<meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width; initial-scale=1.0; "\>Event ID: 1833787
Event Started: 9/28/2011 5:00:00 PM
----------


>>Please stand by for realtime captions.
>> Good afternoon, everyone.
>>
>>Please stand by for realtime captions.
>> Good afternoon, everyone and thank you for joining us on today's webinar. I am Genelle from Web manager -- I want to remind everyone that we will be posting recording along with us slides and a transcript by the end of the week. Hopefully by tomorrow. Before I begin, I would like to start off by introducing -- plain language launcher. She coordinates just a plain language program. She is an active member and trainer for the plain language action and information network otherwise known as plain and teaches courses and -- -- she worked for the GSA and the Federal acquisition service is integrated services where she managed -- social media and edited -- .
>> Catherine ?
>> thanks, Genelle, let's get under way. That they've got a lot to cover and I want to leave some time for questions. We will be getting some slides afterwards, we may have to do some breezing through them. This is what not to Web, plain language and writing for the web or I thought of calling this the website makes me look sad, but I could not get my way around it. Here we go.
>> Okay. As you know, I am Catherine Spidey, if you want -- have a question for me later on, it will be Katherine. spivey at GSA.gov. I will be talking about plain writing in a very specific contexts writing for the website. We will be looking at a couple of design possibilities and some of the current research and some of the ways you can make your content better on the web. We will not be covering everything to do with plain language, but I will ask Genelle to include the link over to the basics plain language webinar I did earlier in the month. So one of the big questions as always, what is plain language.
>> Plain language is a style of writing that allows readers to quickly find what they need understand what they read, and use what they read to fulfill their needs the first time they read or hear it. That is the definition of plain language from the plain language action and information network. It is if you can imagine particularly important on the web. Again it is helping the reader to find and understand the information. If your document or webpage whatever do not do both, it is not plain language. what plain language is not, I don't know if you heard any of these, it is not writing in baby talk or the dumbing it down or making it an technical or a final step before you posted on the web or just using pronouns in a Q&A format or easy, we are taking on the responsibility of writing to so that people can find and understand the first time. That is a big responsibility for the writing and a big task. But we are offering some techniques to make it easier for you. So why use plain language? Well, it is an essential part of "ferment which shows no sign of going away and it can also reduce agency costs. Not necessarily save money, but it will reduce costs because you will be focusing on what the customer needs to know, it will be effective communication, reduce the time spent by staff on training or putting up further guidance and it will improve compliance. That is what we are expecting to have happy as a result of plain language. This is an example from the plain action information network. This is just, they revised a bit benefit form letter, Jackson Mississippi departmental of veterans affairs office. Device to benefit form letter and with one letter, the letter, they were getting 9.4 calls a month for counselors and help went down 1.6. They were able to save staff time to devote to other work that needed to be done. So what governs plain language? What is the plain language enforcement arm? There is not really going to be people policing all the writing, but there is the plain writing act of 2010 which was actually signed into law. There has been a number of -- they made it into law last October. New and substantially revised government documents that are covered, must be written in plain language by October 13, 2011. So that is next month, rapidly coming up. Documents that are necessary to get government benefits or services or for filing taxes. Perhaps I should reiterate this is federal documents that are necessary to

get federal government benefits or for filing taxes. Documents that provide information about federal benefits or services. Documents that explain to the public how to comply with a federal requirement. This narrows the focus. I have seen information that covers regulations, it does not cover regulations. There's a number of executive orders that do, but the plain writing act of 2010 does not. The legislation applies to the paper and electronic letters, publications, forms, notices and instructions you the people who read we are focusing on how to make it easy to comply, OMB provided final guidance on April 13. The plain language action and information network worked with OMB to provide this guidance and there's a great deal more information on plain language on plain language.gov. And how to.gov is a website of the office of Citizen services and innovative technology here at GSA. That is a website devoted to best practices in customer service. So all of those will help you learn a little bit more about plain language. There is also the executive order on customer service. That is the streamlining service delivery and improving customer service. Another element we are  where plain language is reaching out to the public. Where it explicitly states, government managers must learn from what is working in the private sector and apply these best practices to deliver service better, faster and at lower cost. They mentioned the self-service options that you can access by Internet or mobile phone which will be a game changer and how we treat content. There will be a lot less of it for one thing. And reduce the need for customers to call or e-mail or write and we hope complain, if we can get what they need done that in -- written in plain language. The techniques that I will be covering today at top speeds are identify your audience and organize content for them. There should be no surprise to Web content audience. Using certain design features, keeping sentences and paragraphs short, using pronouns active boys and herbs. Choosing simple everyday words. Can access content. We don't have time to talk about all the plain language techniques, but this is going to be the highlights that will work for you on the web. People do not read word for word on the web, people scan. It sounds like only 16% read word for word. Everyone else is scanning. They are getting higher reading speed, but still slower than reading print. We are finding some of the online behaviors are transferring off-line as well. People are not reading just text anywhere. You probably have seen the heat map from the website, example of the heat map, this is what is seen as relatively standard almost on those pages, people look on the left, they read the header and then read down along the margin. Generally not going over to the right, not looking too much at navigation. So you have to allow, to write to match people's behavior. You cannot assume that they are going to read everything on the page. His analysis, was that people read an average of 18% of what is on the page. But it is like the word limiting -- the number of the words go up, the percentage read it goes down. An inverse relationship with that. To get people to read half your words, you have to cut your text, severely, so that they will do so. Just having more and more text, means people give up. So take a close look at your audience, push your web treated analysis, the search terms, or whether you are using red terms of Google analytics, this is an information they provide, should tell you, your audience is not your supervisor or your coworkers. But find out who needs to look at your content. Why do they need it, what information do they need and what do they need to do when your website? This is top task. The usability testing proved here at the GSA covers stability testing and federal government websites and they address what are people coming here to do. You have to know or you will not be able to write content or design your pages or get them to look at your website at all.
