

U.S. Department of Commerce
Plain Writing Act Compliance Report
April 30, 2013

I. Designate senior agency official for plain writing.

Jennifer Berlin, Acting Director of Public Affairs, was the senior agency official for plain writing during the scope of this compliance report. She has since left the U.S. Department of Commerce. Ciaran Clayton is the Acting Director of Public Affairs and has assumed the role of senior official for plain writing

- Office of the Secretary (OSec)- Anatta
- Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) - Eugene Cottilli
- Bureau of Economic Analysis – Lucas Hitt
- U.S. Census Bureau - Neil Tillman
- Economic Development Administration (EDA) - John Atwood
- Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA) - Jacque Mason
- International Trade Administration (ITA) - Blanche Ziv
- 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) – Justin Marsico

II. Explain what specific types of agency communications you have released in a format consistent with the plain writing guidelines.

Type of document or posting and how it is made available to the public	Intended user and approximate number of potential users	What has changed by using Plain Writing	Bureau
Audits/Evaluations	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. OIG's reports are published on our website, and	Office of the Inspector General

		have received traction with stakeholders.	
<p>USPTO Web site and social media postings, news releases, public event and activity announcements.</p> <p>Patent and Trademark Application Information: (continually updated to capture Plain Language techniques). Booklets sent to individuals who request information regarding filing a patent and trademark application.</p> <p>General Information Concerning Patents (booklet)</p> <p>Declaration to file (PTO/SB/01)</p> <p>Provisional Patent brochure & cover sheet (form PTO/SB/16)</p> <p>Guide to filing a utility patent (booklet)</p> <p>Non Publication Request form (PTO/SB/35)</p> <p>Fee Schedule</p> <p>Fee transmittal form (PTO/SB/17)</p> <p>Utility Patent Application transmittal form (PTO/SB/05)</p> <p>SCAM brochure</p> <p>PTDL map</p>	<p>General Public Intellectual Property Stakeholders</p> <p>Department of Commerce Employees</p>	<p>Stakeholders, and those seeking information, are able to better understand the content provided to them in order to remain informed of current developments, procedures, and priorities of the Agency. Additionally, employees are better prepared to communicate with constituencies, stakeholders, and each other, to successfully accomplish their duties.</p> <p>Patent and Trademark Application Information (continually updated to capture Plain Language techniques): Booklets sent to individuals who request information regarding filing a patent and trademark application.</p>	<p>United States Patent and Trademark Office</p>
<p>Internal communication, information dissemination, announcements, opportunities, etc. (USPTO Intranet).</p>	<p>USPTO Employees and Visitors to the USPTO</p>	<p>Employees are more confident of their ability to effectively communicate with each other and share information regarding the USPTO and the services that it</p>	<p>United States Patent and Trademark Office</p>

		provides to its stakeholders.	
BEA Blog	Broad audience via web site	A new service that focuses on clarity with minimized jargon	Bureau of Economic Analysis
FAQs	Broad audience via web site	Renewed focus on clarity with minimized jargon	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Articles in Survey of Current Business	Technical audience via print publication and online version	Renewed focus on clarity with minimized jargon	Bureau of Economic Analysis
One-page highlights to news releases	Broad audience via web site and blog	Renewed focus on clarity with minimized jargon	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) Announcements	To inform stakeholders of the availability of EDA funds for economic development projects. (10,000+)	EDA has simplified the language in the Executive Summary of all FFOs to help stakeholders clearly understand their purpose and requirements.	Economic Development Administration
EDA Annual Report to Congress (transmitted to Congress and posted to EDA website)	To inform Congress and stakeholders of FY priorities and accomplishments	Writers and editors are using Plain Writing techniques in producing the Annual Report to Congress.	Economic Development Administration Economic Development Administration
EDA Newsletter (Innovate@eda.gov)	Monthly newsletter to inform staff and stakeholders of EDA and administration priorities and accomplishments.	Writers and editors are using Plain Writing techniques in producing the newsletter.	Economic Development Administration
Leadership messages, distributed via e-mail to staff	Internal communications (200)	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	Media and general public to inform of EDA investments (1,000)	Writers and editors use Plain Writing techniques in drafting press releases	Economic Development Administration

