

U. S. Department of Commerce

Plain Writing Act Compliance Report

May 27, 2014

I. Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing:

Jim Hock, Director of Public Affairs, was the senior agency official for plain writing during the scope of this compliance report, calendar year 2013. In 2014, responsibility for the Plain Writing Act transferred to the Office of the Executive Secretariat. Madhura Valverde is the Director of the Office of the Executive Secretariat and has assumed the role of senior official for plain writing.

- Office of the Secretary (OSec) - Terry Layton
- Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) - Eugene Cottilli
- Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) – Jeannine Aversa
- U.S. Census Bureau - Neil Tillman
- Economic Development Administration (EDA) - John Atwood
- Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA) - Jacque Mason
- International Trade Administration (ITA) - Tim Truman
- Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) - Patricia Tomczyszyn
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) - Ciaran Clayton
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) - Heather Phillips
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) - Gail Porter
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) - Bob Houser
- Office of the Inspector General (OIG) – Ann Carper

II. Explain what specific types of agency communications have you released by making them available in a format that is consistent with the Plain Writing guidelines.

Type of communications of document or posting. List how this is made available to the public	Who is the intended user and approximate number of potential users	What has changed by using Plain Writing	Bureau or Operating Unit
BEA Blog	Broad audience via Web site	The blog continues to focus on clarity and brevity with minimized jargon. It has become a primary communications vehicle for BEA.	Bureau of Economic Analysis
FAQs	Broad audience via web site	The FAQ	Bureau of Economic

		continues to focus on clarity with minimized jargon.	Analysis
Articles in Survey of Current Business	Technical audience via print publication and online version	Specific article types continue to focus on clarity with minimized jargon	Bureau of Economic Analysis
One-page highlights to news releases	Broad audience via web site and blog	One-page summaries continue to focus on clarity with minimized jargon	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Census Bureau Home Page (www.census.gov)	All users (17 million page views per month; 3.7 million visits; 2.4 million unique visitors).	In May 2014, the Census Bureau launched a new website with topic-based navigation which users say they prefer. We drew on years of feedback and testing in designing this theme-based approach.	U.S. Census Bureau
Twitter feeds and Facebook postings	Twitter (49,000 subscribers) Facebook (121,000 subscribers)	From the beginning of our use of SM, the Census Bureau has used plain language since these media are our way of communicating with a general audience not tuned into traditional or professional media.	U.S. Census Bureau
Census Explorer (http://www.census.gov/censusexplorer/censusexpl)	Metrics still in development.	New interactive mapping tool lets users map out	U.S. Census Bureau

orer.html, launched December 2013)		trends at the national or neighborhood level. Easy-to-use, simple alternative to detailed statistical tables, especially for the general user.	
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.	U.S. Census Bureau
Blogs	All users (varies greatly by topic; generally blogs attract 800 viewers)	The Census Bureau has four blogs with varying audiences. From the beginning of our use of SM, the Census Bureau has used plain language since these media are our way of communicating with a general audience not tuned into traditional or professional media.	U.S. Census Bureau
New 2012 Economic Census home page – business.census.gov (launched March 2011)	Gateway to response to the 2012 Census – representing about 4 million businesses. Currently geared to trade associations and other partners. Visits varied greatly during the promotion and collection cycle: average	The goal was to drive all traffic regarding the economic census to a single hub, first for data collection and then for data release.	U.S. Census Bureau

	49,000 page views per month during height of the collection period.	The site aimed at a “customer-centric” approach, providing solutions in simple terms to the questions users have.	
Question & Answer Center (https://ask.census.gov/ , FAQ site)	All users (averages 120,000 visits per month)	FAQs on the American Community Survey (our largest household survey) underwent an exhaustive plain language revision. From the beginning, this site has reflected an emphasis on plain language.	U.S. Census Bureau
Infographics and Data Visualizations (http://www.census.gov/how/infographics/ , features plain language labels and text)	All users. Measuring America infographics vary widely from about 3,000 to 30,000 per graphic.	Measuring America won a 2014 National Association of Government Communicators Blue Pencil Award. Judge’s comment: Clear, concise, reads smoothly; free of jargon, doublespeak, clichés.”	U.S. Census Bureau
Plain Language Glossary (launched August 2013)	All users, especially anyone who has to understand our technical terms (21,000 visits)	Created by the Plain Language Team as a guide to terminology, with a plain language focus. This application is	U.S. Census Bureau

