



2023

Plain Writing Compliance Report



March 2024

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Social Security Administration

The 2023 Plain Writing Compliance Report

Introduction

Social Security communicates with plain language that is clear, concise, and easy to understand. We are leaders in the federal government when it comes to effective use of plain language—though don't take our word for it; the results speak for themselves.

Since 2013, we have consistently received high marks on the Center for Plain Language Federal Report Card, often the highest-scoring agency. On the most recent Plain Language Federal Report Card, issued in 2022, we received an "A+" for organizational compliance and an "A" for writing quality. In addition to high grades, we were featured in the Center for Plain Language's announcement: "An excellent model to follow is the Social Security Administration's "Contact Us" page, the only one to earn an A+." The Center went on to write, "The web page is clear in its intended purpose to provide information readers seek. The page has clear and concise language and the reader is addressed directly." The center also noted "excellent use of links, colors, fonts, sizing, bolding, bullets, and imagery to highlight important information."

Plain language is easy to read, yet it can be a challenge to write, especially for an agency with the complex subject matters that Social Security faces. Why do we work so hard on easy-to-understand writing? Not only is it the law, it's also good customer service. Our goal is to provide the people who depend on us with information they can read, understand, and use.

Plain language breaks down systemic barriers for people who have difficulty understanding complicated language and formatting. Plain and simple, plain language is good customer service.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 (the Act) requires federal agencies to apply plain writing principles to written communication. The Act states that all government agencies should write in a way the public can easily understand and use.

We are pleased to present our 2023 Plain Writing Compliance Report, which highlights our accomplishments in compliance with the Act. The report also includes specific details about our efforts along with samples of effective plain language.

Our Commitment

We take our responsibility seriously to provide clear and concise messages in our written communication to current and future recipients. In 2023, about 68 million Americans received a total of about 1.5 trillion dollars in Social Security benefits, and about 182 million workers were covered under Social Security. We strive to explain our complex programs in easy-to-understand language.

When we apply plain writing principles, we successfully deliver information to the public that is useful, easy for anyone to access, and simple to comprehend. We do this in letters, notices, publications, emails, policy documents, and web pages.

In addition to the public, we communicate daily with state and local government agencies, third-party groups and organizations, Congressional offices, and White House staff members. Clear and concise communication is vital to providing outstanding customer service to these offices and organizations.

We provide the following plain writing resources to all employees:

- Plain Writing website
- *Commissioner's Writing Center*
- Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence (QUICC) Handbook
- *Plain Language Hub*

Additionally, we:

- Use editing software tools to evaluate our written products.
- Train employees about the Act, plain writing best practices, and the use of available tools.
- Keep our employees informed and trained, encouraging a commitment to plain language.
- Review written materials from other components across the agency to make sure they adhere to plain language principles.
- Maintain a plain writing mailbox, monitored by staff who respond to emails from our employees and the public.

Our content is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 508 requires all federal agencies to provide communication methods that people with disabilities can access using assistive technologies.

Our daily dedication to plain writing principles means we are committed to providing clear, concise, and easy-to-understand messages to everyone who interacts with us.

We encourage employees and the public to submit feedback about our written communications and plain writing efforts to PlainWriting@ssa.gov.

Our Accomplishments

We strive to comply with the Plain Writing Act. To accomplish this, we met basic and advanced requirements.

We developed and followed our *Plain Writing Implementation Plan for 2023* to help us monitor how offices throughout the agency apply plain writing guidelines to their written materials.

In addition, we:

- Launched an internal *Plain Language Hub* — a centralized location for plain language resources.
- Created two educational plain language videos for employees.

- Established a mandatory plain language review for any updated or new Social Security notices.
- Continued to update Social Security’s website to apply plain language principles throughout.
- Continued to research tools that can be used to assist employees in developing content in plain language.
- Provided plain language training for over 2,000 agency employees.
- Hosted a successful two-day “Plain Language Writing for Government Employees” event.
- Attended “How to Get Started with the First International Plain Language Standard” hosted by the Center for Plain Language.
- Maintained both a Plain Language internet and intranet webpage.

How We Carry Out Our Implementation Plan

Our **Plain Language Implementation Team** (Team) provides oversight and implementation of the Plain Writing Act to ensure written communications are clear, easy to understand, and useful to the audience.

