



Department of State

2022
PLAIN WRITING ACT
COMPLIANCE REPORT

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 improves our communication with our diverse workforce and the American public as we 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>.
 - Public comments now go to PlainLanguage@state.gov rather than eFAM@state.gov.
- Continuous updates to the public-facing Department of State website (www.state.gov) reflect 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.
- Department personnel have access to a plain writing internal webpage containing training and reference material.
- The Office of Directives Management created and posted a one-page plain writing reference guide on the internal webpage.

- **Training and Procedural:**

- The Foreign Service Institute, which is the Department of State’s primary training institution, 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 2022:

- The Office of Directives Management hired a full-time Plain Writing Program Manager.
- The Office of Directives Management created a new dedicated email address, PlainLanguage@state.gov, as a central contact point for all questions related to plain language at the Department.
- The Bureau of Global Talent Management issued a Department-wide notice entitled “Creating Accessible Content: Two Tips for Documents.” The first tip encouraged writers to use plain language.
- The Ralph Bunche Library, which is the official library of the Department of State, created a webpage devoted to plain writing resources.

- The Office of Directives Management issued a Department-wide notice reminding employees to employ plain writing principles. The notice also provided employees with resources on plain writing available from both the Foreign Service Institute and the Ralph Bunche Library.
- The Office of Directives Management secured external plain writing training for 15 employees within the Bureau of Administration. We expect additional sessions in the Fall of 2022 to ensure that all GS-13 and GS-14 supervisory employees in the Bureau of Administration receive plain language training.
- The 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.

Contact Information for Plain Writing at the Department of State:

Alden Fahy, Program Manager for Plain Language, is the point of contact for Plain Writing at the Department of State and can be reached at PlainLanguage@state.gov.