Plain Writing Act Compliance Report — April 1, 2021

This report outlines the progress towards implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 within the Department of Defense. Please check back for updates.

I. Senior Agency Official

Thomas Muir is the Acting Director of Administration and Management, and is the DoD Senior Official for plain language. The Washington Headquarters Services, Executive Services Directorate, Directives Division, oversees the implementation and administration of the DoD Plain Language Program through the plain language point of contact. The point of contact may be reached at whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil.

II. Using Plain Language

DoD received no plain language amendment requests in 2020.

DoD agencies took many actions to implement plain language requirements in 2020.

- Army Publishing Directorate
    - Provides policy guidance, high-end design, management, and oversight of all departmental forms and forms collection instruction, as well as relays DoD and Federal law superintendence.
    - Enforces strict standards for maintaining metadata in the Department of the Army Publications Index, resulting in improved searches on the APD website
    - Layout, design, and management of web content is easy to access, read, and navigate (on average more than four million visitors a year to the APD website).
    - Reviews and edits all departmental administrative policy and procedural publications with emphasis on understandable and concise writing.
    - Upgrades and updates publishing software and tools that look for missing or inappropriate punctuation, misuse of acronyms, completeness of parts and document structure, and more.
    - Promotes use of required style guides and DoD Plain Language resources to revise and develop publications content.
    - Conducts virtual training for customers charged with writing and developing publications
- Defense Contract Audit Agency
    - In 2020, the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA) transitioned its public website to a content management service managed by the Defense Media Activity. The new website has the same URL (www.dcaa.mil) as before, but mirrors those used by most DoD agencies, making navigation easier. In building the site, DCAA used the latest web design principles and tried to minimize the number of clicks to get to any given document.
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)
    - From a communications perspective, DFAS continues to have its Corporate Communications Office prepare or review all official customer communications for message clarity and ease of understanding. These include Facebook posts, articles, videos, letters or e-mail content for public release, and web content.
    - From a training perspective, DFAS provided one related training course offering, which provided key principles of the Plain Language Writing Program – Business Grammar: Business Writing for Executives. In 2020, 25 DFAS employees successfully completed this course. Due to contracting issues within Calendar Year (CY) 2020, only one course was held.
    - DFAS Corporate Communications continues to provide plain language training for agency newsletter editors.

- Defense Media Activity (DMA)
  - DMA's requirement to use plain language was included in July 2020 publication of interim staffing process instituted during COVID-19 response; staffing guideline posted to DMA's intranet site and accessible by the DMA workforce.
- Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
  - During CY 2020, the Joint Staff processed numerous instructions, manuals, and publications, but none were public-facing (i.e., informed the public on how to obtain Federal government benefits or services).
  - The Joint Staff Training Program (JSTP) administers the effective writing program as part of the required Joint Staff Actions Process (JSAP) training for new Joint Staff personnel. Joint Staff personnel receive training on plain language standards that equip them for writing JSAPs and supporting documentation in support of the Joint Staff mission. JSTP offers specialized writing-related training on an individual and small group basis through the JSTP JSAP Help Desk. During CY 2020, JSTP provided plain language training to 495 Joint Staff personnel.
  - The DoD Manual 5110.04M, Volumes 1 and 2, Joint Staff Guide 5711, Joint Staff Instruction 5711.01E, and DoD Instruction 5025.13 will continue to be an integral part of the existing JSTP curriculum.
    - JSTP recognizes additional writing-related training needs and is developing a stand-alone effective writing workshop. The workshop will provide Joint Staff personnel with an enhanced writing curriculum and practical exercises as a deep dive for understanding and applying plain language and proper grammatical standards in the development of timely, accurate decision-making products.
    - JSTP's writing-related curriculum will support Joint Staff training needs, from newly reported personnel that lack Joint Staff experience to seasoned writers, and equip learners to perform their advisory and leadership roles and responsibilities.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of Net Assessment
  - The Office of Net Assessment uses the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command "Action Officer Staff Writing" course, and has made their course available to the entire team via Microsoft Teams and Sharepoint.
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
  - The Officer of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy provides a 3-hour course to all incoming personnel on how to write in plain language. This monthly course is also open to all Policy personnel.
- Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA)
  - The PFPA Training Division continues to ensure that all new hires are in compliance with the requirements of DoDI 5025.13 within 1 year of onboarding, and notifies the larger workforce when the training is made available on iCompass and the corresponding due dates. As of the date of reporting, PFPA is in compliance with DoD policy training requirements.
  - PFPA informs the workforce that more information can be found on the DoD Plain Language website.
- Washington Headquarters Services
  - The Washington Headquarters Services oversees the DoD Issuances Program. As such, WHS:
    - Works with action officers across the DoD to use plain writing in drafting and updating DoD issuances (i.e., directives, instructions, manuals, directive-type memorandums).
    - Oversees the DoD Issuances Writing Training class, which emphasizes plain language. In CY 2020, 12 classes were held.
    - Maintains the DoD Issuances Website. Ensures that guidance offered on the website as well as the site itself are clear, correct, and easily accessible.

