e-Learning Plain Language Online Training Script

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Slide	Photo	Script	Time
1.	Intro page	<mark>G:</mark> Welcome to DoD Plain Language Online Training	
2.	parachutes	<mark>G:</mark> In this training, you will learn: What plain language is Why you should write in plain language How to write in plain language	
3.	**Section 1 Header**	[NO AUDIO] What Plain Language Is	
4.		<mark>G:</mark> Plain language means writing in a way that readers can understand something the first time they read it.	
5.		<mark>K:</mark> In a document written in plain language, readers can: Find what they need; Understand what they find; and Use what they find to meet their needs.	
6.		<mark>K:</mark> Plain language is defined by results: it's easy to read, easy to understand, and easy to use.	

7.		G: Plain language is not: Writing less precisely; Attempting to be folksy or too informal; or Leaving out necessary technical or legal terms. Plain language isn't "dumbing things down"; it's clearing things up.	
8.		K: Why should I write in plain language?	
9.	(Examples from slide 6 of the PPT)	G: Using plain language makes a big difference in your documents. [No audio for examples]	
10.	Triangle – Effective communication Reader focus Reader comprehension Fewer reader questions	G: There are six benefits to writing in plain language: It's the simplest and best way to communicate effectively. When you use plain language, you're focused on your readers' needs. Readers are more likely to understand your intended meaning when your writing is simple and direct. Readers are less likely to ask for explanations if your writing is clear. Fewer questions saves time both for	

	Accessible government Trust in government	the reader and you! Plain language makes government services more accessible to users. Readers can trust the government more if its documents are clear and easy to read.	
11.	Pic of DODI 5025.13	<mark>K:</mark> Also, the Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires federal agencies to use "clear government communication that the public can understand and use." <mark>K:</mark> The Department of Defense is committed to writing all documents using plain language principles as appropriate. This includes those public documents covered by the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and our internal documents. This became DoD policy in 2013. By using plain language we will: Make the DoD a more efficient and cost-effective agency by providing clear guidance to our personnel; and Help to make government more accessible to the public.	

| 12. | | G: Most importantly, you should use plain language because we as Americans deserve clear communication from our government.

You should also use plain language because your fellow DoD employees deserve plain communication from you. | |
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| 13. | **Section 2 Header** | [NO AUDIO] Writing for Your Audience | |
| 14. | | K: Before you write, you need to think about who your audience is and why they are reading your document. | |
| 15. | | K: One of the central ideas of plain language is that documents should be written for their audiences. This is because language that is plain to some readers may not be plain to others. If your document is not written for your audience, it will be harder for people to read it and they may not be able to do what you want them to do. | |
| 16. | | G: There is a myth that says using plain language means "dumbing down" your document; that is, using overly simplistic or folksy language. This isn't true! If your audience is a | |

		class of fifth graders, write your document so they can understand it. If your audience is a group of nuclear physicists, write so *they* can understand it. But let's be clear; no matter what your readers' education or experience levels are, cumbersome writing is never a good idea.	
17.		K: If you're not sure who your audience is, ask yourself these questions: G: Who will be affected by my document? G: Who is typically affected by my office's activities?	
18.		K: You must also think about why people will be reading your document. You want to give them information; your document must be written for *them*, not for you. Ask yourself these questions as you think about the subject of your document: G: What does my audience *already know* about the subject? G: What does my audience *need* to know?	

		G: What *questions* will my audience have?	
19.		K: If you don't know the answers to these questions: Ask colleagues who work closely with members of your potential audience. These colleagues might not necessarily work in your office. Read letters or emails that stakeholders have written to your office. Research your audience on the internet.	
20.		K: Always keep the audience's perspective in mind. Instead of thinking, "What do I want to say?" Ask yourself, G: "What does my audience need to know?"	
21.		K: Instead of thinking, "How can I protect my interests?" Ask yourself, G: "How can I serve my readers' interests?"	
22.		K: Instead of thinking, "How can I impress my readers?" Ask yourself, G: "How can I communicate what	

		my readers need to know?"	
23.		K: Remember, it's about the audience, not the writer.	
24.	**Section 3 Header**	[NO AUDIO] Writing in Plain Language	
25.	**Subsection 3.1. Header**	[NO AUDIO] Plain Language Word Choice	
26.		G: You may have heard the expression, "choose your words carefully". When writing in plain language, correct word choice is essential.	
27.		K: Let's look at some ways of choosing the correct words for your document.	
28.		K: Limit your use of discipline-specific jargon. These terms make sense to you because you're writing about your field but they might confuse an outside reader. Your readers are intelligent, but they may not know about specific terms used in your field.	
29.		G: If you must use a scientific or technical term, and you aren't sure that everyone reading your document will know what the term means, define it. After you define it, see if you can use the definition or	