>> If you think about the difference between reading a novel, my latest novel was dances with dragons, G. R. Martin's latest novel and a game of . That was telling me a story, lots of stories. It is linear. I started at the beginning, read through the middle and through the middle and through the middle and eventually I read the end. I read it on my cell phone, that is what I did over the weekend. Are the most part it was complete sentences, complete thoughts. I was reading every word. It is not like that on the web. Webcasters can it because I am not looking at everything, it has to be great. A lot of little text that leads me where I need to go. It needs to meet my needs, not the authors need. I could be running out the door with my smartphone, try to figure out directions, I cannot devote time to reading a narrative for that. Web is interactive. Follow links, click on certain things as opposed to other choices. It is not the same. Writing for print is at the same as writing for the web. It is a new skill. One of the things you want to do is to look

at specifically what kind of page you're working on. There are three main types of webpages. There's the homepage or portal where everything radiates out from. There is connector or pathway pages. These two types should be mostly linked. Not a lot of text, maybe intro, mostly people are looking to go somewhere else. Where you will find the bulk of your material is on the content pages. That is things that talk about the program, service, explains something. That is for people and that , up , but it is still not a free ride for writers because you have to think about topics, not necessarily story. People are not going to lead the way you've presented on. Having a conversation, maybe most of your audience wants to read a certain amount of content and only someone could go on for even more detail. So remember, you have to reduce the amount of words to get your message across. One of the ways is to organize this and serve your reader. You have seen the inverted. , important stuff on top, conclusion and key info first. And in the background. You can start writing it with the background first because sometimes that's a very good way to organize your thoughts. Flip it. Cut, paste put it somewhere else. That is not what people want to know first. These are some screenshots, GSA, how to get to the Lancaster. This is what you need to do in the graphic image how to pack and not the pack. That is what the people want to know. What can I read to get through that line faster. You have five seconds according to the research. Five seconds to make a case for people to read your content. It helps to chunk it, junket similar content so people are not having to read discrete pieces all the time and they can read all what they need in one particular. Here's an example of clustering a screenshot from the PR company. About what we do, presumably some other ones further down. It's a conversation, research what your customers really want and need to do on your website you remember you are not Santa Claus. You cannot serve everybody. Look for the top three or four. If you are leaving out students doing research for papers, maybe that is not the core audience for you. Contact your customers probably don't need. Although it is very popular sometimes. You office was formed. Who is the head. What the headset the day he was sworn in. But the head looks like. What your annual report from three years ago. You get the picture. Some what people want -- the audience doesn't want to know and you have to write for your audience. Organizing the conservative leader involves asking question. Informed readers likely to ask organizer writing to answer question and ordered the reader will ask them. Now what? They come to US customers, readers, users whatever, they come to your site to perform a task. They come because they expect to get cell service you expect to be able to do stuff up the website. Ask yourself, and your team, how well does your website allow customers to get something done? Identify the mission, purpose of the website clarify the number one top task, that your website should help people accomplish, check the search terms, consider usability testing. That will bring clarity to identifying your customer top tasks. Also some design features. I am not talking about different CMSs I am not saying use WordPress or anything, these are all system each well, doesn't matter what you are using users should be able to do these things. This will apply other it is web or Internet board letter, electronic newsletter anything. Use Heather so that readers can scan. They are going to do it anyway, let it work to your advantage. Help them navigate. Keep enough whitespace of information is a giant black of words. Block reports. Consider question headings. They may not be appropriate everywhere people have questions in mind and people relate to the information and thinking about the content like your reader will. For example, this is from US CIS. How do I know if I'm eligible to extend my stay in the United States, the answer is you may apply. That is an excellent use of pronouns, particularly in this for reaching out to the reader, you will be -- we will be going over that later. List. I know that -- I'd