and I wonder if you can address it. This person noticed the word showed in your example as she heard a previous presenter recommended using the word must instead of the word showed -- should.

>> Aikido is a shall versus -- I think it was shall versus must. So is the person today asking about the word should?

>> They might have meant Xiao -- the word shall.

>> I will weigh an end of Catherine if you want to fish me out that might help. I think the generally held belief is that the word shall might be too wiggly to be concrete enough and especially if you're writing instructions or regulations or requirements, you should generally choose the word must over the word shall. And I am -- in my opinion the word showed is perfectly clear. The word should is perfectly clear. It is what you should do. Whether the word should, it depends upon whether you're writing a law, regulation, or a handbook and I think the example we were looking at was a handbook.

>> If the writer thinks that you should do this, this is what we want you to do, we understand that you might not be able to, but the word showed it would be perfectly okay -- the word should would be perfectly okay.

>> There is no wiggle room on the word must. Whereas Xiao -- whereas the word shall, you can interpret it in many ways so it doesn't always mean must. Folks tend toward the must decide because it keeps you out of trouble. Must is the stronger word.

Today Wesley, could you go back to the last slide with your contact information along with Catherine's so people could have a chance to write that down?

>> There we go.

>> A reminder to all of our attendees, we will send out the recording, the slides, and an evaluation like. Let's take a couple of more questions and then we will wrap up. How does that sound lastly and Catherine?

>> Sounds good.

>> There were lots of questions about the FAQs and this person wanted you to spend a -- speak a little bit more on using FAQs. They found that in several focus groups that web users complained that none of the questions were theirs and they are moving from FAQs to topical subheadings. What is your thoughts?

>> This is an interesting question and I blogged about this last summer when I taught a class at Library of Congress. I can see both sides of that argument. First of all, the question after indicated that he or she did use research and in that case if you have answers from your users say they are now preferring FAQs that is a great foundation to eliminate. We also have experienced the FAQs can turn into the junk drawer of your website. There can be so many FAQs that they can be poorly sorted, some FAQs grow by the content donor where they add the newest question to the top of the list and that is the whole procedure for developing them. The FAQs have to be maintained well to be of use.

>> I think is an idiot for FAQs as part of the culture of the Web. Some users it nor navigation and go right to the search box because they have been burned by unclear navigation in the past. Some people ignore specific content pages and go right to the FAQs because the needs are not being represented so FAQs are a place where users predict that it will be likely that they will get their questions answered. If you're answering user questions robustly and a part of your site you may not need FAQs. It is just for the culture of online reading, but if your readers say that they prefer different content more power to you and it makes a lot of sense to shift it.

>> Thank you. A lot of the questions left are pretty similar so why don't we go ahead and wrap up. Do you have anything else to add Leslie or Catherine?

>> Not really but it do go to play my wish... if you have any questions and our meetings are open to everybody. The meeting information is on our website.

>> Make you so much. This was a great webinar and I hope you all enjoyed it. Like I said we will be sending out the links. We will send all of this out via e-mail as well. It will help us get feedback on our courses and how we can improve our future courses. Just as a reminder, we are developing an online filing which course which we hope to have available in late spring or early summer so stay tuned for early details about that. You can also check out our course schedule at Wynn manager University... -- Web manager University.gov. Thank you all so much.

>> [ Event concluded ]