e-mail			
Trade Data Releases	Public	The U.S. Trade Overview was redesigned to communicate the state of U.S. trade in narrative form with minimum use of jargon, and extensive use of simple charts.	International Trade Administration
FOIA Request Responses being published on FOIAonline	The Requestor and now, through FOIAonline, the public	The public now has access to FOIA request responses and these records have increased public understanding of ITA operations.	International Trade Administration
Economic Research Papers (Jobs Supported By Exports, Regional Trade Agreements, etc)	Public	ITA's Jobs Supported By Exports research is now accompanied by an easy to read infographic that covers the primary findings.	International Trade Administration
Web Apps (FTA Tariff Tool, TradeStats)	Public	Web Apps have been designed with a simpler user interface as a primary consideration, and allow the public to access complicated databases in an intuitive manner.	International Trade Administration
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. Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us determine improvements needed.	U.S. Census Bureau
Twitter feeds and Facebook postings	Twitter (37,000 subscribers) Facebook (117,000 subscribers)	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us determine improvements needed.	U.S. Census Bureau

Blogs	All users (varies greatly by topic; generally blogs attract 800 viewers)	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us determine improvements needed.	U.S. Census Bureau
Home Page: www.census.gov	All users (19 million page views per month; 4 million visits; 2.6 million unique visitors).	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability help us determine improvements needed. User comments drive improvements to the home page. The home page is currently undergoing a transformation to a topic-drive organization to reflect user recommendations.	U.S. Census Bureau
New 2012 Economic Census home page (launched March 2011)	Gateway to response to the 2012 Census – representing about 28 million businesses. Currently geared to trade associations and other partners. Visits varied greatly during promotion and collection cycle: average 49,000 page views per month during height of the collection period.	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us determine improvements needed.	U.S. Census Bureau
American FactFinder (Data Distribution Tool)	All users. Table views: 21 million (March 2012 – February 2013). Monthly average: 1.3 million table views.	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us determine improvements needed. AFF2 recently upgraded to improve user access and ease. Considerable attention given to plain language.	U.S. Census Bureau
Question & Answer Center (FAQ site)	All users (averages 66,000 per month)	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us	U.S. Census Bureau

		determine improvements needed.	
Infographics and Data Visualizations (features plain language labels and text)	All users. "Data Viz of the Week" Gallery: 155,000 page views (July 2012- April 2013). Page views for	Results from an ongoing feedback survey and usability testing help us determine improvements needed.	U.S. Census Bureau
Agency Strategic Plan	The Census Bureau asked the Plain Language Team to edit the upcoming agency strategic plan.	Plain language edit complete, but plan still in production.	U.S. Census Bureau
NIST issues about 250 news items per year on its Web sites and aims to provide them in plain language.	Intended primary audience users for this information are researchers in all science and engineering fields and business people in companies related to S&T. There are hundreds of thousands to millions of people in this intended audience.	We have become more conscious of the need to translate all our materials more consistently to meet Plain Language requirements	National Institute of Standards and Technology
Press release – website; links on Twitter; links on Facebook	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 use common words and short phrases when possible.	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Fact sheets – website; links embedded in press releases	The public; interested stakeholders (i.e. industry, consumer groups; trade organizations) 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
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
ACE Web page;	Public and Businesses	Clear headlines,	Economic and

Created ESA Digital Strategy based in promotion of Plain Language techniques to make the webpage customer-centric, accessible and understandable	General Public and Key Targets	components, headings – Launch 4/13 January/February 2013	Statistics Administration
Cleared Census Press Releases	Public, public and private special interests groups, economists	Active voice, organization, bullets and sub-heads	Economic and Statistics Administration
ESA Blogs	General public, elected officials, economists, statisticians	Shorter sentences, active voice, organization	Economic and Statistics Administration
MBDA Fact Sheets have been redesigned and will be available on our website in the near future.	General public, students, teachers, etc.	Simplified and shortened the language; better visual presentation of data.	Minority Business Development Agency
MBDA-101, the Agency's standard PowerPoint presentation has been updated and simplified by incorporating plain language standards.	MBDA clients, elected officials, corporate procurement officials.	Better flow and use of plain language standards.	Minority Business Development Agency
Webinar announcements	MBDA clients and general public	Streamlined language.	Minority Business Development Agency

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. Train staff in plain writing techniques.