getting a bad rap, your teeming turning everything into a PowerPoint slide, but they make it really easy to scan. Don't overlook them. Use numbers for steps in a process. Use bullets if the order does not depend on things happening in the certain point. Also make your items parallel. If you notice, all the items in these are commands. Make, use, add, help, and make. They should all be parallel and match that way. Don't make the list too long. I'm not actually giving absolute. I broke my own will hear what the seven items. This is a guy. Look at how it behaves on the page and look what your reader can take. You are presenting a lot of information, make it as user-friendly as you can. Sometimes you can cluster instead of one long list, cluster similar items, maybe interrupt the list with headers. Here's one example. Here is a child wall of words. There's a lot of text in your eyes are moving across and it's easy to lose focus and jump unless

you're sitting there with a ruler on your screen which gets old very quickly. Here is a list. Same information. Here is the wall, here's the list. Easier to convey and figure out what is the different separate items in the list. There's also another possibility make it a table. Tables are not going to solve are you  our it all the list problems, but sometimes they will help to mark information and make it easier for people to realize, that is a list for forms. They have numbers and names. That might be exactly what they are looking for. In the interest of time, you can look at these later on. There is an exercise, it is adding a thing if you take a look at this answer. You will notice the third bullet delivered to you by certified mail or in person does not match the rest of the items. Take that out. Since it doesn't match, it is not a content idea. It is the kicker sentence at the bottom. You can move stuff in and out of the list if they don't fit. In the interest of time, moving through this. Made two elements of bullets. This bit more about tables. Tables safe words. They make it easy to locate specific provisions. If any of you have to do any kind of estimated text, quarterly tax payments, anything like that, you go to the IRS and look for where you send a check ticket you  to get you assume they are interested in getting the check. If you live in this state, send your money here. I will look for Virginia and send it to a lamp or Pittsburgh. I only care about my state and where I send it. The rest doesn't matter, using the table makes it easier to get that. For example, this is sending expense once. At the end of the fiscal year you have seen a lot of things like this. I don't know about you I find them confusing, I get lost easily and paragraphs. Table would make it a lot easier to comply you assume most people want to do the right process. They don't want to go out with the line. They are interested in doing whatever they need to do to make it work am I to make it easy on them. Tables would often do this. Similarly, forest products, advertisement, dollars, days. This makes it a lot simpler. A also if you got any sort of process flow, you will be able to look at these at your leisure when we send it out. This points out that it is a workflow. And you can see where you can go, what the next step is until the process stops. Short paragraphs and sentences are going to make a very big difference for a couple reasons. Number one, you are looking to cut text, you are at a sentence paragraph level. You also need to make sure that the proper information is emphasized. The beginning of the sentence and the end are the positions of power in an emphasis, and sentences and paragraphs. Step in the middle, sometimes that is a dead zone. People don't. Not as much attention to that. That is the reason why in paragraphs you can pick them out in bulleted lists in something sentences.
>> So no one wants to read material like this big wall of words again. You have seen that, it can be broken out into bulleted list. Also it could actually say what it is. You have always heard about the idea you should link to existing content, don't copy it because it changes and you copied it, you will not necessarily know the change. Put the burden of keeping it up-to-date on the people who own the content. We don't have to have the same thing copied all over the website. This is important in times of emergency where the federal government is responding to hurricanes or flu or what I have you. People make sure people stay in their lanes and agencies who own specific contents, that you are linking to them. You are not replicating. Unless you are in NOAA, don't create that hurricane widgets. Let them do that and you are linking to them. You have the best information, accurate information. [ audio not understandable  ] ways to stay in your lane. Limiting paragraphs to one subject or step will make it easier to read and to follow him to comply. A rough guide although look at your screen will be seven lines, at the mobile phone is changing this. We are not quite sure what went two, assuming it will be less. People will have less less space for words. For example there is these days 62 words paragraph, which can be brought down to -- more night jobs would keep youths off the streets. Then words, rather than 62.
