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>> I would like to thank you for joining us for today's webinar on Plain Language act and what it means and what it really -- what you need to do. We are in for a very informative and insightful webinar. I would like to introduce to you the presenters for today's webinar. First we have Amy Bunk, who is the director of legal affairs and the policy for the office of the Federal Register US national archives and records ministrations. And she is also currently the chairperson of the plain language action and information network. I also want to introduce to you GSA's Plain Language launcher coordinating GSA program Katherine Spivey. Catherine is an active member of and trainer for the Plain Language action and information network. And she teaches Plain Language courses and holds them at GSA, so I just want to extend my heartfelt thanks to both [Indiscernible -- poor audio]. Thank you all for -- so very much.

>> Thanks, Sandra. Thanks for joining us all today. Looking forward to a good webinar. We're going to start this Plain Language as understood, Plain Language, the act, what it means and what you need to do. Just to make it clear, we're going to be providing an update on the plain writing act, plain writing principles, and how you can make content playing, strategies and tactics, we'll show you some before and after -- after examples, explain how the [Indiscernible -- poor audio] -- a -- wondering what is this plain language, what is the plain writing? Hello?

>> And how we are defining how the plain language action and information network has defined Plain Language is a style of writing that allows readers to quickly find what they need, that is, their task, why they are on your website in the first place or why they are receiving communication from you. Understand what they

[Indiscernible] .

>> [Indiscernible -- no audio] .

>> Because you [Indiscernible -- no audio].

>> -- Reduces errors on applications and of course it reduces the amount of [Indiscernible -- no audio]. Amy, do you have anything more on the [Indiscernible -- poor audio]?

>> I'm actually having problems hearing the presentation. I don't know if anybody else is.

>> Sorry about that, folks. Can you hear us now?

>> I can hear you now, yes.

>> Catherine, can you go back -- what we're doing. Is it clear now?

>> Just a brief update, for those of you in computer land who could not hear us, we will be updating on Plain Language principles and the law. We will be looking at strategies and tactics for making content playing, before and after examples of what we mean. Hear how the plain writing act of 2010 affects government agencies,

[Indiscernible -- no audio] .

>> Janelle and Catherine, you are off again.

>> Okay, folks. We're back. Can everybody hear us okay?

>> I can hear you. This is Amy.

>> Wonderful. We're going to go back to Katherine.

>> I think I just lost you again.

>> Hey, everybody. We're back. This is Derrell Byman with Web Manager University. We apologize with the delay with the audio but we are back up and live and back to Katherine Spivey. Taken away.

>> Okay. Talking about the definition of Plain Language, the style of writing that allows readers to quickly find what they need, understand what they read, and use what they've read to fulfill their needs the first time they read or hear it. So it's really two parts. Helps the reader find information, putting it in the right place on the page, and help making sure the reader understands the information once he or she has founded. If the document doesn't do both, it's not plain language.

>> Plain Language as -- is an essential part of open government transparency. A citizen cannot know what an agency is doing if they don't understand how the agency is describing what they are doing, their mission. The final OMB guidance on the plain writing act states that creating documents using plain writing can reduce

agency costs, as a function of time and agency staff and the resources allocated to answer questions. Can reduce questions from the public to agency staff, the resources spent on enforcement, errors on forms and applications to pick up a great deal of time, and time spent addressing errors. So it is a better way of addressing customer service, and it is one of the best practices from the private sector that is emphasized in the streamlining customer-service Executive Order. Amy, do you have anything more about the anticipated benefits?

>> I think what people should keep in mind is if they want contact from the public, they can also ensure that they're going to get the answers that they need from the public if they write in Plain Language. The public doesn't understand what you're asking for and you need them to contact you, they are not going to.

>> Exactly. Excellent point. Thank you.

>> Some of the techniques we're going to cover that help move content to plain language or plain English, they are what allow users to quickly and easily understand what they are reason to -- reading. Here are some of the common techniques will go over later in the webinar. Reader centered organization, and this is a big shocker for the federal government. It's not what you want to tell people, it's what they need to know. This is in itself one of the bigger surprises about encountering plain language for a lot of people, because they are used to being able to write whatever they want. They've got a webpage, infinitely expendable, but people don't read that much. One of the things we are finding with GSA's first Fridays usability testing is that there's way too much text. Way too much text on government agency websites. And that's not helping people get their point across. People are much more likely to understand easily if it's short. Also, another technique is using design features, headers, tables, bulleted lists, ordered lists. Using short sentences and paragraphs. Using pronouns, you, we, other ones. Nothing wrong with that. Also using contractions. Nothing wrong with that. Using active, not passive voice. Focusing on verbs, not nouns. Using consistent terms, not jargon or acronyms. That's something else that's generally on the top 10 in any usability results. We're always getting things for jargon and acronyms, particularly here at GSA, and using common everyday words. So those of the techniques we're going to be covering.

>> And I'm going to let Amy do the what governs plain language, and that's the information about the Plain Language act of 2010. Amy?

>> Thank you, Katherine. Last October, October 13 of 2010, the president signed the plain writing act. This act requires the federal agencies use clear communication that the public can understand. The act defines what it calls covered documents. Those documents are described on your screen there. The documents are needed to get federal benefits or services or for filing taxes ergo they are documents that provide information about these benefits or services, or they explain how to comply with the requirements administered or enforced by the federal government. Those are the types of documents that the plain writing advocates everything you do, whether when -- web or paper, the act focuses on these particular types of documents so as you begin to start examining and rewriting new or substantially revised documents you want to focus on those first. A couple slides ahead, we're going to go over the timeline again but let me give you the preliminaries on that. The act required OMB to issue guidance April of this year. They did that, final guidance. By July 13, they needed -- each agency needed to designate a senior official for plain writing. They had to explain the act and train their staff on plain writing. Set up procedures to oversee the implementation of the act, and provide agency point of contact for the act.