		available on every Census Bureau Web page for easy access. Promotion of this application has been limited as we further improve the functionality.	
“Stat of the Day”	All users.	Since December 2011, the Census Bureau website has prominently featured a short “Stat of the Day,” that entices readers to learn more about a data program. The “stats” succinct introduction (short sentences, few words) to the vast gamut of Census Bureau statistics.	U.S. Census Bureau
Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) Announcements	Public	FFO’s are written to inform stakeholders of the availability of EDA funds for economic development projects using plain language.	Economic Development Administration
EDA Annual Report to Congress	Congress/Public	EDA’s Annual report to Congress is written to plain language standards to best inform Congress and the public on EDA priorities and accomplishments.	Economic Development Administration
EDA Newsletter	Public	Writers and	Economic

(Innovate@eda.gov)		editors are using Plain Writing techniques in producing the newsletter.	Development Administration
Leadership messages, distributed via e-mail to staff	Internal Messaging	Writers and editors are aware of and using Plain Writing techniques – active voice, fewer words, getting to the point, less bureaucratic	Economic Development Administration
Press releases, posted via the EDA website and distributed via e-mail	Public	Writers and editors use Plain Writing techniques in drafting press releases	Economic Development Administration
Blog Posts	Public	Writers and editors use Plain Writing techniques in drafting blog posts	Economic Development Administration
Data releases of the principal federal economic indicators to mainstream media such as Bloomberg, Reuters, AP, The Wall Street Journal weekly.	Targeted Media outlets (50) through Press Lock-ups and releases to public on ESA website, email subscriptions to 33,000 subscribers.	Release statements are shorter, direct and to the point. They include links to press releases. Releases include more accessible and legible charts and graphs	Economics and Statistics Administration
ESA Reports posted on ESA homepage on www.esa.doc.gov	Public	Reports use “plain language” tips. Reports have been shortened and the layout has more breaks, bullets and examples to make them more readable and understandable. Text is broken up by headlines.	Economics and Statistics Administration

		Charts/graphs are easier to understand thru better data visualization.	
ESA economic briefings and US blogs posted on ESA webpage at www.esa.gov.doc	Public	Briefings and blogs have been transformed to include shorter sentences, better examples and plain language. Illustrations/graphics are easier to understand.	Economics and Statistics Administration
New ESA Website	Public	Website is being replaced with new website; launch in Summer 2014. New website display and content is consistent with Plain language guidelines	Economics and Statistics Administration
Current ESA Website	Public	Current website was revised in FY 2013 to encompass better usability tactics, display of charts and graphics to enhance data visualization; cross-posting of data from sister agencies such as DOC, BEA and Census to increase public participation and understanding of	Economics and Statistics Administration

		DOC data as well as direct, simple descriptions of data releases, briefings, blogs and reports in headers and captions.	
Press releases, report releases, data releases, calendar of releases	Targeted media lists (top 50 reporters), PR Newswire (1300 outlets), GovDelivery emails to 33,000 subscribers	Materials released to media through email, web postings as well as public materials posted on website are written according to plain language guidelines.	Economics and Statistics Administration
Talking Points for senior staff; economic analysis, charts/graphs in specialized briefings, reports	Senior DOC officials to use for public statements	Materials prepared for senior officials better reflect use of plain language that result in more direct messages and clearer data visualization	Economics and Statistics Administration
Submissions posted to ITA's Tradeology blog	Public	Blog posts highlighting ITA initiatives, programs, and success stories are easier to read and understand after we updated the review/clearance process with a focus on readability.	International Trade Administration
Messages distributed through available social media platforms –	Public; specifically social media followers of ITA	ITA created a Social Media Community of	International Trade Administration

Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn		Practice to share best practices and lessons learned – specifically how to make our messages more easily readable/understandable to the general public while remaining consistent with DOC messaging.	
Trade data and individual industry statistics issued through public statements, the ITA website, or business-unit specific e-mail lists	Public; application developers	ITA has increased the amount and type of data available through API. This has standardized the data so that any application developer sees the data in the same, easily understandable format, no matter what data or series it is originally developed.	International Trade Administration
Submissions posted to ITA’s Tradeology blog	Public	Blog posts highlighting ITA initiatives, programs, and success stories are easier to read and understand after we updated the review/clearance process with a focus on readability.	International Trade Administration
MBDA Fact Sheets	Public. These are available on	Fact sheets were	Minority Business