The Team meets a minimum of every two weeks to discuss plain language matters and more frequently in sub-groups focused on specific efforts, such as notice language reviews and Plain Language Hub resource development. Our team of volunteers have skills in writing, editing, leadership, organization, administration, and management.

Our **Plain Writing Compliance Board** meets to plan, coordinate, and carry out the *Plain Writing Implementation Plan* and related activities.

The Board members represent each component within the agency. These board members prepare reports, monitor usage of software editing tools, and promote plain writing principles within their components. We rotate board members to encourage new ideas and input.

Oversight

Social Security’s **Senior Agency Official for Plain Language** is Dr. Susan Camarena, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Public Inquiries and Communications Support in the Office of Communications. [The Plain Writing Compliance Board](#) consists of the designated Senior Agency Official, members of the Team, and representatives from the Office of the Commissioner and 11 deputy commissioner-level components. In addition, Regional Communication Directors in our 10 regions serve as [plain writing contacts](#) and are a resource to the public for plain writing information.

Plain Writing Resources

The *Commissioner’s Writing Center* promotes techniques to improve grammar and writing style preferences to ensure agency correspondence is clear to the public. It also provides a link to the *Quality Initiative for Commissioner’s Correspondence Handbook (Handbook)*. The *Handbook* includes guidelines to prepare, review, and submit correspondence for signatures of the

Commissioner and other executives, with examples of proper formatting for letters and memorandums.

The Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development website is available to all employees. The site offers plain writing training opportunities, such as Video on Demand (VOD), online lessons, instructor-led courses, books, and additional plain language resource materials.

The Plain Language Implementation Team created the Plain Language Hub, which houses a variety of resources to provide guidance that helps our employees communicate in plain language. These resources include articles, fact sheets, videos, best practices, and links to additional plain language sources.

The Plain Language Implementation Team provides trainings, briefings, resources, and review services across the agency on plain language.

Editing Tools

In 2023, we continued to use Acrolinx editing software to evaluate websites, PDF files, and Word documents. About 250 agency employees are trained to use Acrolinx, and we have worked to expand the software's use throughout Headquarters and Regional offices across the country. We provide reference guides and training, including Acrolinx training VODs for employees on our intranet and one-on-one training upon request.

In addition to Acrolinx, we measure our plain writing success using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. We have piloted other editing tools and continue to research alternative editing software and tools to enhance our plain writing efforts.

Supporting Activities

In 2023, we continued to promote the application of plain writing principles in our communication methods. We used internal publications, videos, and the new Plain Language Hub website to promote plain writing and provide guidance on how to apply plain writing.

We share plain writing guidelines and tips to employees on our website, through our Compliance Board members, in emails and other electronic delivery methods, and through training.

How We Measure Performance and Get Public Feedback

Our goal is to communicate with the public in a clear, organized way. We encourage members of the public and employees to make comments and suggestions by emailing us at PlainWriting@ssa.gov. We normally respond to emails within one business day.

We benchmark our plain language practices against those of other agencies. We look at the plain language practices of both the private and public sector. We seek the expertise of plain language academia and experts and the Community of Practice.

The Federal Plain Language Report Card is an excellent measurement of success, and we strive to make sure our written materials rise to the high standards required to earn high marks.

We also consider awards and honorable mentions in the annual ClearMark awards to be a measure of success.

Perhaps the best measure of success is seeing more requests from components throughout the agency for the Team to review their written materials using the plain language lens. The result is more of our written communications rendered in language that is easy to read, understand, and use. We are seeing plain language awareness become part of Social Security’s culture; the result is more of our written products—internal and external—complying with plain language best practices.

Compliance Report

Each year, we publish an annual *Compliance Report*. You are reading our *2023 Compliance Report*, published in March 2024.

The following are component-specific examples of communications our agency created using plain writing principles. Although released by the specific components, many of these documents reflect cooperation across teams and departments. Each of these examples reflects plain writing efforts across the agency. These entries show our efforts to improve our written communication products. Please see [Appendix A](#) for examples.