>> Finally, on a yearly basis, annual basis, they need to post compliance plans. One of the other things they needed to do was set up a website focused on -- a webpage focused on plain writing, and own these guidance they recommended that the off agencies open government sites. Plain language, plain language.gov has posted some helpful templates in conjunction with Web Manager University and the web Council, we did a template for an agency webpage and we've also done a compliance plan template that OMB has made comments on and made some changes to, so you might want to look at that. By October 13 of this year, any covered documents that's new or substantially revised needs to be in plain language -- thanks, Catherine for moving the slides -- again, you need to be writing your compliance plans by April of 2012, you will start issuing your compliance plans.

>> So that's the highlights of the time frames and the requirements of the act. As I

mentioned, owing be issued guidance on the act and what you should keep in mind from the guidance is that your plain writing pages going to be off your open webpage that these covered documents are those that are issued toward external stakeholders as OMB calls it, so anybody outside your agency that you're writing a document, to address. Other highlights from the OMB guidance is that preambles for your rulemaking documents are not exempted. I should note that rules were not covered by the act, but OMB did say in their guidelines that rule-making preambles are not exempted, and long-standing policies currently in effect require regulations to be written in a manner that is simple and easy to understand. So again, what's the OMB guidance emphasizes is that the public needs to be able to understand agency communication and it needs to be simple, clear, meaningful, and charge and free.

>> Thanks, Katherine Thank you, Amy. Thanks for bringing it up about the regulations.

>> One of the things that we find isthatt sometimes -- we're moving more into the techniques now -- we did find an actual State Department question. I would like to add that we'll pick on anybody with these examples, if you'd like us -- if you have an example you'd like us to feature in our next webinar, please send it to me, katherine.spivey@gsa.gov. I'd be happy to include any agency for these plain language examples. You can see the problem here with this actual State Department question. It actually has three or four questions all in this -- collectively with just a yes or no answer. There is some logic problems and examples of it not being organized for the reader.'s --

>> Similarly the Coast Guard boating information on the screen, they have just get a -- done an investigation to see what detection devices are available to recreational boaters issuch that -- I don't know about you, when I see this huge wall of words, it's difficult to get my way through it, so this is 72 words, this particular paragraph, the plain language version of that is this. This is the revision. 39 words. Carbon monoxide is a silent killer. Most important. Coast Guard recommends that you use a carbon monoxide detection device on your boat to reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO. You may choose from a variety of devices. And for a quick sort of before and after, it shows what that can do. You've got 72 words versus 39. You know, it is easier for the reader. Amy, I think you wanted to look at the organized to serve the reader, the reader centered organization? Do you want to take the next slide?

>> I think this gets back to what we were talking about earlier where what you really want to do is focus on your audience and who you're drafting your communication for, whether it's Internet, web-based communication, or it's going to be physically presented to them as a pamphlet or letter. You need to organize your documents so that it's -- it answers what the reader is likely to ask. And not organized for the way you would do it or -- the person in the cube next to you would, I think what happens a lot with writing in the government is that we're so tied into these programs that we know will want to say and we may not say it in a way that is not -- that is most focused on the public. Next slide.

>> We have some information on how to use headings to make it easier for your readers to scan. We have discovered again, through usability testing and a lot of research, on particularly websites of course, that readers do not read every word, particularly online, they scan. There's the F shaped heat map that they go down to the left and over to the middle but there are big dead zones on the page. Some of his behavior is replicating off of websites, just regular pages. People are reading less and less, so obviously the less text that you have, the easier it is for people to find what they're looking for. Sound like a paradox, but Heather's will allow readers to get where they need to go to find the information they're looking for. It also helps Rick up the information. It increases blank space on the page, so it's not this giant wall of words or giant lots of text, and it helps readers navigate the document. They don't have to read every sentence to know where they're going to be. Another possibility, particularly with, say, frequently asked questions, you can use question headings. For example, you can also allied that with pronouns, such as, you know, am I able to do this? And the answer is you can do this in certain circumstances. Because that makes -- it put a person into the audience. You're not just speaking to a face -- faceless entity or public, you have a person in mind, verse and who has this question and wants an answer that he or she can understand. Questions help readers relate to the information, show more of a reader focus and they help you, the writer, the creator of this content to organize the information

to have it make sense. One of the unpleasant parts of the Plain Writing Act is that the burden of making the content playing is on you as the writer or the web editor or whatever you are. It's not on the reader to figure it out. You have to make it clear to the reader, because that's what determines whether it's plain or not. -- Plain or not. -- plain or not.

>> How do I know if I'm eligible to extend my stay in the United States? That's a question header. You may apply for an extension if, and boom, boom, boom you've got the list for that.

>> Another thing online that's being replicated off-line, so to speak, is the use of lists, particularly bulleted lists or ordered lists. Use the numbered lists only if the order of these steps is integral to the process. If the process requires things to be done in that order, if not, just put them in bulleted order. Just put numbers in the process. A list makes it easy for the reader to identify all items or steps in a process. Again, it adds whitespace or blank space for easy reading and helps the reader see the structure of your document. It also serves to break open paragraphs. Sometimes if you have important information in the middle of a sentence or the middle of a paragraph, it's easy to lose that, and you really lose emphasis in the paragraph, but the bulleted list will help break it out.

>> But don't make them too long. There is some research that seven items are the maximum that works particularly well. Longer lists become harder to navigate. For example, and this is from our Plain Language group, how easy is this to read? And there is simply too much information to have it make sense. The revision, broken out into a list, makes it much easier. You know that those are all titles of forms. You have which one they are, they seem to be in more or less a -- well, whatever order, but it would be too easy to lose track of these in a paragraph. Amy, did you have anything that -- anything else about list formats?

>> No. I have a bit of an anecdote. My brother came down here from Massachusetts to go to a conference, and he asked some people who were on the conference before, and it was on the history of sports, what would be best to do for this conference, and they said just keep things to three. That's what people like one secure doing a presentation or something, three major points. So maybe you should aim for three, and try to max out at seven. That way, people remember and take notice of your points.