	<p>the MBDA website and distributed at events, exhibits, meetings and conferences.</p> <p>These are very popular online; one of our top five downloaded documents.</p>	<p>resigned to be more reader friendly, aesthetically appealing, and to incorporate use of plain language. Unnecessary text was eliminated; remaining content was rewritten using plain language.</p>	<p>Development Agency</p>
<p>MBDA Brochures</p>	<p>Public. Three brochures were developed for targeted audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business owners • Elected officials • Clients interested in exporting 	<p>Developing three brochures enabled us to eliminate unnecessary content, rendering each brochure more reader-friendly. Content was kept to a minimum and limited to key areas of interest for each audience.</p>	<p>Minority Business Development Agency</p>
<p><i>TechBeat—NIST Website</i></p>	<p>Science attentive members of the public</p> <p>About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population</p>	<p>Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of active voice, etc.</p>	<p>National Institute of Standards and Technology</p>
<p>Engineering Laboratory Newsletter— <i>NIST Website</i></p>	<p>Science attentive members of the public</p> <p>About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population</p>	<p>Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of active voice, etc.</p>	<p>National Institute of Standards and Technology</p>
<p>PML at Work— <i>NIST Website</i></p>	<p>Science attentive members of the public</p> <p>About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population</p>	<p>Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of</p>	<p>National Institute of Standards and Technology</p>

		active voice, etc.	
ITL Newsletter— <i>NIST Website</i>	Science attentive members of the public About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population	Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of active voice, etc.	National Institute of Standards and Technology
Forensic Science News— <i>NIST Website</i>	Science attentive members of the public About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population	Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of active voice, etc.	National Institute of Standards and Technology
NSTIC Blog— <i>NIST Website</i>	Science attentive members of the public About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population	Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of active voice, etc.	National Institute of Standards and Technology
MEP Blog— <i>NIST Website</i>	Science attentive members of the public About 31 million—10 percent of U.S. population	Greater efforts to explain technical terms in lay language, increases use of active voice, etc.	National Institute of Standards and Technology
Web stories and print materials on fisheries science, sustainable fisheries, and protected resources	Public (thousands)	Communications staff are adopting Plain Language techniques	NOAA/NMFS
Controlled correspondence and reports to Congress	U.S. Congress and their constituents, general public (thousands)	Staff in program offices are adopting Plain Language techniques	NOAA/NMFS
NTIA Press releases – website; links on Twitter; links on Facebook FirstNet – Press releases,	Members of the press and public. Thousands (no way of knowing exactly)	Technical terms are translated in to language understandable to the public; acronyms are spelled out; quotes	National Telecommunications and Information Administration

new website		use common words and short phrases when possible.	
NTIA Fact sheets – website; links embedded in press releases FirstNet Fact sheets for website; links embedded in press releases	The public; interested stakeholders (i.e. industry, consumer groups; trade organizations, public safety community) press – available to thousands of users	Provide detailed questions/answers about programs, agency actions, deadlines, etc. Gives the public an easy way to find information on a given topic.	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
NTIA Blog – website; links posted on twitter and facebook FirstNet Blog – website; links posted on twitter and facebook	Public, stakeholders, press (potentially thousands of users)	Communicate with public in an informal, more conversational style.	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Reports and correspondence issued by OIG’s Office of Audit and Evaluation and Office of Investigations	Department of Commerce leadership and employees, members of Congress and Congressional staff, members of the public, and the media.	OIG continually strives to improve its products by writing in a clear, concise, and jargon-free manner.	Office of Inspector General
Congressional testimony	Department of Commerce leadership and employees, members of Congress and Congressional staff, members of the public, and the media.	OIG staff involved in testimony preparation, including subject matter experts and writers/editors, are especially sensitive to the need to make oral	Office of Inspector General

		presentations clear and easily comprehensible.	
Social Media	Our number of followers has steadily risen since we began tweeting and posting on Facebook in September 2013.	Brevity of tweets/posts focuses on simple, direct language.	Office of Inspector General
<p>Web-site: USPTO has created a plain writing</p> <p>Web-site intended for employees with access to the USPTO Intranet. The site provides information, examples, and training opportunities regarding the Plain Writing Act of 2010.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>USPTO Employees</p> <p>Intellectual Property Stakeholders</p> <p>General Public</p>	<p>Having access to plain writing history and definitions on-line, as well as the opportunity to participate in plain writing courses through the Commerce Learning Center, offer writers and Web publishers the ability to:</p> <p>Identify key characteristics to consider when analyzing the targeted readers</p> <p>Identify attributes to consider when defining your relationship to the readers</p> <p>Determine the appropriate written messages to use for the given situation</p> <p>Recognize the value of knowing the appropriate tone to use to address your readers</p>	United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)