Examples of Policy and Legal Documents Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of Analytics, Review & Oversight (OARO)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Policy Document: The Social Security Administration’s Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law (HALLEX) Manual	Agency employees; Members of the Public	We continue to re-write and re-organize our policies and instructions in HALLEX to improve readability and understanding.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.
Policy Document: The Social Security Administration’s Programs Operations Manual System (POMS)	Agency employees; Members of the Public	We continue to re-write and re-organize our policies and instructions in POMS to improve - readability and understanding.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.

Office of Budget, Finance and Management (OBFM)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Policy Document: TRIRIGA Opportunities Guide	Agency employees	Revised the instructions in the TRIRIGA Opportunities Guide to make it easier to understand the steps for creating various opportunities.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.
Policy Document: TRIRIGA Reports Guide	Agency employees	Revised the instructions in the TRIRIGA Reports Guide to make it easier to understand the steps for creating various reports.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.
Policy Document: TRIRIGA Central Request Guide	Agency employees	We revised the instructions in the TRIRIGA Central Guide to make it easier to understand the steps for creating various service request.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.
Policy Document: TRIRIGA Space Reservation Guide	Agency employees	We revised the instructions in the TRIRIGA Space Reservation Guide to make it easier to understand the steps for reserving space.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.

Office of Human Resources (OHR)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Policy Document: Personnel Policy Manual (PPM) S575_4, Bar Law License and Continuing Legal Education Reimbursement	All eligible agency employees	Clarified language and content updates using plain writing standards.	Employees can easily understand and apply for reimbursement of Bar Law Licenses and associated continuing education requirements.

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Policy Document: Management Guidance for Government Shutdown Furloughs	Agency management-level employees	Updated the sections on requesting absence to allow all employees to make furlough requests like leave requests and make procedures consistent for all employees. Added a new set of talking points for meetings with groups of only excepted employees to streamline meetings for frontline managers, and expanded guidance based on questions from managers and new OPM guidance.	Improved readability and clarity for target audience.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy (ORDP)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Policy Document: Inclusive Language in Notices	Agency employees	This POMS reference section explains how to write notices using inclusive language, specifically how to use gender-neutral relationship terms and pronouns.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Policy Document: Information about the National Beneficiary Survey (NBS)	Agency employees	Data collection for the survey started in February 2023 and ended in December 2023.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Examples of Mailed Materials Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of General Counsel

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Mailed Material: Privacy Act Request Response Template -	Members of the Public	Office of Privacy and Disclosure maintains templates that are used to respond to Privacy Act	We are informing members of the public of these requirements in

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
First Party Claims Records Request		requests received by the agency. We updated the "First Party Claims Records Request" template to include the identity verification requirements for a written, mailed, or faxed request for access to one's own records.	our response letters so that they can resubmit a valid records request to the local office. The response letter uses a bulleted list of requirements for ease of reading.

Example of a Form or Publication Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of Communications (OCOMM)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: <i>Social Security Changes - COLA Fact Sheet (ssa.gov)</i>	Members of the Public	Clarified language and content updates using plain writing standards	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.

Examples of Short Brochures Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Short Brochure: Equity Based Guidelines	Members of the Public	This guide is used to aid consistency across competitive grant program funding opportunity announcements and to increase Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other Institutions Serving Students of Color (ISSCs) awareness of and participation in grant opportunities.	Easy to read, clear, and concise.

Examples of Long Brochures Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of the Chief Actuary

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Long Brochure: 2023 OASDI Trustees Report</p>	<p>U.S. lawmakers; Members of the Public</p>	<p>The annual report presents the latest detailed information on the financial state of the OASI and DI Trust Funds that provide the financial basis for the operation of the Social Security program. This is by far the Office of the Chief Actuary's most requested publication, with visits to this webpage numbering in the thousands. Given the high visibility and wide-ranging audience of this report, we try to use plain language in the text wherever possible.</p>	<p>This publication is updated every year. We continuously try to improve our use of Plain Writing concepts within the Trustees Report wherever possible.</p>
<p>Long Brochure: Trustees Report Summary</p>	<p>U.S. lawmakers; Members of the Public</p>	<p>This document, also called "The TR Summary" is published annually, in conjunction with publication of the annual OASDI and Medicare Trustees Reports. It presents the highlights of the two larger technical documents, for more general consumption. This year The TR Summary was edited substantially to incorporate Plain Writing concepts where possible. Edits included simplifying text, adding white space, adding a table of contents and a glossary, shortening some paragraphs.</p>	<p>The Plain Writing edits made to The Report Summary are helpful at making the publication easier to understand and more appealing to read. This serves our purpose of getting important information out to the intended audience more effectively.</p>

Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Long Brochure: SSA Language Access Plan	Members of the Public and agency employees	The Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity (OCREO) has worked closely with the Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Communications (OCOMM), and the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Steering Committee to update the agency's LAP, per Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency. This plan is the agency's first comprehensive LEP policy/plan, which was a true collaboration.	This policy will serve as a guide to aid employees in assisting customers with Limited English and/or Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy (ORDP)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Long Brochure: Your Payments While You Are Outside the United States	Claimants and beneficiaries residing, or planning to reside, outside of the United States	We made inclusive and plain language improvements, and we updated facts in the publication to be current.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Office of Budget, Finance and Management

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Long Brochure: Division of Furniture Support (DFS) Furniture Offerings	Internal Agency Supported Customers (Regional Field Services Staff, Facilities Staff, etc.)	The DFS Offerings provides agency customers with a consolidated document that outlines and illustrates agency standard furniture products and services.	Improved communication and reference material available for supported customers.

Examples of Newsletters & Reports Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of Analytics, Review & Oversight

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Newsletter: Executive Director's Broadcast (Office of Appellate Operations (OAO) Newsletter)	Office of Appellate Operations Employees	We continue to use plain writing principles in our monthly component newsletter, which remind employees about policy updates, provides information and summaries about training, and share best practices in drafting Appeals Council documents for the public.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of Appeals Council notices, orders, decisions, and internal deliberative documents.

Office of Human Resources

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Newsletter: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Early Close Out HRIC	Agency Employees	Content and plain language updates	To ensure employees understand the procedure to submit timesheets during a holiday and to make sure they are paid on time.
Newsletter: 2023 National Work and Family Month	Agency Employees	Content and plain language updates	Provide information on work/life programs that are available to assist employees.

Examples of Blog Posts & Summaries Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Summary: Center for Harassment Prevention Webpage	Agency Employees	New site created to support the establishment of the Center for Harassment Prevention	Employees can find the agency's policy on harassment and how to report an allegation of harassment. Additionally, employees can find information on civility in the workplace, including tips that can be applied to daily interactions.
Summary: Center for Compliance Management	Agency Employees	Created to support the establishment of the Center for Compliance Management	Employees can identify the appropriate forms the public should use to report allegations of discrimination as well as the agency's policies on the topic.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy (ORDP)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Blog Post: Making the Most of Your Ticket: Work with Your State VR Agency and An Employment Network	Members of the Public	This is a new blog post that explains Partnership Plus and how two former beneficiaries used it to extend the employment support services they received, which led to them exiting the disability rolls.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Blog Post: Mental Health Support on the Job: Reasonable Accommodations	Members of the Public	This is a new blog post that explains what reasonable job accommodations are and how specific ones, such as having a job coach and requesting a flexible schedule, may assist workers with mental health concerns.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Example of a Public Inquiry Reply Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of Budget, Finance and Management

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Public Inquiry Reply: FY 2023 Agency Financial Report- Message from the Acting Commissioner	Congress, Administration, public, other stakeholders	Each year we work to ensure that the Message from the Acting Commissioner follows the QUICC Handbook, adheres to Plain Language principles, and presents a well-rounded and candid message.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Public Inquiry Reply: FY 2024 Budget Overview	Congress, Members of the Public	We updated graphics and added more language in plain writing explaining our budget request.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Public Inquiry reply: FY 2022-2024 Annual Performance Plan and Report	Congress, Members of the Public	We updated graphics and added more language in plain writing explaining our performance plan.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Examples of Webpages Using Plain Writing Principles

The following examples demonstrate improvements to webpages used mostly by the public and other external stakeholders. Please see [Appendix A](#) for examples.

Office of the Chief Actuary

Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Solvency Provisions	U.S. Congress; Members of the Public	This site provides information on the actuarial effects expected to result from changes to individual policy factors governing the Social Security program. We strive to present this information clearly and understandably, to a possibly non-technical audience, using plain language.	We update these pages regularly, always trying to improve our outreach using plain language whenever possible.

Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: The 2023 OASDI Trustees Report	U.S. Congress; Members of the Public	We use plain language in the text wherever possible.	We improved our use of plain writing concepts within the Trustees Report.
Webpage: Solvency Proposals Webpage	U.S. Congress; Congressional Committees; Organizations that request legislative proposals affecting Social Security	This site provides actuarial analysis of legislative proposals to affect Social Security, brought by Congressional or related entities. While analytical results are necessarily technical, we are mindful that part of our duty is to explain actuarial concepts and analytical results in terms understandable to non-actuaries. Thus, we strive to use plain language in our write-up of the results as much as possible.	We strive to improve clarity and outreach using plain language concepts in our response to requests from non-actuaries.

Office of General Counsel

Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Electronic Request for Consent to Disclose	Members of the Public	The agency implemented webform SSA-3288-OP1, Consent for Disclosure of Records Protected Under the Privacy Act, in July 2023. To provide the public with information about how they can use the webform, we added the "Electronic Request for Consent to Disclose" page to the public Privacy Program webpage.	We made the public aware of the new webform SSA-3288-OP1 and provided the public with the link to access to the webform. We note that OPD is currently working on updates to this specific webpage to make it more customer friendly.

Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)	Members of the Public	We added language to our FOIA webpage to notify the public of changes to FOIA Case Management Solutions in FY 2023 and possible delays in case processing. We also updated all the old case management links with the new link so requesters can electronically submit FOIA requests to SSA.	We made the public aware of the new webform SSA-3288-OP1 and provided the public with the link to access to the webform. We note that OPD is currently working on updates to this specific webpage to make it more customer friendly.
Webpage: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Public Access Link (PAL)	Members of the Public	The public can submit FOIA requests electronically to SSA via our PAL.	This is a new webpage for this calendar year. The agency transitioned from FOIA online to FOIA Xpress this year. The PAL allows the public to submit FOIA requests through FOIA Xpress.

Office of Communications (OCOMM)

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Online Press Release: Olivia and Liam Remain Most Popular Baby Names for 2022	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: Cost of Living Website	Agency employees	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: Online Cost of Living Fact Sheet	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Communications Hub, new SharePoint site	SSA, DDS, OHO, and 800# front line employees.	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI RSI Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI ESRD Medicare Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI SSDI Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI SSI Aged Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI SSI Blind and Disabled Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: SSA Open Data Annual Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI RSI Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Annual Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI ESRD Medicare Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Annual Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI SSDI Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Annual Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI SSI Aged Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: SSA Open Data Annual Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI SSI Blind and Disabled Initial Claims	Members of the Public; Media Outlets; Agency employees; Third-party stakeholders	Applied plain language principles.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Office of Hearing Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Online Video Hearings at the Social Security Administration	All SSA claimants	Simplified information.	Easier understanding and application of the Online Video Hearing option.

Office of Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Webpage: Secure Messaging for Message Center text notification users</p>	Members of the Public	my1099 expanded functionality to provide customers with access to historical benefit statements for any of the past 6 years for which benefits were paid.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
<p>Webpage: Secure Messaging for Message Center text notification users</p>	Members of the Public	Aims to provide <i>my</i> Social Security Message Center text message users information about text commands such as STOP and HELP.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
<p>Webpage: Business Services Online Employer Page</p>	Members of the Public	We aim to provide clear instructions for the employer community regarding filing of wage reports and requirements. Emergency messages and other pertinent information are communicated on the web page.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
<p>Webpage: Emergency Message - Instructions for Posting Death to Cross Referenced SSNs</p>	Agency employees	Provided instructions for technicians to post a date of death to a cross referenced SSN when proven. These instructions were not available in POMS prior to publication.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
<p>Webpage: Emergency Message - Updated Process to Transfer HALE Cases to OCO/CASI</p>	Agency employees	Provided instructions to technicians to transfer HALE requests from field offices to OCO/CASI via email rather than USPS or UPS.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Emergency Message - Electronic Enumeration Holding File	Agency employees	Provided instructions to field offices and social security card centers with an option to use an electronic holding file for pending enumeration applications instead of a paper file.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.
Webpage: Transfers and Reassignments	Agency employees	This website, created in June 2023, provides Agency employees with guidance on how to request a hardship transfer or reassignment. The website provides a brief description of the hardship and reassignment requirements. This website also provides employees with a list of forms needed to request a transfer or reassignment. Instructions about where to send completed documents is included within the webpage.	Used plain language principles to improve readability and understanding.