>> You know, I think that's true. If it gets too much, people's brains just start to get full. It's like the far side cartoon. My brain is full. May I be excused? Yeah. There's a lot of competition for our attention, and what we need to do. So yeah, I think between three and seven is certainly a good number.

>> But this is just much easier to read. Thanks for that anecdote, Amy.

>> You're welcome.

>> Another way of using a design feature with your content is to use tables, and tables are particularly good if you have if then things. Sometimes you'll see that on credit card statements. If you pay by the deadline, if you pay after the deadline, it's this much more. It's just a really helpful way of showing that. Tables save words. They make it easy to locate specific provisions. Makes it easy to take in complex material at a glance and sort of makes your logic OSHA how you're structuring the document clearer. I don't know about you, but whenever I go on the post office website, I'm looking generally for something very specific or even the IRS website, I want to know where do I mail my tax forms? And they have a giant table. If you're in Virginia, they go here. I don't care about all those other states. I just want to know, where's my state? Where is the address I need? And the table makes that really, really easy. For example, here's one on sending expense forms. You know, you have to read the entire document. Actually, there's a lot of words, it's easy to get confused, and then there's two different things. Are you doing it electronically or not electronically? And magically, a table, boom, electronically by the 25th, if it -- paper or fax the 15th. Done.

>> It's much easier for people to understand the table, and you get that are compliance, you get when you need it. Rather than that, people could very legitimately get confused. And if we don't want people calling us saying, you know, I'm going to submit this by -- via fax, when do you need it, we don't want people calling us or e-mailing us or showing up in person or something like that saying, really, what are we supposed to do? We have to make it easy for them. There's no of your -- no virtue in complexity.

>> And one of the ways to not get too complex is to keep things simple. Amy, do you

want to take the next slide, keeping things short?

>> Sure. One last comment on tables, OBM has nice tables of federal holidays, especially those that rotate year to year, so that's another good example of a table.

>> Excellent. Yes. Because it would be a disaster in a paragraph.

>> Yeah. You get a holiday, you'd like to take it and not show up to work.

>> I think with the upcoming holiday on Monday, everybody wants to be able to take that.

>> So keep things short. So if you go to the next slide, this is an example of some boilerplate language from a preamble of a rulemaking document and what you'll notice is that it's a wall of words. One of the other issues with it is it's almost the statement of the civil Justice Reform executive order. People aren't looking at your preamble of your rulemaking to read the Executive Order or a quote, huge block quote of the Executive Order. If you go to the next slide, what you'll see is the very bare-bones of all that text that was on the last slide. Basically, what they were saying there is that their rule meets the acquirement of the civil Justice Reform executive order. Now, they could put a little bit more information in this example and say how they've met that Executive Order. But in this instance since it's just an example we decided not to make anything up. But again, there you have one sentence that says you've met the requirements and then two more that explain how you were met to requirements and then you've done the reader a favor. Also, we've used the slide before and we've gotten questions on, well, what if I want to see the language of the Executive Order? My response to that is, then you go to the actual Executive Order. You don't want to set out in the text of another document. As an attorney I'll go to the Executive Order first and I won't rely on the verbatim quote of the Executive Order in a separate document.

>> If I can add, Amy, also it's a best practice particularly in the web world to link to existing content rather than repeat it because that's where errors, missed typing, messed up cut and paste, whatever, that's where errors get introduced. And it's better to go straight to the source. Just sort of reinforce thing what you said, Amy.

>> Right. And moving on, using short paragraphs, limit a paragraph to one subject or step. Smaller bites of information are easier to digest, and this is a rough guideline, we don't really want you to go back to your desk and start counting the lines in your sentences -- in your paragraphs. But it's important to take a look, what does your document look like? Is it a giant paragraph? That's awfully painful to read. Can you break it up? Can you make a shorter? Can you make it use the -- use a bullet list? Can you move things around? And in those paragraphs, can you use short sentences? Treat only one subject in each sentence. It's not insulting to get easy-to-read sentences, believe me. Of VoIP complexity, avoid confusing your readers. Again, a guideline, aim for 20 words per sentence or fewer. Nothing wrong with short sentences. Certainly true for English that the major line of sentences is subject, verb, object. Who is doing what? What are we supposed to do? That makes easier to figure out what's going on in your sentences and paragraphs.

>> Another thing to her member, I know we have style guides, but style guides can be adapted. Your reader is a person, not an entity. Use pronouns to speak directly to readers. Make your writing relevant. Make it easier for your readers to read yourself. And eliminate words. There's also nothing wrong with contractions like the agency's position or out -- or our position, those are grammatically correct. Which is easier? What makes it more likely that the readers going to finish reading what you said? For example, you can use we to refer to your agency, use you for the reader. This is particularly important if you're doing it again, Q&A format, frequently asked questions, question headers as we went over earlier, use I in the question, where do I send my tax form? Used you in the answer. So that they feel that their questions are being met.

>> For example, we've got this very third person candidate, employer, proposal, you know, it's actually rather difficult to figure out what's going on in this. Once they can -- the candidates goals are established, the goals are identified. A preliminary proposal for presentation to the employer is developed. The proposal is presented to an employer who agrees to negotiate an individualized job that meets the employment needs of the applicant and real business needs of the employer. I was getting lost in those sentences because all of the words look alike.

>> So some of the ways that you can work to fix that, think about the purpose, the

topic, your audience, and some of the common sources of worthiness. Passive voice, repeated words, prepositional phrases, hidden verbs, modifiers, no pronouns, and if you look through all of those things in the example, we've got a much easier to understand paragraph. Once we establish your goals, we identify one or more potential employers. As opposed to this. We prepare a preliminary proposal to present to an employer who agrees to negotiate a job that meets both his and your employment needs.

>> So still not perfect. But a lot plainer. -- plainer. You can see where it needs to be made better. For example, this is just a side to side comparison. 52 words versus 37. Shorter is not always going to make something clearer, but it's certainly a big step on the way.