>> There's some other examples here that simply show, you don't have to master the content on these, just see this is how they were broken up and some of the editing. The edited part is in blue, that is the point of these are. And you might choose if this was your content, you might choose to link the different acts. Depends on what the content page is doing. This would be a content page. The similarly, you notice the three bullet points all start with the ING verb, providing, facilitating, supporting. Makes it easier which, what is going on in the paragraph. Sentences, as you do with paragraphs,  due sentences, one subject, make them short. Look and see where your sentences are going. They can also be broken into bulleted lists. Another

element is to really get down to the pronoun, the word level, narrow it to
paragraphs, sentences and within sentences very definite word choices. One of the
things you want to do is take a look at your style guide and see if it has been
updated for plain language. If not, bring that back to the owner of the style guide
and say, this law was passed here, this does not seem to affect this. If you have
any questions, if you can get me off-line I can tell you some of the ways I have
worked on that.
>> We have looked a little earlier on people relate better on information to
information that talks to them by using pronouns, and one of the ways you want to do
that is also to help you avoid jargon. The usability testing we have done here at
the GSA, that is where they bring in some testers to [ audio not understandable  ]
and they look at all the problems they encountered from that particular number of
tests. This generally 10 things that are the most important change. The top or three
of those in the top 10 are always too much text, too much jargon, and too many
acronyms. So it doesn't matter what the federal website is. There's too much text,
too many acronyms, too much jargon. One of the ways to work around that is to use
pronouns. Your audience does not have to translate, am I the beneficiary, or the
purchaser, they can get that figured out. Then your content will go that much more
smoothly.
>> It also requires less work from your readers, eliminates words, speaks directly
to them. A lot of benefits to them. It helps you remember that your reader, your
audience, is a person. So consider, I am not advocating, throwing out the style
guide completely. But you want to refer to your agency as we, the reader will be
you, or using command voice, and as I ended questions, and the question had her
slides. -- header slides. Some of these are straightforward. And I'm just going to
go straight for the answers. You must provide copies. We will review loan
applications, you will be the primary source of information. It really does lay out
who is going to be doing what. Another example. This is from the plain language.gov
website. When freeing us that -- a vehicle that has been stuck results in rats or
false, the operator will fill the rut or hole created by such activity before
removing the vehicle from the immediate area. I would have no clue what to do next.
But the revision if you make a whole while freeing of the stuck vehicle, you must
fill the hole before you drive away. I can do that. I can do that once I have
understood what it is. But I would be sitting there for quite some time figuring
out, what does this mean and probably B., do I have a shovel in my car?
>> And repeating the key points about the programs. This is an example from GSA
about some of the statements of work reviews that something the small business
government line acquisition contract center does for certain business lines. It is a
really nice thing that they offer. Before you said Sandison, we will take a look at
it, check your homework before you turn it in. It is not very helpful in this way.
If you change it like this, I have broken it open, it is what you can expect, these
three things. And then you will still need to like this is what will happen. But you
still need to do these things. Much easier for people to figure out what they need
to do and what is going to be happening. And we hope happier customers. Some of the
times when pronouns are not going to work, if you are addressing more than one
audience. You sort of have an audience issue on your page anyway. One of the ways
you can do that is to put on the page for example, we have on our pages, if you are
a vendor, this is the information this is what you need to do. If you are a business
partner, this is what you need to do. That sort of device your audience from that.
If you have a very clearly defined audience, that will not have a great deal of
overlap.
>> Passive verbs, he didn't birds, complex verb forms are going to make your writing
week week and confusing. Particularly in passive voice. People complain about this.
Finding out who's doing what, who's supposed to do what and the clearest form of
this of course is a wonderful phrase, mistakes were made because that implies that
nobody actually made them, they just kind of happened all by themselves and no one
was really responsible for them. So mistakes were made. Now probably someone made
them at some point. Examples are, this is the help you identify passive voice. The
person who does the action usually follows the road. And Arlene was promoted by her
boss, the verb, the action is promoted. And who did this, the boss. To rewrite the
sentence, her boss promoted are laid. Or Arlene's boss promoted her. And there's
always two parts. A verb, a form of the verb the verb to be in the past participle.
It is often made more clear by the use of the preposition by. Sometimes, passive

voice will hide the actor or delay the actor would not identify the actor. That is not particularly what we want to see an open, transparent government.