		<p>Use the appropriate writing tone to communicate a written message for a given purpose and audience</p> <p>Recognize sentences that reflect the techniques of clear writing</p> <p>Recognize how to apply the techniques of concise writing to a given business writing</p> <p>Identify ways to recognize content to increase reader and understanding.</p>	
Internal/External communications, information dissemination, internet, announcements, briefings, memorandum, documents, Web content, etc.	USPTO Employees, Visitors to the USPTO, and Intellectual Property Stakeholders throughout the world.	Internal and external writers and publishers are aware of the Plain Writing in Government Act and consider it during the preparation and editing of official and unofficial documents.	United States Patent and Trademark Office (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. It is also available on our public website at <http://www.commerce.gov/plain-language>. Those immediately affected by the requirements have been notified of training opportunities.

IV. Training

Bureaus provided the following trainings:

Type of Training	Number of employees trained	Date	Bureau or Operating Unit
CLC course were made available to employees on clear and concise writing.	No metrics available	All year long	All Commerce
Three onsite two-day training events. Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to the point quickly and concisely • Eliminate unnecessary words and phrases • Avoid common usage and punctuation errors • Improve sentences with seven key tools • Make the purpose of the document clear at the beginning • Write for the audience • Organize and present information logically • Choose the correct style for both the type of document and the reader • Make sure all the necessary information is included • Edit for coherence using standard readability formulas • Use charts, tables, graphs, and other numerically based illustrations effectively 	47 (and counting)	January 29-30 , 2014 April 8-9, 2014 June 11-12, 2014 upcoming	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Classroom, Online, and Offsite Training (23)	440	Multiple dates from January 1, 2013 to April 30, 2014	U.S. Census Bureau
Many Census Bureau employees have received extensive training in data visualization and plain language is a key	Varies	Varies	U.S. Census Bureau

message conveyed in this training.			
The Census Bureau also maintains an extensive Intranet site with writing tips and links to outside online training.	Varies	Varies	U.S. Census Bureau
All Census Bureau employees from top management on down have clear communication as a part of their performance plan.	Varies	Varies	U.S. Census Bureau
EDA posted information on the Plain Writing Act and where to find more information on its internal display boards.	60	March/June 2013	Economic Development Administration
ESA Training Series on Data Visualization -Training designed specifically for ESA staff to encompass how to better create easily understandable graphics and blogs through data visualization. Review of graphic and blog creation process as well as customer feedback.	15-25 people per session/ four 3 hour sessions	Friday, June 7, 2013 Tuesday, August, 20 Thursday, Nov. 21 st Tuesday, Dec. 3 rd	Economics and Statistics Administration
ESA Usability Training – GSA led training for ESA senior staff to explain the benefits of making the new ESA website more customer-centric. This covered making content plain language compliant.	ESA Senior Staff	Tuesday, July 23, 2013	Economics and Statistics Administration
ESA Staff attended Census Data Visualization Workshops (1-2 day trainings)	Open to all ESA staff – 12-15	June 13, 2013 July 16-18 August 21, 2013	Economics and Statistics Administration
Office of the Deputy Under Secretary “Tuesdays at 2” Workshops – designed to train ITA staff on writing more concise, clear, and understandable briefing papers, memos, and correspondence for senior DOC/ITA principals	215	3/19/13 4/23/13 6/11/13 8/13/13	International Trade Administration
Import Administration: “Developing A Solution to Case Issue”	33	5/31/13 6/5/13	International Trade Administration
U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service/Global Markets: Plain Language Training	Available to nearly 1,500 U.S. & FCS/GM personnel	Continuous	International Trade Administration