>> When pronouns don't work, if you are addressing more than one audience and if you're referring readers to more than one office within your organization. For example, if I'm talking about GSA's division and PBS, that's going to be confusing if I'm trying to switch between those, or announce might not work. Excuse me, in that particular instance. Okay, Amy, do you want to take active voice?

>> I'll certainly take the first slide and if you want to follow-up and talk more about passive voice, that's fine with me.

>> Great.

>> Okay.

>> All right. Active voice -- it says it's more clear, concise, direct. Passive voice is a characteristic of bureaucrats. It's not plain. Active voice -- it gives us an active verb and the subject at the beginning of the sentence so that people can figure out what was going on, so the example, mistakes were made, you don't know who made the mistakes. When they were made. Basically, you don't know what that refers to or what it is referring to, so again, it's all about writing for your reader and putting the important material in the sentence at the beginning. And using an active verb. Taken away, Katherine what is passive voice? This is following on exactly to what Amy just said, in passive voice, a person doing the action follows the verb. Again, in a regular English sentence, Tom hit the ball, you've got subject, verb, object. To make that tacit, you emphasize the ball was hit by Tom. -- passive -- On the screen we've got our lean was promoted by her boss. Was the word for -- the verb? Are mode. Who did the promoting? Boss. Who did he or she promote? Arline. Inverting the order. You've got to go to more trouble to figure out what is actually going on? And the key to this is always going to be the verb. What's the verb in this? The verb has two parts for the grammarians in the group. It's going to be the verb to be plus the past participle of another verb. It was or will be. Another big giveaway for passive is by, if verb plus the word by, "by," so the active voice version of these are her boss promoted our lean, or Fred will lease the house. -- Arlene. What's important in sentences? 99% of the time, was important in sentences is who's doing what, not anything else. There are a very, very few exceptions, what generally what you want is passive -- active voice, not passive voice in your writing.

>> Passive voice can disguise who does what. The memo was written yesterday. And active voice, you have to answer who did it? The director wrote the memo yesterday. So there's a comparison of packed up and -- passive and active. Passive voice, because of the way it's constructed, generally is more wordy, and active voice is more concise. Just because it requires fewer words, it doesn't need the helping words and it doesn't need the preposition "by."

>> And also, these are all for English. I should have said that at the beginning. I'm only qualified to talk about plain language or plain writing in English, not any other language because I know that there grammatical constructions are different. So passive voice again is awkward for English. Consultation from respondents was obtained to determine the estimated burden. And in active voice, we consulted with respondents to determine the estimated urban. So you at least know -- there are still great fault in that sentence but at least it's in active voice.

>> And so we just have some brief examples, access and/or unauthorized expenses delays or luxury accommodations and services will not be reimbursed by the company but will be borne by the employee. Your application has been denied by the Department of State. The submission you filed will we be reviewed by the judges. The active voice versions of those -- notice I added a bullet list because it lent itself to that. The company will not reimburse you for bullet lists, unauthorized expenses, delays, or luck sure he accommodations and services. The Department of

State has denied your application. The judges will review your submission. These techniques, such as using headers, using lists, shortening sentences and paragraphs, looking for active voice, not passive, of those are sort of what I'll call mechanical things that you can do to try it to work toward improving your writing. I mean, you can take a pass through -- that's a way of improving the readability, making it easier for your reader to understand it little by little.

>> Another similar thing, and this is another mechanical thing you can do to improve is to avoid hidden verbs. Those are verbs disguised as nouns. They are generally longer than their true verb form. They're also words often ending in -ment, -tion, for example, conduct an analysis, the hidden verb is analyze. Present a report. This report -- during an assessment, assess, provide assistance, assist or plain, help, and came to the conclusion that, concluded. This is another mechanical thing you can do to go through your writing and try to make it shorter, ticket clearer and sharper.

>> Amy, can you do the consistent terms of shall and must and those?

>> Okay. All right. So you want to avoid shall because it's ambiguous and not used in everyday speech. The example I like to give people when they challenge me on whether or not shall is an obligation, I say to them, shall we go for coffee? With that in mind, what you want to use for an obligation is the term must. Use must not for a prohibition. Use me for a discretionary action. And use should for recommendation. Next slide please.

>> All right. So if there are any attorneys out there, they might be familiar with Bryan Garner. He's a strong advocate for plain language in legal writing. He's the editor of blacks legal dictionary, and he talks about why you shouldn't use shall. -- Black's.

>> You see on the list, shall can mean must and me, but it also might mean will or is. So what you want to do is avoid the term shall at all costs, and if your lawyer requests to you put shall in your document, ask them if you could just drop that term entirely, because you're saying truckers shall provide -- why not just say truckers provide the department of transportation with the following paperwork. And then list it out. There's really not a you -- the need to use the word shall.

>> Okay. Great. Thanks, Amy. And in the interest of sounding less bureaucratic, one of those ways is to limited jargon and acronyms. One of the things that usability tests reveal again on webpages is that government agencies have way too much garden -- jargon, way too many acronyms that are even inconsistent within the same agencies. Contractions aren't bad. Use them. Use everyday words.

>> Amy, did you want to take jargon and acronyms? This next slide? The necessary technical terms and the obscure and often pretentious language?

>> I think you just read it. As a reminder, if necessary technical terms in your writing and -- writing to a technical audience, judges or lawyers or engineers, then use those technical terms, plain language doesn't prohibit that. Again, plain language is to write for your audience. If your audience is attorneys and if the court brief, use the term played if. -- Plaintiff. But there's other language that maybe you want to stay away from. Because it's of skewer, it's pretentious, it's long, -- it's obscure -- maybe your audience has to think and try to figure out what you mean. I think probably the one example that I have most recently heard of is on boarding. What's on boarding is in several federal agencies is orientation for new employees. And every time I hear that term, I have to go back and try and think of what that means. So that's the kind of thing that you want to avoid. I think was acronyms, what you want to do is make sure that your acronym means something. Use the agency name. If you have to use the acronym, putting behind the agency name the first time you use it or say the. -- we. We at the Federal Register, the governing body is the committee of the Federal Register. So what we try to use is the term committee instead of the ACFR. There's a couple of examples. Hopefully that helps.