>> Active voice is more clear, concise, direct. Passive voice is is a characteristic of bureaucratic language, not plain language. Model your sentences in subject, verb, predicate. Who does what. That is just one of the reinforcement. Passive voice disguises, active voice, makes clear. Who does what. These are just some of the examples, for example, number two, your application has been denied by the Department of State, what is the verb, deny, who is doing the denying, Department of State, what has been denied, the application. The Department of State has denied your application. The actor is clear. The another thing for you to work on and this is one of the mechanical ways because one of the things that I have done in a long career of web writing, you cannot always make it perfect because it goes up. Sometimes it has to go up. I know that, you know that. Sometimes you can take at least one step that is plain language. Maybe you can break it into two paragraphs. They be you can make something a bulleted list. Maybe you can do some rewriting, maybe you can take a passive voice. Those are all steps to play language. It is not going to happen instantly, no much it no magic button. And push a button and everything will be translated, I wish. But that is just not going to be happening. One of the steps that you can take in a piece of writing, is to look at it in the burbs and -- and these are pretty straightforward. In a document or page. Instead of saying things like do an assessment, take the verb assess. Instead of came to the conclusion that, you concluded. You're having that he didn't verb run out and put into past tense to match Kane. Board conduct an analysis, analyze, there's no reason to have the whole phrase. Doesn't take your writing better, doesn't make you sound more important. Clearest writing is always going to make the best impression. Use your customer's language. Do not use agency jargon. Limit it as much as you can. Avoid foreign and Latin terms. Late -- legal language unless you are a lawyer then you will be dealing with other lawyers, they will not have to sit and pull out a dictionary, does that mean what I I think it means? You can use contractions. You can use everyday words. That is what most people use. And you are having a conversation with your reader after all. Here are some things that could better be written so that everybody can understand them. You don't want to take out necessary technical terms, but you want to take out obscure and pretentious language. If you cannot figure it out, maybe it needs to be rewritten. Don't make it hard. If you cannot figure it out, what makes you think that your audience can. Here are some consistent terminology list for you. Asked, must not, nay, should. Do not use a child. The explanation is by this noted legal writer on why not to use shall. One of the things we are discovering as we change this week update the style guide, there are some is your ways on what we need to consider, try another stab, not everythineverythin g has to be an acronym. Try to make them pronounceable. A use everyday words. List the list on the left is long everyday words that is used on everyday speech. On the right, instead of a tent, try, it's the same meaning. Instead of demonstrate, show.
>> To implement, start. Submit, send, or give. There's a longer list of these, substitution on the plain language.gov site. If you really are interested in having a little bit more of these. Place your words carefully particularly be careful with only and always you put exceptions and long conditions after the main cause, not before or in the middle. What do most people need to know first, put the extra information afterwards. Also you want to look to start trimming excess content. There are two elements to that. There is excess words and content that shouldn't be there at all. That again gets you back to your top task, your audience's needs, what does your reader need to know and to focus it from there. There's some techniques for that and some other common sources of worthiness or passive voice which we went over. Redundancies, prepositional phrases, even burbs as we went over, unnecessary modifiers or intensifiers, and failing to use pronouns. Redundancies are things that repeat without adding the extra meaning. You probably all have seen this lists. Instead of later, worked instead of --  -- you might also take a close look at prepositional phrases. A word the things that show direction. Over the table, under the table, through the door, under the stairway, location or time. Sometimes prepositional phrases nearly pad out a sentence or paragraph and one of the ways to fix those is to use the substitution list here. For example, instead of at this point in time, you can say now. What you can also use contractions. For example, instead of the needs of the customer, the customer's needs. Instead of the mission

of agency, the agency's mission. They are grammatically equivalent, the one is not better than the other. Using the contraction will save you a few words and straighten out your meaning. Sometimes people get confused with prepositional phrases and think that they are acting as the subject of the sentence. There's also padding writing, excessive modifiers like totally, completely, really, absolutely. Using excessive modifiers, we can see writing. -- using excessive modifiers we can see your writing. For example, you can shorten absolutely essential they contact me at once, to simply the message, contact me at once or contact me immediately. That is using the dead zone of the sentence putting your information further down where it needs to be. Double -- doublets, I'm not something that people were in the Renaissance, but are also repeated words. Pairs of words. Generally, you only need one. Cease and desist the can be replaced by stop. There's also similar information in this plain language.gov which has a great deal of useful information and examples. Also meaningless formal language often seen in the first and second sentences in e-mails particularly. These are just some examples that we can go through. Just showing some of how things can get tightened up. For example, this one, the overview. That broke out a bulleted list and put out the three elements and that really highlights their importance. And also using pronouns. I moved from protest are not allowed to you may not protest. That makes it clear who can and in this case cannot do what. This category equipment and services, there's a big paragraph with a lot of items going across the page. Very easy to get lost in the second sentence, services and this category