		an alternative common term instead of the scientific term.	
30.		K: Don't use too many acronyms. Government documents often become an alphabet soup of acronyms. If you use too many, your readers may become confused and have to turn back to remind themselves what the acronym means.	
31.		G: Use an acronym only if you are using the term for which it stands several times. Remember to state the acronym in parentheses next to the term the first time you use it.	
32.		K: Avoid hidden verbs. Hidden verbs are verbs disguised as noun phrases. They are generally longer than their true verb forms. Using a noun phrase instead of a simpler verb makes your document too complicated.	
33.		G: To eliminate a noun phrase, take the verb out and use it in the correct tense, as in these examples. Replace "conduct an analysis" with "analyze". Replace "present a report" with "report".	

		Replace "do an assessment" with "assess".

Replace "come to the conclusion that" with "conclude".

Replace "provide assistance" with "assist" or even "help". | |
| 34. | | K: Remove pretentious words. Writers often try to impress readers with fancy language that shows off the writer's education and expertise.

Remember, you should focus on the reader's needs when writing. Instead of trying to impress the reader, your goal is to provide information, give instructions, or relay rules. | |
| 35. | | G: Instead of "date of demise", use "date of death".

Instead of "implement" or "commence", use "start".

Instead of "attempt", use "try".

Instead of "in the event that", use "if". | |
| 36. | | K: Get rid of excess words. Readers often become frustrated reading long sentences and paragraphs over many pages. After a while, readers may stop paying attention and miss | |

		important information.	
37.		G: You may think using fewer words would make your document less precise. Actually, using fewer words makes your document clearer. It also forces you to think critically about what they want the reader to know and what information should be in the document. Reread what you write and see if you can say the same thing with fewer words. Here are some examples: Instead of "a number of", write "several", or "a few", or "many". Instead of "a sufficient number of", write "enough". Instead of "on a monthly basis", write "monthly". Instead of "be responsible for", write "must".	
38.		G: Another way to use fewer words is to use contractions. They're generally acceptable in most writing.	
39.	Chart on slide 31	K: Try not to use the words "shall" and "shall not". They are ambiguous and are not a part of everyday speech. Use a more precise	

		alternative such as "must", "may", "should", "shouldn't", "will", and "won't".	
40.		K: Avoid using slashes or the infamous term "and/or". Using these makes your document seem ambiguous or even wishy-washy. Instead, use either "and" or "or".	
41.		K: In correspondence and more informal documents, consider using pronouns such as "we" and "you" instead of nouns such as "the applicant" and "the agency". Pronouns can make your sentence more straightforward and help your readers feel that you are speaking directly to them. This makes your message more relevant in their minds.	
42.	**Subsection 3.b Header**	[NO AUDIO] Writing Sentences in Plain Language	
43.		K: The most important thing to remember is to keep sentences short. A good sentence usually contains 20 or fewer words. Short sentences convey complex information better because they break information into smaller bits that are easier for your reader to process.	

44.	example on slide 25	G: In this example, the writer clears up a sentence that is long and confusing by breaking it into shorter sentences.	
45.	"before" example on slide 26	K: Be sure each sentence contains only one idea. You may have a sentence in which different people have unique requirements, or, as in this example, the requirements change through a given process. If all the requirements are combined into a single sentence, your reader will very likely be confused.	
46.	"after" example on slide 26	G: When you separate the "if-then" provisions that appear in a sentence, your meaning becomes much clearer. You can put each separate provision in its own paragraph or use bullets.	
47.		K: In each sentence, put the main idea first, then give any exceptions. If you put the exceptions first, you almost always force the reader to re-read the sentence to understand the relationship you're describing.	
48.	"If you are determined to have a disability, we will pay you the following. . ."	G: Be careful which words and word tenses you use. Many words have multiple definitions. In this example, it looks like the writer is saying "if you really want to have a disability,	

		we will pay you."	
49.	"If we determine that you have a disability, we will pay you the following. . ."	K: Notice how only a small change in wording makes the writer's meaning much clearer. This example also shows the benefits of using active voice.	
50.		K: Active voice is more clear, concise, and direct. Use the active voice whenever possible.	
51.		K: Passive voice can be awkward, wordy, and evasive.	
52.	chart on slide 28	G: To write in active voice, tell your reader who does what, in that order.	
53.		G: Instead of writing, "the memo was written yesterday", write "the Director wrote the memo yesterday."	
54.	**Subsection 3.c. Header**	[NO AUDIO]Writing Paragraphs in Plain Language	
55.		K: Like sentences, paragraphs should also be as short as possible. A paragraph should be no more than seven lines long.	
56.		K: Each paragraph should have only one topic. If you start a new thought or topic, make a new paragraph.	
57.		G: Start each paragraph with a topic sentence that contains the main idea	