>> Thanks, Katherine Sure. Here's a wonderful cautionary tale that came up as one of the plain anecdotes that we share. I hope you can see it properly. This is -- I think it's in the drilling industry, the oil and gas petroleum industry. It's a machine or a device known as a Christmas tree. And someone was doing an article on a journal in the field, an industry journal, and was given a request, can you have a Christmas tree on the front? And since the designer was not familiar with the term Christmas tree, just imagine what actually ended up as a draft cover. You know, center, star, decorations, everything. -- Santa. It's always helpful to remember that not everyone knows all of our terms all the time.

>> There's also something to remember is that there's nothing wrong with everyday words. Again, based on your audience, you don't have to use the words anticipate. You can use expect. You can take heat -- you can use try for attempt, or begin or start for commence. Just because they are longer or have more syllables does not make them in transit we better words. You know? -- More syllables. It's helpful to get your meaning straight so that you are not relying on your audience is having to remember which is it going to be. Just take the extra step and make it easier for your audience.

>> Place subjects and objects close to their verbs. Put conditionals such as only or always next to the words they modify. Don't misplace modifiers unless you really like getting lots of follow-up e-mails. And put your exceptions and long conditions after the main clause not before or in the middle. Word placement does make a difference. My favorite example so far is the yesterday a mad dog bit five men and women in the south and. I can't actually hear you laughing out there, but I'm assuming that at least a smile has gone over -- end. It should be yesterday in the South, or yesterday in southern whatever, a mad dog bit five men and women. And the last one, this rule proposes the spring summer subsistence harvest regulations in Alaska for migratory birds that expire on August 31, 2003. I think it's amazing that they know when the birds are going to expire. That's what I call planning. So people seize upon these sorts of mistakes, so it's always a good idea to check on your placement.

>> I just have some examples to show how we've made some examples plain -- plain. The after version, if you make a whole while freeing a stuck vehicle you must fill the hole before you drive away. I think it's much more likely that the second version, the revised version, people would understand what they're supposed to do. So they're much more likely to get compliant.

>> Another short -- shorter version of before. These are from the website Plainlanguage.gov in the example section. There's also database so if you're ever looking for before and after samples or you want to pass them on to us, that would be great too.

>> Of the SATCOM, this is essentially boiling down something, to transition smoothly, all services that were available under the GSA satellite services program will also be available under SATCOM II.

>> The GWAC overview. You may not have noticed the revision. Protests are not allowed. Move that to using pronouns, you may not protest task orders and also including a bullet list. You may not protest task orders under 10 million unless the order increases scope, Prairie the performance, maximum by you of the GWAC -- maximum value of the GWAC. Making it easier for people to see what's involved.

>> This next example, category one, this is the before. There's two Mayor to prop -- major problems with this. You've got this -- sorry -- you've got the area here is it's very difficult to keep track of things going across into the paragraph, and you've also got this second sentence, which gets blurred in with the other items. So revision of that is to make it a very long bulleted list, which does go past our seven item limit, so maybe they could be clustered in some way, but you separate this last sentence out from everything else so you can actually understand it. So you can understand it. Services in this category are limited to those that would specifically support the equipment. So I mean, that's something that you would want to know. I might even go back to the page owner and say, should this go on top?

>> Socioeconomic credit. This is just a rewrite that we did of the second part where it says board DOD agencies. Again, breaking it open. If you are saying, fill out the following one, two, three, four. It wasn't a step process so we just use bullets for that.

>> Another example about statement of work reviews, this is something very valuable that they offer. So work review, so that you can doublecheck it, have things like someone is checking your work before you turn it in and it was very difficult to understand what they were offering. So what can you expect? Short turnaround time, yes no decision, decision on which functional area is appropriate, and then the things you still need to do. As a person interested in submitting this, you have to complete the acquisition planning, work with legal and technical of visors, conduct the Kermit and perform due diligence. -- Conducted the procurement.

>> There's a checklist for web content. It's also good advice for the plain language, but have you identified what the most people get? And this is in relation to the plain writing act, looking at the most frequently visited pages or the most

documented that the most people get, depending on what your federal agencies does, identify your audience, what type of customer use of this document? Remove or explain jargon, that's the mechanical things you can do. Remove the out of date content. Make it easier for customers to complete their tasks and remove all the text or content you can and still keep it useful. So with plain writing, the plain language, what else can you do? What are your next steps? Web manager University, the plain language and action information network offer courses. Joining the plain language action and information network is three, monthly meetings -- second wednesday of each month generally. You can take a look at your agency's plain writing act page that should be off your opengov page. There's a listing on Plainlanguage.gov, the federal plain language guidelines, and you can take a look at those and start to apply them, and work on the key content first that you're covered documents according to the act of the public facing documents.

>> And I've also included some resources. These are I think mostly on the plain language -- Plainlanguage.gov where you can get some of these federal resources, we'll be sending out these slides or putting them on web Manager University, so we'll add some links that will make sense once you can actually click on them. Howto.gov is the best practices run by part of Web Manager University or ally, Web Manager University. Usability.gov, that's the group thatdoes the first Friday you to build -- usability testing. Web Manager University is offering courses . There is some not for profit and nonfederal, but still plain language oriented, center for plain language, clarity international, plain language Association international. Amy, is there anything else that we should mention before we go on to questions? Or anything you want to add?

>> Just a note about plain language.gov, you'll need to enter the www.plainlanguage.gov to get to the site.

>> I will make sure that that's included in the links when we post this.

>> Thank you.

>> Sure.

>> Well, thank you both. Thank you, Amy and Katherine. We have several questions. Hopefully we'll get to everyone. If we don't, we will provide all of the attendees a copy of the answered questions for those that we don't get to. As a reminder if you do have a question, please type in the chat box. Just wanted to start off with a question of clarification, Amy, you had mentioned about documents written to lawyers could use terms that lawyers understand. And this person wanted a clarification, so the audience for legal documents could be both lower -- lawyers and general public, so in that case, do we ignore the general public?