the last two lines get lost. My immediate and for poorly formatted part for this was to make it of course, a bulleted list. And I thought also if I could cluster those in some ways I might try that. I might go with the two column option, but my PowerPoint skills failed at that point and I could not get the rest of the content from there. So long list, two column list, just some possibilities. Here's another wall of words I'm looking at the socioeconomic credit. Part of that seems to be a quote. I have to look at that more carefully, but the very least I could do in this part of the spectrum of changes, I can make it two paragraphs. That makes it a lot easier to read did I could also took out the second paragraph. I could also make it more clear what they have to do. This option, rather than that. Moving forward, getting cleaner all the time. There's a couple of general style guide principles and if you don't know your style guide, you should really take a look at it and double check on these. The spelling, no grammatical errors, no broken links or images. Used this text, don't tie it to a particular time and then you will have to go back and change it. Use bold sparingly. Don't write in all caps. Keep blue or underlined text research for links. I have been seeing particularly on some French formatting, I am seeing underlined headers. That is just disconcerting when they get pushed into the web as PDFs because people tried to click on them. Printers generally turn those sorts of things into colors or italics were some sort of justified header. Here is a checklist for your web content is you're looking at it. Have you identified frequently visited pages or documents? what type of customers reads the content. Removed or explain jargon. Removed your archived out-of-date content. One of the things you could do with Web, the get file downloaded. We have found a mostly people look at pages, it seems taking them to download a Word document or PDF document. It is sometimes, sometimes they won't do it. This is more action than I want to do, they are not sure what is going to come up. Often, content that is in PDF end up getting lost. Because people will not open it. The number of people who visit the page as opposed to open the particular document is not going to be the same.
>> Have you designed your content to make it easier for your readers and if you removed all of that you can still make it useful? What do you need to do with the plane writing at? You need to work on your key content first. That is the public facing documents that meet the definition. Read and apply the federal plain language guidelines which are on playing language.gov. If you would like, you can join the plain language action and information network. And plane has monthly meetings. You can attend in the DC area or you can call in. Here are some additional resources, how to plain language.gov book. And some nonprofit, nongovernment elements as well. Can we have some questions?
>> Yes, we have some questions, Katherine. First question is, if you are you using cable, how can you use -- ensure that you they will work on a mobile device?
>> That is a tough question. That is when we have not really solved yet. Because you can fix them for one and they may not necessarily work for another. For example, one

might work on a joy, and may not work for ork for the iPhone. It is an excellent question, I wish I had an answer, the next plan we are visiting in plain language what is the very issue. How is mobile content going to affect tables and charts and graphics.
>> .
>> This person added to the question, what are your thoughts on best practices around this and I am assuming there's an answer your still developing.
>> Still developing those, they're much work in progress. There's a lot of new functionality with all the apps and the people at doing with their phones. And still looking at it in a pure content standpoint. All the principles apply. Excellent question. I wish I knew the answer, but not even my magic eight ball can help with this one.
>> Great. Thanks, Katherine. This question asked, how are most agencies rolling out with the language implementation? Are they doing this as existing staff or are they writing or editing opportunities coming up?
>> That is a wonderful question. I do know, I can say that the plain writing at the 2010 was unfunded. To the best of my knowledge, there's no money going around for plain language writers, editors and teachers. The plain language action and information network itself is comprised of volunteers. I am assuming that they're probably making, probably staffing were stepping up to that or being assigned to it, one of the two. Each agency is naming a senior official to be in charge of them from entering the plain act of 2010. The GSA senior official Susan, there's a list of all the agencies and their senior officials and implementation plans on plain language.gov. If you're curious and you want to know who is in charge in your agency, take a look there.
>> Thanks. Do you have strong feelings either way regarding contractions?
>> If they get the message across, I am all in favor of them.
>> Okay. Thanks. As a reminder to everyone, we will be posting the recording, slides and transcript on the how to.gov and also these slide presentations. We have several questions hopefully will get to them all. If we don't get all of them, Katherine, can we send the rest of them out to the attendees?
>> Sure.
>> This question said, you mentioned linking to information -- however when President Obama took office, Whitehouse.gov, all these websites completely changed. Every link was -- what do you advise in that situation?
>> I know there was a great deal of looking at the current website and where I worked before, we did get PDFs and post them if we were linking to them. We tried to look very carefully and if that was anywhere else. I'm not sure that is totally answering your question, but it is true that it seems that the administration be does the website when there's a new president.
>> What about blogs? For writing blogs?
>> I think reaching out and being as plain as possible in a blog is even more important than on webpages because blogs are supposed to be conversations you to invite comments and to invite engagement. I think that you may be dealing with couple different audiences, but I think plain language applies there as well.
>> Thank you. Some people seem to speak about plain language as though it is about grammar. This person fears that they may be missing the larger point. For example, you can follow the rules of grammar, but still not have plain language.
