

Department of Homeland Security
2023 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report

On October 13, 2010, President Obama signed 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.” This law changed how the Federal Government communicates with the public, and all government agencies are expected to adhere to the guidance as outlined in the *Plain Writing Act of 2010*.

Our Commitment

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a vast mission and a dedicated responsibility to secure our nation and the safety of the American people. In light of our responsibility to national priorities such as emergency preparedness, cybersecurity, immigration, travel, and international trade, it is paramount that DHS present information effectively and efficiently. Many aspects of the Department’s programs and operations have a direct effect on our stakeholders and the general public, and it is vital that we communicate with them clearly and reliably.

Our Accomplishments

DHS leadership continues to be committed to the use of plain language and has expressed an expansive commitment to implementing plain writing principles in all written communications. At the Headquarters level, we continue to support the Department-wide plain writing program by communicating:

- the importance of using plain language;
- best practices and helpful tips;
- leadership’s interest in and support of plain writing; and,
- training opportunities (within and outside of the Department).

We also continue to work to ensure plain writing is used in all public communications.

Oversight

Designated Senior Official for Plain Writing:
Tammy Howard, Chief of Staff, Office of the Public Affairs

Departmental Plain Writing Coordinator:
Stephanie Fauquet, Assistant Executive Secretary, Office of the Executive Secretary

Implementation Plan

The DHS Plain Writing Implementation Plan is available on the Department's public-facing plain writing website (<http://www.dhs.gov/dhs-plan-implement-plain-writing-act-2010-requirements-summary>). A small group of agency representatives prepared this plan and submitted it to Department leadership as a proposal for DHS-wide action. This plan details the responsibilities of the plain writing officials and points of contact, as well as our training plan and additional resources.

Compliance Report

The completion and online publication of this report satisfies the Act's requirement for a public-facing compliance report.

Mechanism for Public Feedback

DHS plain writing provides an email address that allows the public to communicate ideas or concerns with regard to DHS's plain writing efforts (DHSPlainWriting@hq.dhs.gov). Communication submitted to this address is immediately reviewed and considered.

Website Access

DHS has encouraged its Agencies and Offices to use plain writing for all prepared materials. In support of this, the DHS Office of Public Affairs created a webpage devoted to plain writing (<http://www.dhs.gov/plain-writing-dhs>). This webpage lists links to the DHS Plain Writing Implementation Plan, DHS plain writing leadership, and the avenue in which the general public can provide their feedback on plain writing at DHS. The Office of the Executive Secretary also posts plain writing tips, training links, and other plain writing tools on its internal webpage.

The Department's public webpage also links to a site devoted to "Open Government," outlining DHS's commitment to transparency and clear communication.

Training Tools

DHS Agencies and Offices have held plain writing training for staff in Headquarters and, in the case of operational Agencies, in the field. Additionally, a prominent Agency within DHS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), created an internal plain writing program with dedicated staff responsible for ensuring written materials prepared by USCIS for public consumption are in line with plain writing guidelines. This program has been lauded for its Government-wide efforts to promote the use of plain language. USCIS staff offer customizable training courses to DHS and other executive agencies and have posted several short videos on YouTube using humor and imagination to educate employees and the general public about plain writing.

Using the resources available through the Plain Language Action and Information Network's (PLAIN) website (plainlanguage.gov), DHS has promoted the benefits of plain writing to employees throughout the Department. Several DHS representatives attended PLAIN's "Train the Trainer Bootcamp" and are available to train small groups upon request. DHS employees are encouraged to take advantage of free online training (e.g., the Federal Aviation Administration's Basic Plain Writing course).

In addition to training, DHS promotes plain writing through colorful signage throughout the offices and verbal reminders in regular meetings with representatives from every DHS Agency and Office. The Office of the Executive Secretary also dedicated a section to plain writing in its Executive Correspondence Handbook. This Handbook, first published in 2015 and updated regularly, continues to be used Department-wide to ensure materials are consistent, clearly formatted, and plainly written.

Moving Forward

DHS will continue its efforts to promote plain writing Department-wide and educating employees on the tenants of the Act and the Department's history of commitment to plain writing. We have encouraged every DHS Agencies and Offices to ensure that they are using plain writing in the preparation of public-facing materials. We have also emphasized the importance of using plain writing in correspondence that is directed to Members of Congress, high-ranking officials, and citizens alike. We will continue to urge DHS Agencies and Offices to review and update public-facing documents and websites to ensure we are preparing materials appropriately, matching the tone and style to the intended audience.

Further, DHS Headquarters, in support of the requirements outlined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended in 1998), has highlighted the importance of plain writing and the overall benefits it can offer to individuals with disabilities. As described by GSA, "Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers to information technology, open new opportunities for people with disabilities, and encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. Under 29 U.S.C. 794 d, agencies must give employees with disabilities and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others without disabilities." In support of this goal, DHS continues to work to educate its Agencies and Offices on the Section 508 requirements, provide information on related training opportunities when available, and link the integral role plain writing has in all communications.