Training on Plain Writing Principles

Office of Human Resources/Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development:

Agency-wide Training (Online Courses & Classroom Training – Writing and General Knowledge)

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Advanced Business Writing	92	16 hours
Business Writing and Grammar	98	16 hours
Leadership Competency Series: Written Communication	50	26 min

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Communicating & Interviewing – Part II – Oral and Written Communication	24	1 hour 30 min
Principles of Plain Language (Operations)	22	27 min
Principles of Plain Language Part 1	130	19 min
Principles of Plain Language Part 2	93	32 min
Principles of Plain Language Part 3 Workshop	64	12 min
Audience And Purpose in Business Writing	116	29 min

Headquarters Component Training

(Any classroom training not sponsored by the Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development)

Office of Analytics, Review, and Oversight

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
OAo Supplemental Training Exchange: How to Write Excellent Grant Review Notices & Appeals Council Decisions	323	2 hours
OAo Supplemental Training Exchange: Efficient Analysis Writing Training	317	2 hours
Writing Analyses	15	30 min
Effective Writing Skills	15	1 hour 30 min
AC Decision Drafting	15	1 hour
Drafting Denial Notices	15	1 hour 45 min
Drafting Remand Orders	15	1 hour 30 min

Office of Operations

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Effective Presentations, Written and Oral Communication - Public Affairs Training for New Supervisors/Managers - LE 4.2	78	2 hours
Critical Congressional Unit: Virtual Detailees Training	4	2 hours

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
RO Analyst Training: Introduction to Business Writing	33	3 hours
Cogs and Wheels Training: Email protocols and Correspondence/Written Communication	25	1 hour
TL 301/Nuts and Bolts: Written Communication	45	45 min
Business Writing and Grammar	103	1 hour
Plain Writing Presentation	45	1 hour

Office of Communications

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Implementing Plain Language as a strategic priority	1	36 hours
How to get started with the first International Standards Organization (ISO) plain language standard	2	1.5 hours
Plain Writing for Government Employees	25	16 hours

Agency Activities and Accomplishments

To help our employees communicate with the public as clearly and effectively as possible, we offer plain writing training throughout the year. We offer online resources about plain writing to both employees and the public. In addition, many components use Acrolinx and Microsoft's spell check and grammar check tools to check their internal and external documents and webpages for compliance with plain writing guidelines.

Our agency's plain writing activities include:

- Online training, classroom training, and workshops.
- Ongoing review of webpages and documents.
- Access to online resources, desk guides, and VODs.

Our components are committed to communicating with the public clearly and concisely, and we strive to create webpages and documents that are easy to understand. We continue to be recognized by other agencies and organizations, including the Center for Plain Language, for the clarity of our webpages and documents, and high marks on the annual Federal Plain Writing Report Card.

Team Accomplishments

The Team oversees agency's Plain Language Program, including plain language compliance efforts of the agency. The Team encourages plain writing for communications so that language we use is useful and easily understood.

To this end, the team:

- Worked with the Chief Business Office, website content owner, to ensure pages being evaluated by the Center for Plain Language for the Federal Plain Language Report Card adhered to the best plain language practices.
- Received the highest grades in federal government on the most recent Federal Plain Language Report Card:
 - A+ - for Organizational Compliance.
 - A - for Writing Quality.
- Solicited and developed new ideas for engaging writers throughout the agency.
- Maintained a Plain Language Project Plan and Work Matrix to be proactive with plain language efforts.
- Engaged with other plain language entities (such as the Center for Plain Language, Plain Language Action & Information Network, Plain Language Community of Practice, other government agency plain language employees, and Acrolinx) to discuss best practices and ways to engage with writers in the agency and the broader plain language community.
- Conducted plain language presentations for numerous agency components and events:
- Office of Human Resources

- National Public Affairs Training Conference
- Office of Payment and Recovery Policy
- Office of Retirement and Disability Policy
- Office of Systems
- Reviewed and revised written communication products (such as the *Statement*, agency webpages, publications, external notices, and correspondence) to ensure the language is compliant with the Act.
- Actively promoted our Team's availability to be invited to review new and revised documents, webpages, and written communications to ensure they follow plain language best practices.
- Maintained Acrolinx licenses (editing software) for plain language writers throughout all components of the agency.
- Reviewed and responded to inquiries from the PlainWriting@ssa.gov mailbox.