>> That is an excellent point. Plain language is that of the grammar fight. It is really not grammatical points. These are more like grammatical choices. For example, it came out before, what did I think of contractions? Contractions are grammatical. They aid in dying language. It is not generally -- they aid in plain language. It is not generally grammar questioning, purely there is grammatical elements, but the point of inviting in plain language is to reach your reader. So it is not -- I mean grammar is important, don't get me wrong, but to call this only grammar is to be missing the point that.
>> Thank you, Katherine. What are the cover types of documents, what needs to be plain language for October 13?
>> That is in the plain writing at itself and one of the beginning sites when I talked about the act, those documents that cover benefits for services or for filing taxes. So -- I am glad I'm not working at the IRS right now because they've got a huge audience are people who are needing to file taxes. So the material would have to be in plain language. That is a big job. Also if it explains how to comply with a

requirement. For example, I am taking this out of the air. , so to speak. Maybe have to get a visa. If you are complying with the requirement. Have to get back into the country. That would be something that was 12 covered by this. How to get a benefit or service, what people have to do to get that. That is also something that needs to be covered. These are -- mostly all externally facing documents. They deal with the public. They deal with citizens, they deal with customers. It is not really so much that in  intranet.
>> Thanks, Katherine, are there any standards using act -- action terms, for example, click on the link versus select from a menu, navigate to an object. Where can the person find this is standard if there are?
>> There are some information on the federal plain language page, plain language.gov and the federal plain language guidelines. Click here does not qualify as plain language or indeed accessibility. That is a different issue. What people should focus on more is what's called descriptive link language. For example, if you say, here is a list of meeting minutes and you can save June 2nd, July 4th, August 7th. Each of those states is underlying to indicate that is the meaning -- the meeting minutes that you will be reading. Discrete plain language is very important because it allows people that allow them to know where to click on and people do not like picking on the unknown.
>> Are there any good software tools to measure plain language?
>> Again this gets back to the giant language easy button which no one would welcome more than me, more than I. It would be great to have one of those instant plain language. A particular software that I could recommend simply because even the simplest things like the grammar checker in Word, you actually have to know what passive voice mean to be able to say okay, six were to accept the door, reject and move on. They are not really grammar points for spelling or anything like that. You actually have to make a lot of decisions about how your writing, what you're saying, things like that. Not something that could really be reduced to technology as we see it right now. There is something rather handy about checking their readability of your text, but that sort of a guide, not an absolute fix. There's readability things you can do that, in word, paste it what is called the index, sort of tells you supposedly what education level your readers will need to have to understand your content. But there are some faults in that, some jury greeting you can do. If you did it and it said that you needed 24 years of education to understand something, you might get, can I make my sentence shorter, use fewer words, change my words am a substitute my words, those are mechanical. For the mechanics, you can do some things, but for some -- making grammar or instant plain language, I have not seen it yet.
>> Speaking of quick fix, maybe not, but training people, what is the best way to train non- writer colleagues to tailor initial darkness for plain language translation if you will.
>> Excellent question. I think what I would do, I would do this one-on-one because you don't want to be calling out people poking fingers saying you are not plain language. That makes people mad. How did not telling people they ople they misspelled something. I have something where the coworker sent me a meeting of the notice of a meeting just an e-mail and I took a look at it, -- huge paragraph I don't know what is going on directions are messed up with the intro. So paste it into Word and do a few mechanical things, nothing too hard. And I sent it back, saying -- next time you do one of these, try doing it this way because it might be easier for people to figure out what is going on and what they need to do and how to register stuff like that. She did not throw will spend also me, but, on the other hand, there were no rocks coming my way. Sometimes it takes well for people to get used to it, sometimes a touchy issue editing other people's things.
>> Speaking of editing people's things and cutting or reducing the amount of words, this person is kind of resistance for content owners to cut content, and when dealing with law experts, what advice do you have been ported convince the people to adapt these best practices of plain language?
>> If I understand the question properly, it is how do you convince particularly lawyers to cut the amount of text?
>> Correct. One of the things that I have seen in this is sort of in the usability realm is what are called hallway tests where you blow up a piece of content and put it in an ESA will. And you leave instructions and let a center number of people know, take a look at this and Marc here, Mark on this one a page where you would uld

stop reading. But sometimes that's a good indicator because many people think that
people are going to read the entire page beginning of the beginning stopping at the
end, looking at all the footnotes. Frequently that does not happen. Sometimes you
can do it that way. Sometimes you could put it on a staging page and do some
usability testing. Do people actually look at this, this does actually work? You can
recommend if you are introducing this concept people, say, can we add some
headers?mechanical things. You can really help the usability, readability of
something without being too actively painful or involving that much work on the part
of the originator. If you can add some headings, break up some long paragraphs,
throw in a few bulleted list. That will break it open enough that it can be read a
lot less painfully.
