

**Plain Writing Act of 2010 - 2018 Compliance Report**



**Department of State  
2018 Compliance Report  
Plain Writing Act of 2010  
October 2018**

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### Background:

The purpose of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 ...”is to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.” By improving understanding of agency requirements, plain writing improves legal and administrative compliance. As a foreign affairs agency, the extent of the Department’s communication to the American public is inherently more limited compared to other federal agencies. However, the Department is committed to promoting clear and concise communication to the public as well as Department personnel.

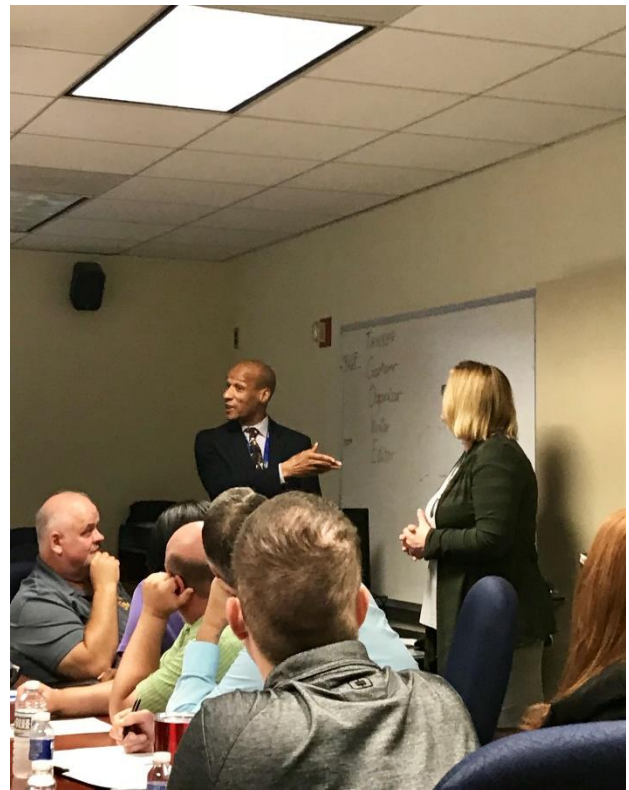
### The Department’s Ongoing Actions for Compliance:

- The Assistant Secretary for Administration, Nicole Nason, is the senior official responsible for overseeing the Department’s implementation of the Plain Writing Act. The Office of Directives Management in the Bureau of Administration has responsibility for compliance activities.
- A plain writing webpage of the Department website continues to be available to the public at <https://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/plainwriting/>
- The continuous updates to the public-facing state.gov website demonstrate adherence to Plain Writing principles, including:
  - Section headings organized under tabs
  - Succinct sentences under 15-20 words
  - Visual media that complements the text
  - Liberal use of white space as a visual aid
- An internal webpage on Plain Writing continues to be available to Department personnel via the Office of Directives Management’s website.
- In order to improve Department personnel’s understanding of applicable policies and procedures, sections of the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) and Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH) have been incrementally rewritten to increase use of Plain Writing tenets such as active voice; concise paragraphs that are often no longer than seven sentences; everyday verbiage; and precise verbs.
  - For example, 9 FAM uses the personal pronouns of ‘you’ to refer to consular officers and ‘we’ to refer to the Department.
  - Subchapter 2 FAH-1 H-110 ‘Revising or Drafting New Material’ continues to provide direction on Plain Writing.
- The Foreign Service Institute continues to offer over a dozen writing courses that integrate Plain Writing principles.
  - An hour-long, distance-learning course entitled ‘The Plain Writing Act’ is available.
- The Executive Secretariat continues to update templates and drafting guidance, supplemented by training sessions, in order to standardize the process of drafting communication for Department principals.

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### Plain Writing Accomplishments in 2018

- In March 2018, a Bureau of Administration management analyst conducted an internal workshop entitled ‘Tighten and Brighten Your Writing,’ in which Department personnel practiced six criteria for effective writing: precision, clarity, readability, efficiency, usability, and persuasiveness.
- In June 2018, a Department Notice entitled ‘Learn about Your Plain Writing Responsibilities’ was published to convey the Act’s requirements to Department personnel.
- In June 2018, the Office of Directives Management sponsored a four-hour Plain Writing workshop for interested personnel. It was taught by a certified Plain Writing trainer who is also a Foreign Service Officer in the Department and a member of the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN).
  - The Bureau of Administration posted the results of this Department-wide Plain Writing workshop on its internal blog, with a reach of ~2,000 personnel.
- In July 2018, the Department’s public-facing plain writing webpage was refreshed, <https://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/plainwriting/>



**Quotes from Department participants of a Plain Writing Workshop**

“We write all the time but to make your thoughts and points plain can be a positive challenge.” - Eunice: Deputy Branch Chief

“The premise of plain writing is to keep it simple, but to capture all necessary information.” - Carolyn: IT Specialist

“Plain writing is essential to maximize the effectiveness of communication.” - Eric: Press Officer



**Plain Writing Workshops in 2018**

- The Office of Directives Management facilitated Plain Writing workshops for specific Department audiences, including:
  - A training for the rewrite of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security internal website in August 2018
  - A training for the Bureau of Consular Affairs Directorate of Overseas Citizen Services in September 2018
  - A training for the modernization of state.gov for the Bureau of Public Affairs Office of Website Management in September 2018
  - A training for the Bureau of Consular Affairs Special Issuance Agency to tighten Passport Information Request communication in October 2018
- The Office of Directives Management conducted a Plain Writing Train-the-Trainer workshop in September 2018 that produced a new cohort of leaders for the Department’s Plain Writing initiatives.

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