

## Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretaries, Heads of Bureaus and Offices

From: Associate Deputy Secretary

Subject: Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-274)

Writing clearly is an important element of openness and transparency, and is now required by law. As the senior official in charge of implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010, I am committed to making plain writing the standard for the Department's communications.

We are taking the following steps to implement the Act:

- We have established a Department plain writing web page at [doi.gov/open/Plain-Writing.cfm](http://doi.gov/open/Plain-Writing.cfm).
- We have developed an inventory of documents that may be covered by the Act (see Attachment A).
- We will be offering through DOI University several levels of training in the techniques of plain writing (see Attachment B).
- We will publish a notice in the Federal Register seeking comments on documents the public believes can benefit from revision.

I need your cooperation in ensuring that your employees receive training in plain writing techniques and that documents covered by the Plain Writing Act meet the required standards. To provide the necessary training, DOI University is developing offerings at several levels, including an 18-minute online overview, a 35-minute online mini-course, and more extensive classroom training.

The Office of Executive Secretariat and Regulatory Affairs will work through the bureau regulatory contacts to oversee this implementation effort and will publish annual progress reports, as required by the Act. In addition, the Office of Policy Analysis will work with information collection clearance officers to ensure that documents cleared under the Paperwork Reduction Act meet plain writing standards.

The two attachments to this memo contain specifics on the requirements of the Act, the initiatives outlined in this memo, and where to obtain assistance. You can also e-mail or call John Strylowski, 202-208-3071, for information or assistance.

Attachments

## ***Nonregulatory documents covered by the Plain Writing Act of 2010***

### **Publications**

- Federal Register notices and rule preambles
- Fact sheets and brochures
- Newsletters
- Manuals and handbooks produced for a public audience
- Policy and directives documents (if directed to the public)

### **Instructions**

- Instructions to the public (examples: notices to lessees, instructions memos, information bulletins, other instructions on how to comply with and administer new regulations and requirements)
- Instructions and forms for entering contests (e.g., duck stamp art contest)
- Requests for proposals (for contracting work, cooperative agreements, etc.)

### **Applications**

- Applications (for grants, permits, leases, rights-of-way, etc.) and related instructions and guidance

### **Technical reports**

- Environmental and other analyses and impact statements
- NEPA compliance documents
- Financial reports
- Economic analyses
- Implementation plans (e.g., restoration plans and monitoring plans)
- Other reports directed to a public audience

### **Miscellaneous**

- News releases
- Material disseminated via Web pages
- General correspondence with the public (paper and electronic)
- Vacancy announcements and instructions on how to apply for jobs

## **Department of the Interior Plain Writing Act Implementation – Questions and Answers**

### **1. What is plain writing?**

Plain writing is writing that your intended audience can understand with a single reading. A plain document is –

- Organized to put important information at the front.
- Written in a clear and easy-to-understand style.
- Streamlined to include only information that the reader needs.

### **2. Where can I find information about plain writing?**

The Plain Writing Act and the OMB implementation guidelines require us to use the Federal plain writing guidelines, which are available online at [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov).

### **3. How can I get training in plain writing?**

DOI University will soon offer several levels of training in plain language:

- An 18-minute online overview of plain writing.
- A 35-minute online mini-course.
- Quarterly classroom training.
- Additional online training lessons on selected writing topics.

DOIU will notify all employees when these courses become available.

### **4. What do I have to do?**

Write all documents covered by question 5 of this attachment in plain language. For detailed guidance, see the OMB guidelines on implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>

### **5. What documents does the Act cover?**

The Act covers applications, instructions, reports, analyses, regulatory preambles, and other documents distributed to the public. For more specifics, see Attachment A and section C(4) of the OMB guidelines.

### **6. Are regulations covered?**

While the Plain Writing Act does not cover regulations, three Executive Orders require us to write regulations clearly. The OMB guidelines also reinforce this requirement. (See section C(4).)

**7. Are regulatory preambles covered?**

Yes. The OMB guidelines specifically state that regulatory preambles are covered by the requirements of the Act. (See section C (4).)

**8. Are environmental compliance documents, endangered species analyses, and other technical documents covered?**

The OMB guidelines state that --

The Act also requires agencies to use plain writing in every paper or electronic letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction. When an agency prepares a specialized or technical publication, the agency should take into account the subject expertise of the intended audience.

Since the audience for compliance documents, analyses, and other technical documents includes the non-specialist public, authors should write these documents to be understandable to the interested non-expert and to meet the other criteria in question 1 of this attachment.

**9. Do we have to rewrite existing documents?**

While the Act doesn't require us to rewrite existing documents, it is a good idea to do this where possible.

**10. Where can I get more information about this initiative?**

Abundant information is available at [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov). Your Bureau regulatory contact or the Office of Executive Secretariat and Regulatory Affairs (202-208-3071) can also provide more information.

**11. What's the address of the Department's plain writing web site?**

<http://www.doi.gov/open/Plain-Writing.cfm>