Bureaus provided the following trainings:

Type of Training	Number of employees trained	Date	Bureau
These courses, which were provided by Graduate School USA, trained staff to (1)	60	7/30/2012, 8/1/2013,	Office of the Inspector General

Review the core rules of writing in plain language; (2) Spot examples of writing that fail to meet the requirements of the law; and (3) Review basic editing techniques that will improve poorly written documents and emails. In addition, many other OIG staff, including our entire Office of Counsel, attend yearly training focused on writing techniques, and plain writing in particular.		8/9/2012	
PLAIN-provided training – live	375+	2007 – Present	United States Patent and Trademark Office
Three onsite one-day training events in 2012.	22	1/25/2012 7/18/2013 5/22/2012	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Commerce Learning Center course were made available to employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Writing Basics • Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose • Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely • Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading • Business Grammar Basics • Business Grammar: Parts of Speech • Business Grammar: Working with Words • Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing • Business Grammar: Punctuation • Business Grammar: Sentence Construction • Business Grammar: Common Usage Errors • Writing Skills for Technical Professionals • Writing for Technical Professionals: Preparation and Planning • Writing for Technical Professionals: Effective Writing Techniques 		All year long	Bureau of Economic Analysis
In-house (agency staff or contractor)—live	4	July 19, 2012	International Trade Administration
In-house (agency staff or contractor)—	12	July 31, 2012	International Trade

live			Administration
In-house (agency staff or contractor)—live	8	August 14, 2012	International Trade Administration
In-house (agency staff or contractor)—live	12	September 18, 2012	International Trade Administration
In-house (agency staff or contractor)—live	8	October 23, 2012	International Trade Administration
Classroom – Many headquarters writing courses for employees of all levels	246	Multiple dates	U.S. Census Bureau
Online – All levels	48	Multiple dates	U.S. Census Bureau
Other – Offsite, college courses, and other types	18	Multiple dates	U.S. Census Bureau
DOC trainer came to NIST NIST Training Scheduled		June 2012 June 2013	National Institute of Standards and Technology
NIST offers a Plain Language online training class on its Commerce Learning Center training site		Posted in 2012	National Institute of Standards and Technology
In person training session -- FISH - managers	35	4/12/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session -- NOAA general counsel	100	5/3/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Presentation - NOAA 5-yr research plan team	12	6/15/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session - NOAA GLERL	26	7/30/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session - NOAA Homeland Security	18	10/31/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session - NOAA FOIA	12	11/15/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session-NOAA Homeland Security	15	11/19/2012	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session - NOAA- CIO office	16	1/30/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Writing class/Plain - NOAA NGS	18	2/12/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session --NOAA NOS Coast Survey	15	3/11/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric

			Administration
In person training session - NOS-IOOS-Zdenka	1	3/15/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session - NOS Coast Survey	21	3/22/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session -- NOS-IOOS	18	3/26/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session - NOS	5	3/27/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person training session -NGS	18	3/28/2013	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
In person writing courses. These courses weren't specific to plain language, but these covered plain language principles	14	During 2012	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
May All Hands live training	45	5/10/12	Economic and Statistics Administration
Provided Video links to staff as follow- up		May – July, 2012	Economic and Statistics Administration
Planned In person training on plain writing techniques.	All staff	Summer 2013	Bureau of Industry and Security
Live at the National Association of Government Communicators training	2	Apr 2013	Minority Business Development Agency
Print guidelines for MBDA staff	Added plain language instruction and training links to the MBDA Style Guide, which will be introduced to staff on May 13, 2013. All MBDA staff are require to attend and will receive plain language resource	Jan-Apr 2013	Minority Business Development Agency

	materials.		
Online training	Plain Language coordinator regularly reviews resource material available online	Oct 2012 – March 2013	Minority Business Development Agency

V. Maintain ongoing compliance and sustain change.

Contact Ciaran Clayton or Mike Kruger within the Office of Public Affairs with compliance questions.