Moving Forward

Our agency has made big strides over the past year operationalizing our plain language activities. We see even bigger steps ahead as we strive to make plain language a part of our agency's culture—and a part of a wider range of communications that are distributed by Social Security.

As we move forward, we will continue to make plain language a top priority to comply with the law and provide the best service we can in a way that the public can easily understand. We will continue the use of editing software tools, such as Acrolinx, to prepare and edit notices, websites, policies, letters, external notices, and other communications. Using editing software tools brings clarity and a consistent approach to creating and reviewing our written products.

To evaluate the effectiveness of our communications, we will continue to participate in the Federal Plain Language Report Card and ClearMark awards processes as presented by the Center for Plain Language. We will work with our Plain Writing Compliance Board to ensure the distribution of our plain writing awards criteria to employees.

As we continue to use editing tools and software such as Acrolinx, we will investigate other editing tools as well.

In support of a well-trained workforce, we will provide training resources on plain writing that include online classes, the Commissioner's Writing Center, and targeted classroom training.

We will continue to engage our employees and executives to put plain language principles into practice throughout our agency's culture and promote the use of plain writing in all our communications, internally and externally. We will continue to engage with plain language experts outside Social Security as we adopt best practices and aim to establish our own Plain Language Program as the benchmark other agencies and organizations strive to emulate.

Summary

This 2023 *Plain Writing Compliance Report* documents our compliance activities and accomplishments across the agency. We achieved all the requirements of the Act. We received an “A+” in the compliance category of the Center for Plain Language’s Report Card for federal agencies. We received an “A” for Writing Quality based on our FOIA and Contact Us webpages. These two grades make us the highest-scoring agency in the federal government on the most recent Report Card issued.

This report includes information on our plain writing resources, our editing tools, and supporting activities. We provide examples of notices, webpages, policy documents, and report the agency’s plain writing training activities.

We receive high ratings on our websites because they are easy to read, understand, and navigate and information is easy to find.

We are proud of our plain writing accomplishments throughout the years, and we know that it means better service to the public. We recognize that improvements in plain writing are not a destination, but a journey. We look forward to the next leg of that journey to provide information in a clear, concise, and understandable way.

Appendix A: Plain Writing Examples

1. Updated - Olivia and Liam Remain Most Popular Baby Names for 2022: [Press Release](#)
2. Updated - Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Information for 2024: [Cost-of-Living Adjustment \(COLA\) Information](#)
3. Updated - Cost of Living Fact Sheet: [Social Security Changes - COLA Fact Sheet](#)
4. Updated - Solvency Provisions Webpage: [Individual Changes Modifying Social Security](#)
5. Updated - 2023 OASDI Trustees Report: [The 2023 OASDI Trustees Report](#)
6. Updated - Solvency Proposals Webpage: [Proposals to Change Social Security](#)
7. Updated - Freedom of Information Act Webpage: [Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) at Social Security](#)
8. Updated - Electronic Request for Consent to Disclose Webpage: [Privacy Program](#)
9. Updated - Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Public Access Link (PAL): [PAL Application-Home](#)
10. Updated - SSA Open Data | Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI RSI Initial Claims: [SSA Open Data | Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI RSI Initial Claims](#)
11. Updated - SSA Open Data | Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI ESRD Medicare Initial Claims: [SSA Open Data | Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI ESRD Medicare Initial Claims](#)
12. Updated - SSA Open Data | Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI ESRD Medicare Initial Claims: [SSA Open Data | Quarterly Spoken Language Preferences of AAPI ESRD Medicare Initial Claims](#)

Appendix B: Plain Writing Links

This Appendix shows links to webpages and documents that support our compliance with the Act.

1. Social Security Administration
<https://www.ssa.gov>
2. Plain Writing
<https://www.ssa.gov/plain-language>

Plain Writing Compliance Board

<https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/complianceboard.html>

3. Plain Writing Contacts
<https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/contacts.html>
4. Plain Writing Feedback
PlainWriting@ssa.gov
5. 2023 Plain Writing Implementation Plan
<https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/assets/materials/2023-plainwritingimplementationplan.pdf>