>> This is a common?  People have been submitting, how to get back some -- get by
some people. As a Web content of one person in a regulatory agency, where do you
recommend that your agency put the focus first to get by?
>> Okay I think in that case I would take a very careful look at the complete plain
writing at the 2010. I would check to see if any of the documents fall under that.
And then I think I would enlist may be the training manager. A Web team of one, that
is pretty difficult. Probably the communications people. See if you could get some
traction with that.
>> Also if I can say, we are planning a webinar Ater this year on writing
regulations in  in plain language. So Web manager University will be advertising
that as well.
>> This is -- [ OVERLAPPING SPEAKERS ]
>> That webinar will take place on October 21st and we will include that information
in the link to join for that webinar and a follow-up e-mail as well. We get this
question throughout these webinars do we have done with with plain language,
graphics another station. The company graphics illustration affects how much readers
spends in reading the text ?
>> that's a very good question. I don't know. The reason I don't know is I don't
look at pictures. They might as well be blank as far as I'm concerned. I know that
other people really like pictures were attracted by pictures. It really helps them
understand the page things like that. But regular pictures, they are just a
distraction as far as I'm concerned. Although sometimes, if you can get information
presented like that, the TSA screenshot on how to get through the line faster, it
has a picture of a properly packed suitcase and an improperly packed suitcase. That
was actually useful. I don't know whether graphics make the pages stickier or not, I
think it depends on the audience and maybe on the content itself. Like some
regulations, I don't think there's enough pictures in the world that could make that
better.
>> Great example, Katherine. We are just after two. Can we take a couple more
questions and get the answers to the remaining questions and send them to the
attendees?
>> Sure.
>> Is it okay to link more information or something like -- to have a link to more
information or something like that so the reader can be directed to more in-depth
stuff as they needed or interested, something you recommend ?
>> I think that is a wonderful idea, there's a specific language which I don't have
in my fingertips, they talk about how to give  -- that will be accessible. I have
seen places where they use -- I don't know how to describe it, like a closing tag,
two little closing tags and people know to click on that. I do not know if that is
standard across the industry, but I have seen that a couple places. Absolutely. The
beauty of that is most people just want general information. They know whether they
want to click on that, they don't want everything. Part of the key to plain language
will be, sometimes you can do your best and still not necessarily playing, maybe you
can provide a summary that is plain, so people can say, I don't want to know
anymore, that's enough, that's all I needed and then they can leave and that is
fine, they are doing what they need.
>> How long do you format question and answer, is there a plain language message for
that?
>> There's a couple samples in the slides. One of them is using the question header
format and then that is saying putting pronouns in the header like for example, can
I extend my stay in the eight states and the answer is you makes and your stay in
the United States blah blah blah. I would just be careful that you are not relying

on a frequently asked questions format or question-and-answer format to take the place of what should be actual content, quickly the question should not be what is this program and when did it start, whom does it apply to question what they should be on your basic content pages. The actual sort of nitty-gritty thing should be should be restricted to the question-and-answer format.
>> Thanks, Katherine. Let's have one more question, a reminder to everyone we are recording the session and posting it on how to.gov and we will circulate the slides and ides and the transcript and send the link to the recording and also send you an evaluation, please, complete, it will take only five minutes, it will help us gauge the classes were doing at the Web University. Can you talk about your thoughts on news releases on government websites?
>> News releases, that is a very interesting thing. I wonder sometimes and this is just thinking, I wonder if they are real power is not so much on the website, but when they are sent to the media or tweet suffered about  were posted on the Facebook account. Whether they read -- I would like to see more feathers. I think sometimes there's a little bit of former which -- restriction on what goes into a press release. I know they use journalism style and I think sometimes that could be more planar. And maybe simply using contractions and pronouns might help. Maybe not, I know that when you got the style, if you've got a press release and talking about saying an event that happened or promoted or what have you, you have certain limitations. I would say shorter sentences and more contractions I think.
>> Thank you. Thank you so much, Katherine. Your wealth of knowledge, we really appreciate you taking the time. As Katherine mentioned, on October 21st, we will be hosting a webinar on plain language and regulations. Hopefully that will help answer a lot of questions that you guys have. We will be sending an evaluation and along with these recordings you thank you so much for attending and thanks again, Katherine.
>> Thank you. Thank you to all of you for dialing in.
>> [  event concluded  ]
>>