>> Well, no. Since lawyers are members of the general public I would aim to write to the general public.

>> Thanks. As a reminder, Katherine did mention that we will be sending a copy of the slides and the recording and resources of the slides and transcript will be posted on Howto.gov. So a couple more questions, several more --

>> Can I make another comment? Go ahead and slip in an answer. One of the things that plain language talks about is dividing up your audiences, so if you've got two audiences, and a lot of times they think regulations do that for sure, not lawyers and the general public but it might be as an example, in education, regulations might be directed at school administrators and maybe academics and then the students and so what you'd want to do is breakout your document so that you're addressing each of those audiences separately.

>> Okay. Thank you. Another thing, more general question for both of you, there were two questions similar but different levels. Is person asked, have you heard the rule that our item -- writing should be aimed at a fifth-grade level? Do you agree? Another person wrote that you should write at and eight grade level. Can you address that?

>> Amy, this is an easy one. I'll take this one. I'm reserving you for the hard questions. I think that that particular concept is sort of based off of modern newspaper writing and general interest. And I know, I've been teaching for about 15 years, and I know that when I started teaching, I think we were -- the reading level at the post -- this was my memory -- the reading level that the person is writing at, most of the article was eight. And I think that by the end of the teaching, a couple years ago, it had gone down to six. So what we have is a general audience less focused on reading difficult material, and there's a whole lot of things going on with that. Part of that is reading online, the influence of that on paper. And

there's also a lot of things that you can do to sort of jury rig that answer. If you have long sentences, the education level required is going to shoot up. So breaking that into short sentences is going to bring it down. Using acronyms or jargon or long words is going to raise that score. Using everyday words and explains in -- explaining the jargon is going to bring that count down. It's going to depend very much on your audience. I don't think the Wall Street Journal has changed all that much, but I know that general interest publications have. And you would simply have to pay some attention to what your audience -- where your audience is. And you can test that -- any writing on the smog index or the index or anything, but those are the ways to bring it down. I don't know if that answers your question.

>> Can I just throw something in?

>> Please.

>> What it sounds like they're talking about is readability testing, and while readability testing might give you sort of a grade level that's still not going to tell you if your audience understood it or had more questions, it may be -- some people might use it, but it isn't as a concept completely plain language.

>> Exactly. It's not the whole thing. It's not going to give you the whole solution. You can still confuse people on a fifth-grade level. Katherine, can you go back to the checklist slide that people can reference that while we're answering questions?

>> Thank you.

>> Question for both of you, how is the success attract or measured? And I guess, how are we going to know that people are complying with this act?

>> Okay. Amy, do you want to --

>> Sure. Ways to track success, if you are looking for the public to call in, track the number of calls. That they've gone up and that's what you wanted, that's a good indication that your document is clear and plain language. If you are trying to do decrease the number of calls and free up your call center people to do something else, that's another way to track it. There's several federal agencies that need their documents translated, so ask your translators how long it takes them to translate the document. If the translation time goes down, that's one possible indicator that it was written clearly in English. You could actually -- what might work is to have the English document translated into another language, whether it's Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and then have it translated back and see if that is an indication of what you actually want to say the first place. So there are ways to track whether or not your documents are in plain language. The act requires that we as federal employees and federal agencies have on our plain writing page a way for the public to comment on whether or not we are complying with the Act so that's another good way to track the material. One federal agency, the new consumer financial protection Bureau, has actually posted a truth in lending document and took comments on two separate versions of the new document, and they let people comment on which they thought was clearer, so there's another way to try to track success.

>> I know at GSA, we're trying to figure out how we can add something to our webpages that essentially -- did you understand this page? It would not be a perfect feedback mechanism but you know on some pages, particularly like help pages on a site like Microsoft or Google or whatever, you read the answer and they say, did this answer your question? Thumbs up thumbs down. And that's another way if you can get that implemented with your CMS or however you're running your website.

>> Great. Thanks to both of you. Kind of piggybacking on that question, is there quantitative information like studies that we could use to make the case that are agencies -- this investment of time required to edit the plain language will pay for itself in the long run?

>> I know of some, but I'm pretty sure that these use cases are on Plainlanguage.gov, but I'm not positive right off hand where they are, Amy. I'm thinking of the state of Washington business tax form that went out, and I only know this from going to a workshop, but the state of Washington sent out a tax form to small business owners, and it was essentially, you may ozone tax if you bought something on the Internet or on a different state. But it was so poorly worded -- it really made no sense whatsoever, that it had a 97% ignore rate. And that was really, really bad so they brought in a plain language person who recast it, made it much simpler to follow, and they made \$800,000 more than they thought. So that kind of use case, government, you know, examples of using plain language, I think that

there's an area, Amy, on Plainlanguage.gov, or have I been dreaming that?

>> No. I believe there is. There's also a law professor in Michigan who's written an article, and then scrambling around because it escapes me now, but his name is Joe Kimball. And he wrote an article -- I'm going to try to get the name of the article and I'll have to report back in a minute or so.

>> Or we can send it out -- so don't -- but it was essentially so to speak, the government case for using plain language?

>> It just -- it talks about the costs and benefits of plain language.

>> Okay. We can send that out or the name of the person. That might be helpful -- helpful for attendees. We get this question a lot, can both of you clarify that this act does just apply to federal agencies and not state and local?

>> well, it is federal agencies. However, it has been discussed that if there's a document that appears to be a federal document that's being used by other jurisdictions, like state or local authorities to provide federal benefits, then it needs to be in plain writing too.

>> Okay. Thank you.

>> The name of the article is, writing for dollars, writing for sense.

>> when you say public, what do you mean? Do you mean Internet and intranet? Her webpage has a ton of information on their intranet, but she's curious as to how plain language will be implemented on the Internet website. Does this apply to those as well?

>> My understanding, and correct me if I'm wrong, my understanding is that it's only outward facing, that is, external websites, not intranet or wikis or extranet or anything like that.

>> That's my understanding too. Some of the questions I've received, doesn't apply to the office of the federal registry if we are all the contacting other federal agencies? And it does. So your external customers, that could be another federal agency, it could be president, could be Congress, it could be your regulated entities, it could be the companies that you have regulations that they need to comply with, or it could be the general public.

>> Okay. Thank you.

>> You had talked about that the act is primarily directed primarily at public transactions or services, such as benefits, filing taxes, compliance regulations, and I hadn't heard that before, public direct services, online and paper were primarily the emphasis. Is this correct?

>> well, the act specifies what be covered documents are. Again, those are the document that are needed to get federal benefits or services or for filing taxes. They are those that provide information about benefits or services or explain how to comply with requirements administered or enforced by the federal government. So that's what the Act covers to

>> Right. Shifting gears a little bit, we've talked about text. What suggestions can either of you offer about the types of images, photos, graphics that are most effective online? Or the images in also going along with this, do you think the images interfere with or enhance this?

>> Oh, I don't know about you, Amy, but I feel completely -- without the experience to answer that. I know that personally, just speaking as myself, I tend to ignore pictures. But that's just me. I know that other people are much more visually attuned, and it will make all the difference to how they approach the content, whether it has -- whether that works or not. Amy, do you have anything else to add? I feel very unable to answer this.

>> Yeah, I can just talk from personal experience myself. I'll say that probably teachers aren't such a motivating factor for me but I do notice if the picture doesn't make sense at all with the text. So you have to really be careful with images or pictures. If they're so shocking, people aren't going to look and read the text because they're so stunned by the picture. Also, if the picture doesn't really convey or doesn't really relate to the message that you're sending out, I think that is a distraction so you have to be careful about using images because they at least distract me at times, so I don't think I'm the only one.

>> Yeah. I would think he would be very difficult, we've been working on doing some posters for plain language, and when the pictures are along, it's really hard to keep on track, so I find that pictures, like 75% a distraction. Sometimes when they are really good, they are fabulous. But the potential for it being distracting is so huge that I'm always very hesitant but I know a lot of people are much more visual

than I am I look for pictures, look for something to spark up the page.

>> Maybe the suggestion with pictures, then, is once you have it, once you've got your page set out, have somebody else look at it who's not familiar with the contents and just to tell you, whether or not the content makes sense and seems to be written plainly and whether or not the picture seems to be going along with that or is a distraction or useful.

>> Thank you. Could you comment on changing government culture in an office to accept Plain Language principles? For example, it can be difficult to defend copyright for the sake of -- and according to the Plain Writing Act, enormously challenging.

>> Yes, it's enormously challenging. Amy, you know far better than I do the history of the plain writing, plain language movement, but plain that was itself founded in the 1990s, so I know that good writing goes in and out of -- what gets emphasize, I think that we got, if you will, tremendous oomph from the open government, the citizen engagement forces, and also as I said, the new Executive Order on streamlining customer service, that really does say, essentially, we should be copying what the private sector does best, rather than sticking to what we're doing now. And part of that is customer service, part of that is reimagining how we relate with our customers, like why aren't we using online chat? why don't we have people on call 24 hours a day? why can't we get this level of service? I mean, because we're asking people to engage with us and we need to make it easy. We need to make it superduper easy for them. We should be like Amazon. Really, really easy to get stuff from Amazon. It should be as easy to understand anything on any government webpage as it is on any commercial website. So I know that here at GSA, we have started a program of plain language early adopters, so we are calling them Pacers, trying to get them together, organize brown bags, get them to take it back to their offices and get support, get them to join plain and get involved in those communities. We've got a community on the plain language group, and just trying to keep the sport going. It's easy to be disheartened. I mean, I have been fighting this -- the battle over the hyphen for a very long time and it is the heart of -- disheartening that other people don't see that. I know it's a small part, but plain language does require imagination and fortitude to keep going and say, well, just because you've been doing it like this doesn't mean you can't change. So I'm hopeful. What about you, Amy?

>> I think a couple suggestions on that end is maybe what seems to work best is that there is a grassroots effort to support plain language and the support from the senior staff at the agency, so whether it's the administrator or the architect or the Secretary, have that support behind the grassroots effort, it really helps maintain the enthusiasm for the program. And to write clearer. Other suggestions, I think that have gone over well, you asked citizenship and immigration services has done a number of videos -- US. Short YouTube videos that talk about some of the things we discussed today. My favorite is active voice. Talk about jargon, so those kind of fun ways to sort of bring it into peoples attention, to make it seem not so stodgy, good ways of supporting and bringing the program to highlight. If you've got an intranet page, maybe post a tip of the day, on that page or in your newsletter, other suggestions might be to start a small awards program from agencies -- some agencies before the act even past, had awards programs for employees where they just get a certificate that you print at your desk that says, your document one a planning which award, and that's a good way to boost more row and support the program and develop the program into the is to show memory of the agency.

>> Those are excellent points. I know that other federal agencies are very long-established plain writing programs, like Social Security and the FA and -- FAA and the nuclear regulatory commission, those are some of the ones listed on the plain language websites as having their plans, plain writing pages and plans posted.

>> Other agencies that have been at it for a long time include the veterans administration, in particular veterans benefits. Also, the securities and exchange commission in the 1990s posted their plain English handbook. That handbook is still online, and it's a wonderful source and probably a good example of how plain language can be introduced into sort of a very complicated technical topic.

>> Those are great points. Thanks, Amy.

>> Thank you both.

>> Are there any automated assessment tools to help us to flag potential problem content and reinforce the need for people who are new to the concept?