- The Washington Headquarters Services has oversight of the DoD Plain Language Program. As such, WHS:
    - Annually evaluates DoD policy in DoD Instruction 5025.13 and updates as necessary.
    - Prepares and updates the DoD Plain Writing online training module, available on the DoD Plain Language website and in iCompass (in-house electronic training).
    - Maintains and updates the DoD Plain Language Website as necessary.
    - Monitors the Plain Language organizational email account, reviews requests received from the public and DoD personnel for clarification via the DoD Plain Language Website, and directs the requests to document or information owning agencies for action
    - Compiles the annual DoD Plain Language Report and posts it to the DoD Plain Language Website.

III. Communication of Requirements

Communication about the Act's implementation, plain language guidelines, and compliance requirements is provided to the DoD workforce through:

- Publication of the DoD Plain Writing Act implementation plan, known as DoD Instruction 5025.13. It is available on the DoD Issuances Website at http://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/.
- Distribution of memorandums from the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.
- Annual meetings of the DoD Plain Language Committee, which consists of representatives from different organizations within the DoD.
- Training and helpful resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website and individual agency websites.
- Notices placed in various public forums such as:
  - DoD newspapers
  - DoD newsletters
  - Mass electronic information systems

IV. Training

- Army Publications Directorate
    - Provided plain language training through webinars and online training.
- Cost Assessment Program and Evaluation
    - Provided webinars and online plain language training.
- Defense Commissary Agency
    - Provided online plain language training.
- Defense Contract Audit Agency
    - Provided plain language training through www.plainlanguage.gov and webinars and training online.
- Defense Contract Management Agency
    - Provided plain language training in-house.
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service
    - Provided plain language training through in-house training, www.plainlanguage.gov, and webinars and training online.
- Defense Information System Agency
    - Provided plain language through in-house training and http://www.plainlanguage.gov

- Defense Intelligence Agency
  - Provided plain language training through www.plainlanguage.gov and webinars and online.
- Defense Logistics Agency
  - Provided plain language training through www.plainlanguage.gov and webinars and online.
- Defense Media Agency
  - Provided plain language training through www.plainlanguage.gov
- Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Agency
  - Provided plain language training through http://www.plainlanguage.gov and webinars and online.
- Defense Technical Information Center
  - Provided plain language training through webinars and online.
- Defense Technical Security Administration
  - Provided plain language training through www.plainlanguage.gov.
- Defense Threat Reduction Agency
  - Provided plain language training through webinars and online.
- Department of the Air Force
  - Provided plain language training through webinars and online.
- Department of the Navy
  - Provided in-house plain language training.
- Missile Defense Agency
  - Provided plain language training in-house and through www.plainlanguage.gov.
- National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
  - Provided plain language training in-house, online, and through www.plainlanguage.gov.
- National Reconnaissance Office
  - Provided plain language training through www.plainlanguage.gov
- National Security Agency
  - Provided in-house plain language training.
- North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)
  - NORAD and United States Northern Command provided plain language training in-house and through http://www.plainlanguage.gov
- Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs
  - Provided plain language training in-house and through webinars and online.
- Office of Economic Adjustment
  - Provided in-house plain language training.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense/Director, Operational Test and Evaluation
  - Provided in-house plain language training.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of Net Assessment
  - Provided plain language training through http://www.plainlanguage.gov
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, Department of Defense
  - Provided plain language training through webinars and online.
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
  - Provided in-house plain language training.
- Pentagon Force Protection Agency
  - Provided plain language training through webinars and online.
- Washington Headquarters Services
  - Provided plain language training in-house and through webinars and online.

V. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change

The DoD is working towards full compliance with the Act and has fulfilled requirements such as:

- Maintaining and annually reviewing and updating the DoD Plain Writing Act Implementation Plan, DoD Instruction 5025.13.
- Maintaining the DoD Plain Language Website.
- Designating a senior official for plain language.
- Encouraging feedback from the public and stakeholders to identify communications that require improvements.
- Publishing the annual compliance report on the DoD Plain Language Website.

VI. Website: https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/plainlanguage/

VII. Customer Satisfaction

We want your input. Feedback is critical to help us know whether we have been successful in providing information that is clear and well-organized for its intended audience.

Comments, questions, and concerns may be sent to whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil.