

Plain Writing Act of 2010 - 2021 Compliance Report



Department of State
2021 Compliance Report
Plain Writing Act of 2010
October 2021

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Overview:

This report describes the Department of State's compliance with the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The purpose of the Act is to improve the effectiveness and accountability of federal agencies to the public by promoting clear government communication that the public can understand and use.

By improving understanding of agency requirements, plain writing improves legal and administrative compliance.

As a foreign affairs agency, plain writing is an integral component of our communication strategy to not only our diverse workforce, but also to the American public, as our personnel continues to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives abroad.

The Assistant Secretary for Administration is the senior official responsible for overseeing the Department's implementation of the Plain Writing Act. The Office of Directives Management in the Bureau of Administration in the Office of Global Information Services has responsibility for compliance activities.

Ongoing Actions for Compliance:

- **Web-Based:**
 - A plain writing webpage of the Department's public-facing website continues to be available to the public at <https://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/plainwriting/>
 - Continuous updates to the public-facing Department of State website (www.state.gov) reflects adherence to Plain Writing principles, including:
 - Section headings organized under tabs
 - Succinct sentences under 15-20 words
 - Visual media that complements the text
 - Liberal use of white space as a visual aid
 - A plain writing internal webpage containing training and reference material continues to be available to Department personnel via the Office of Directives Management's website.

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• **Training and Procedural:**

- The Foreign Service Institute continues to offer multiple writing courses which integrate plain writing principles, including an hour-long, distance-learning course entitled ‘The Plain Writing Act’.
- The Executive Secretariat continues to update templates and drafting guidance, supplemented by training sessions, in order to standardize the process of drafting communication for Department principals.
- The Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) and associated Handbooks (FAHs) together are the single, comprehensive, and authoritative source for the Department's organization structures, policies, and procedures that govern the operations of the State Department, the Foreign Service and, when applicable, other federal agencies.
 - The FAM and FAHs continue to be incrementally rewritten to increase the use of plain writing tenets such as active voice; concise paragraphs that are often no longer than seven sentences; everyday verbiage; and precise verbs.
 - Subchapter 2 FAH-1 H-110 ‘Revising or Drafting New Material’ continues to provide direction on plain writing for the Department.

Plain Writing Accomplishments in 2021:

The COVID-19 global pandemic posed significant challenges for the Department to implement planned Plain Writing activities and outreach in 2021. Additional training activities are planned for Fiscal Year 2022.

- In 2020, the Department created a plain language pregnancy guide for employees and Eligible Family Members who are posted abroad and considering whether to deliver their baby in the United States or overseas.
- Bureau of Consular Affairs continued to use plain language in drafting Department Travel Advisories, which provide the American public with access to clear, timely, and reliable safety and security information for all countries. These advisories are available to the public and assist U.S. citizens in safety and security risk assessment and decision-making when planning travel.

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- The Office of Directives Management has developed a Department-wide presentation on Plain Language as part of a briefing series planned for implementation in Fiscal Year 2022.

Contact Information for Plain Writing at the Department of State:

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