>> Have either of you heard of anything like that?
>> I think there is several computer programs that will help you with your writing. Now, those are not the be-all end-all again. It's just another tool.
>> I think pending, -- pending HAL, we are going to have to keep real people. And in some cases, if I can piggyback onto Amy's answer, in some cases you actually have to know what the machine is picking up. There used to be, maybe there still is, a grammar review on Mac software, released a number of years ago there was. But you had to know what passive voice meant to be able to fix it because in that case, in that particular sentence, it might be appropriate so you had to know quite a lot about all the things they were flagging because you couldn't just -- it's like spellcheck. Sometimes when you have is the correct word and it's not in the dictionary and you have to have the judgment to be able to distinguish.
>> Thank you.
>> This person has to -- says if they have a bunch of highly technical reports dating about a decade back. Do they need to go back through all of these publications and put them in plain language or is it more starting from now moving forward?
>> Correct me if I'm wrong, Amy, but I think what the Act says is that its new documents and substantially revised documents. So I don't think they need to go back and do those, although if they like, they could maybe do a plain language summary of those, and that would increase maybe their readability, so to speak. Amy, does that sound right?
>> Yeah, that does. The reports need to be specially revised, they need to be written in plain language.
>> Yeah.
>> If it's a report that was a report, and it's on 1984 crops and you're not going to use that reports of -- it doesn't need to be revised or updated, then no.
>> Thank you. Just wanted to add a quick note about training. This person asked, does plain -- does PLAIN provide on-site agency training for staff?
>> Sure. PLAIN provides half-day training to agency staff. We will come to you. We have a number of trainers who are all learn tears from a variety of different federal agencies. What you need to do is go to www.plainlanguage.gov and click be contacted desk and request training and we will send back an e-mail requesting more information. Keep in mind that because all of our trainers are volunteers, we're usually -- we've been pretty booked up lately so we're about a couple months out, I believe.
>> Okay. There's a high demand for that.
>> Yes. But if you're interested in becoming a trainer, that information is on www.plainlanguage.gov, and you could also become a trainer inn Plain Language And what we would request from that is that you at least teach a couple classes for PLAIN in a year, so it's not that burdensome, and then you could train the whole rest of your own agency. It is if you're from out of town and you want one of our trainers, our trainers right now are located in the DC area. PLAIN has no budget, so the agency would have to provide the budget for the travel.
>> Okay. Thanks for that information. We'll include any of the resources that cap -- Katherine mentioned and include Plainlanguage.gov in our follow-up e-mail so you have that. This person -- we have a couple more questions, we have a little bit more time because we want to get through as many as we can, this person said, I think this is a pretty obvious question, but how much of the Howto.gov applies to military websites? Such as policies and relations?
>> Well, the act doesn't exempt out the military department of the federal government.
>> But it doesn't address regulation.
>> It doesn't address regulation. Maybe senior attorney at the office of the Federal Register strongly recommends that you write your regulations as clearly as possible. With policy guides and training manuals that are internal to the military, that particular branch of the military, the act doesn't cover those but again, I strongly recommend that you write those clearly.
>> Okay.
>> Most writing that you write -- right in plain language is recommended. Do you have any advice on how to further simple five already simple five the text for a mobile website?
>> For mobile? Was a great point because yeah, I've noticed that I'm mostly

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accepting -- accessing the web on my mobile now, and one of the things I think you want to do is make sure secure looking at readers top tasks. I was talking today about using my mobile to set my XM radio. Which is kind of interesting because I was of course trying to do it in a hurry, and I e-mailed -- I googled XM radio reset, and it came right up. And I was able to enter the information into the box. And reset my signal. That was great. It was a wonderful thing of using a smart phone, so part of it is going back to top tasks, cutting text and cutting tasks and cutting text. Even more the screen -- even less of the screen than you do on a laptop. There's a lot in user behavior on smartphone that we don't yet know too much about.

>> I think cutting text is good but you don't want to cut it so much that it makes no sense.

>> Yeah.

>> You mentioned Amazon earlier and I was going to rant, this is probably off-topic, but I have a Kindle and I wanted to archive some of the books and the only thing I could find was delete from device. I tried all over their website and I contacted them and they still couldn't get a clear answer. It turns out that if you hit that button, it's removed from your device and its archive. If they had just use the term archive, it would have saved me a lot of hassle and the first time I did it I was really worried that I was going to lose what I had not.

>> Sure. I think another big part of that answer is testing. We're doing some usability testing tomorrow on the mobile version of USA.gov. And part of that is what commercial entities do. Just to test, what are people doing, what are people trying to do, what do the call centers say that people trying hard -- people are trying to get help with?

>> Shifting gears a little bit, we have time for one last question, this is in reference to section 508 compliance. Is section 508 compliance part of the Plain Writing Act, and what are the best practices to achieve compliance or is it completely separate?

>> well, 508 compliance isn't mentioned in the act, so I consider them probably two separate issues. But whenever developing your website you need to be mindful of both. I'll let Catherine --

>> No. That's exactly what I would going to say. There are two separate things, they both supply -- it's both about you know, getting that material to work for your audience and just making sure that your including all audiences. -- You're.

>> And testing is very useful and key.

>> Thank you both. That's all the questions we have. Do either of you have any last final things to mention? This has been a wealth of information, really appreciate both of you taking your time to educate our community on a hot topic right now.

>> well, I would just say you know, take a look at the federal plain language guidelines. We'll be e-mailing that out with our package later, and think about joining PLAIN. Think about what you can do in your agency and how you can help things be easier.

>> I just like to say thank you to the Web manager you -- Web Manager University for asking me to participate. I'd also like to say that www.plainlanguage.gov also participated in the first Friday, so we had our website tested and I think it was really useful and we got a lot of really good feedback so I would highly recommend that.

>> Great. Thanks, Amy. As a reminder, this is just the first in a series of what monthly webinars we're going to be hosting on plain language is so stay tuned to our schedule talks about Web Manager University Governor for updated information and we are hoping -- we will be posting our new fall schedule shortly, so also stay tuned for that, and again, thanks to Katherine and Amy for your time and thanks to everyone who joined.

>> Thanks, everybody. Have a great day.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you. [event concluded]