	worldwide through DOC's Commerce Learning Center and the "GM University"		
Import and Export Procedures and Documentation	10	9/2013	International Trade Administration
Half-day, mandatory on-site plain writing training session for MBDA's Office of Legislative, Education & Public Affairs staff. Attendance was optional for other Agency employees.	15 employees trained	June 28, 2013	Minority Business Development Agency
MBDA developed an MBDA Writer's Guide , which was rolled out to all MBDA employees as the final phase of the Agency's rebranding. The MBDA Writer's Guide includes an explanation and link to Federal Government " <u>plain language</u> " resource, and was presented to all MBDA employees in April 2013. (Sample provided)	50 employees trained	May 13, 2013	Minority Business Development Agency
Public Affairs Communications Training	18	June 2013	National Institute of Standards and Technology
Online training— Plain Language Course on NIST Commerce Learning page	Have requested number of downloads— Will send when available	ongoing	National Institute of Standards and Technology
Four 1-hour training events (voluntary) as a refresher to 2012 mandatory training. Training conducted by writer/editor who also conducted the 2012 training.	133	03/26/2014 04/01/2014 04/02/2014 04/09/2014	NOAA/NMFS
Writing courses over the past year. These courses weren't specific to plain language, but these courses mention plain language.	14	Throughout 2013	National Telecommunications and Information Administration

3-day course at Graduate School USA, Atlanta, on “Written Communication for Auditors”	2 auditors from Office of Audit and Evaluation	8/28-8/30,2013	Office of Inspector General
2-day course at Graduate School USA, DC, on “Reviewing Other People’s Report Writing”	1 editor from Office of Audit and Evaluation	9/12-9/13, 2013	Office of Inspector General
Legal writing	Several attorneys from Office of Counsel	Throughout the year	Office of Inspector General
Thousands of USPTO Plain Language Web site viewings/hits to review posted material and consider Commerce Learning Center Plain Language educational opportunities.	1581 viewed the USPTO Plain Language Web site since going live.	The Web site went live on or about 1/22/2014.	United States Patent and Trademark Office
Classroom Training	25-50	January – March 2014	United States Patent and Trademark Office

V. Ongoing compliance/ sustaining change

Contact Madhura Valverde or Terry Layton within the Office of the Executive Secretariat with compliance questions. The Office of Public Affairs reported use of plain writing within the Department of Commerce based on reports from bureau plain writing coordinators for calendar year 2013. Future compliance issues will be handled by the Office of the Executive Secretariat.

VI. Agency’s plain writing website

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. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Writing Communications

BEA evaluates customer satisfaction with our public content very generally. According to our ACSI survey results, we have received a score of 85 (out of 100) for customer satisfaction with our content from online customers.

The Census Bureau uses usability and cognitive testing on an ongoing basis to measure customer satisfaction with our web site. We routinely consult our Web logs to study how successful users are in searching our site. We have an extensive program devoted to Web metrics. Since 2007, we have used an ongoing pop-up survey to measure the customer satisfaction. We conduct 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. We are currently creating a Customer Experience Management system using a blend of metrics from various sources (customer calls, Web metrics, Web satisfaction survey, etc.) to gain a more rounded understanding of customer experience.

The Economic Development Administration reviews news clips generated from the dissemination of agency press releases for key message points. EDA PAD's use of plain language techniques helps pinpoint the messaging for reporters. EDA's new website, which was launched in May, uses plain language to help stakeholders and the public best understand the agency's mission, priorities, and accomplishments. Customers are provided with a webmaster e-mail address to contact with suggestions to improve the site.

NIST subscribes to the Foresee Results American Customer Satisfaction Index to gauge the effectiveness of our external website. Our content scores are consistently about 77 on a scale of 100. This is among the highest scores the site receives (categories measured: content, performance, navigation, search, look and feel, online transparency) and are above average for all government websites.

FirstNet, an independent entity within NTIA, launched its website in March, 2014. NTIA Office of Public Affairs worked closely with FirstNet staff to prepare fact sheets and other website material to make the information as user friendly and easy to understand as possible. We have received informal positive feedback.

OIG provides oversight to the Department of Commerce by conducting audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations. When appropriate, we make our findings available to stakeholders, who include Congress, Departmental leadership, the media, and members of the public. It is therefore critical that reports be written in a manner that can be quickly understood by this diverse group. Because OIG's success depends on communicating our findings and recommendations, our staff, writer/editors, and managers all strive to make sure our reports are succinct and jargon-free. Although, in contrast to 2012, OIG did not provide in-house training to staff, the editors plan to have several brown bags on plain writing in 2014. They updated OIG's in-house style guide, so that will be part of their presentations.