The Office of Public Affairs reports use of plain writing within the Department of Commerce based on reports from bureau plain writing coordinators.

VI. Use agency’s plain writing website to further plain writing compliance.

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. Evaluate customer satisfaction after experiencing plain writing communications.

The **Office of the Inspector General (OIG)** provides oversight to the Department of Commerce by conducting audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations, and making our findings available to stakeholders, where appropriate. Because our stakeholders include Congress, Departmental leadership, and members of the public, it is 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.

The **United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)** has continually updated Web site information, as well as information requested by its stakeholders to include, General Information Concerns, Guide to Filing a Utility Patent, Guide to Filing a Design Patent, and Basic Facts about Trademarks. USPTO utilizes ForeSee Results Analytics to gauge public satisfaction with our Web site. Additionally, USPTO monitors the number of daily Web site visits, as well as the volume of information distributed to its stakeholders and visitors.

The **Bureau of Economic Analysis** evaluates customer satisfaction with our public content very generally. According to our ACSI survey results, we have received a

score of 84 (out of 100) for customer satisfaction with our content from online customers.

The **U.S. 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.

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. As noted on page 5, American FactFinder recently went through a major overhaul. Much of this revision focused on making the site easier to navigate and understand in response for substantial feedback from users.

We have developed special usability tests to establish a baseline for our efforts to simplify language on the site. Although we have conducted customer satisfaction surveys for many years, with questions on plain writing, we expect to have much more data on this as we proceed further in our testing.

According to [*Federal Computer News*](#), a November 2011 study ranked the Census Bureau web site third among 30 agencies in readability, transparency and clarity.

The Census Bureau created a **Plain Language Team** to promote the goal of clear communication and meet the requirements of the Plain Writing Act. The Census Bureau funded a [business case](#) aimed at two key goals: (1) enhancing online glossary resources so the public can more easily understand our data products and (2) building a “dissemination culture” in which we further enhance our employees’ communication skills.

The agency’s Plain Language Team, made up of representatives from all directorates, is implementing the business case. The team is building an online glossary of technical terms in simple form, using free, open source software. The glossary is currently in beta version undergoing testing and refinement. We expect to launch it to the public in Spring 2013.

The Census Bureau has an Intranet site with information on the Plain Writing Act, 10 simple steps to achieve plain writing, training, testimonial videos, tips for managers, and more. The site has been substantially revised three times to reflect new developments.

The Plain Language Team has met widely with senior management to build support for plain language, highlighted by a formal rollout event in June 2012 featuring the agency deputy director.

All Census Bureau employees from top management on down have clear communication as a key element of their performance plan.

The **National Institute of Standards and Technology** has not conducted evaluations specifically of plain language goals. We do conduct customer surveys of our external Web site which consistently scores in the mid 70s on satisfaction ratings from our customers. Given the extremely technical nature of the work we do, we think this score demonstrates that we are doing reasonably well in meeting our customers needs for accessible information.

The **National Telecommunications and Information Administration** revamped its website in 2011 to make it more user-friendly and explain our programs more clearly. We received a lot of informal positive feedback related to the website change.

The **Economic and Statistics Administration** tracks how many Census press releases are used by the media and if the key message is communicated with key facts related more clearly. Also, the ESA website traffic peaked last year with posting of consistent blog posts that were easy to understand. This blog posts were picked up by third party economics and media columnists such as Reuters, Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg on a weekly basis.

Although the **Minority Business Development Agency** has a “plain language” statement on the website as required, they have received no comments regarding such. They are currently exploring tools to help us solicit feedback from website visitors and will include plain language in the items we ask users to evaluate.