		of the paragraph. After this come supporting ideas, exceptions, or special conditions.	
58.		K: Organizing each paragraph in this way will help your reader more easily understand what the paragraph is about. Many readers skim documents looking for certain information. If the topic of each paragraph is in the first sentence, readers can more easily find what they're looking for.	
59.		G: If your document seems disjointed, you can link the paragraphs with transition words such as "first", "second", "in contrast", "however", and "also". This smooths the flow of the document and guides readers through it.	
60.	**Part 4 Header**	[NO AUDIO] Organizing Your Document	
61.		G: You should organize your document in a logical and reader-friendly manner. When people read your document they are looking for guidance from you. Too often, this guidance is buried far down in the document under things like legal references and background material.	

62.		G: The main point of your document or the directions that you want your readers to follow should be at the front of the document. People often call this approach "bottom line up front" or "BLUF."	
63.		K: Putting your main point or directions up front makes it more likely readers will understand and follow them.	
64.		K: After you make your point, provide any other information you need to support your main idea.	
65.		G: There are two methods you can use to organize your document: chronological order and reverse pyramid.	
66.		G: Paragraphs written in chronological order list items in the order in which they happen.	
67.		G: Paragraphs written in reverse pyramid format begin with a general statement and then give exceptions, conditions, and specialized information.	
68.		K: You can use headings to set off paragraphs and sections. Headings help organize information and guide the reader. If readers are in a hurry,	

		they can scan the headings in your document and more easily find what they need.	
69.		K: There are three types of headings: topic, statement, and question.	
70.	Example on slide 20	K: A topic heading is typically a word or short phrase that conveys the basic meaning. It could be used at the beginning of a major section in a document.	
71.	Example on slide 20	K: A statement heading can be a phrase or short sentence and conveys more information than a topic heading.	
72.	Example on slide 20	K: A question heading is the most reader-friendly and is best to use when you know the questions your readers may have.	
73.		G: You can use lists to organize content and make important concepts more visible to the reader. The two types of lists most often used are numbered and bulleted. Numbered lists can help a reader understand the order of events in a series, or complete all steps in a process.	
74.		G: Keep lists to seven items	

		maximum. If you have more items, separate the one long list into two or more shorter lists.	
75.	picture on slide 36	G: Always use a lead-in sentence to explain the list. A list appearing by itself might confuse a reader.	
76.		K: In addition to making short paragraphs, you should divide the overall text into short sections. Readers are often intimidated by and get lost in large blocks of text. Instead of reading them, the reader skips over them, possibly missing important information.	
77.		K: A section should have one to three paragraphs in it and include a heading to introduce it to the reader.	
78.		G: As with sentences and paragraphs, be sure each section addresses one idea. Combining multiple ideas into one section may confuse your reader.	
79.		G: When you use smaller sections, you also create more space on the page. This makes your document less intimidating and increases the chances of the reader understanding it.	

80.	**Part 5 Header**	[NO AUDIO] Writing for Websites	
81.		G: When you are writing for the web, remember that people read websites differently than printed material.	
82.		K: As with a printed document, people go to a website looking for answers to their questions. They want to be able to find answers and understand those answers.	
83.		G: However, readers are often in a hurry so they read only a small percentage of the material on a web page. As the number of words on a page goes up, the percentage read goes down.	
84.		K: Use plain language to make sure users get the most value out of your web page.	
85.		K: Make paragraphs and sections short and use headings for both so that readers will be able to find information quickly.	
86.		K: Make sure there is plenty of negative space on the page so that readers aren't overwhelmed by the text.	

87.		G: Also remember,	
		PDFs often load slowly. If you must use a PDF, write a short summary of its content so readers can decide whether to open it.	
		If you link to another web page, describe the content of the link so readers can decide whether to jump to the new page.	
		Media-rich websites are flashier, but they are also slower to load. Put the most essential information in an easy-to-access format so readers can quickly get needed information.	
88.	**Part 6 Header**	[NO AUDIO] Final Review of Your Document	
89.		G: You should always review your document before sending it out. This is your last chance to catch any errors in it. Here are some tips for your final review.	
90.		K: Find someone outside your discipline to read your document. Someone outside your work group can more easily show you where members of the public will be confused. For a website, test the site with a small group before putting it on the internet.	

91.		G: Use a readability test. You can find these in Microsoft Word or on the internet.	
92.		G: You can use the grammar or spell-checking features on your computer, but also read through the document yourself. Computer applications don't catch all the problems.	
93.		K: Read your document aloud. Sometimes you can more easily find errors when you speak and hear them.	
94.		K: Look at the layout of your document. Make sure it's easy to read and conveys information clearly.	
95.		G: Congratulations! You've completed the DoD Plain Language Online Training Course.	