

**U.S. Department of Education
Plain Writing Act of 2010
FY 2015 Compliance Report**

This report shows how the U.S. Department continues to build on the principles of the *Plain Writing Act of 2010*. The Act requires all government agencies to write documents in plain language so the general public can understand them. The purpose of the Act is to assure that documents are written to be clear, concise, and well-organized.

1. **Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing:** Cynthia Dorfman, director of Operations and Agency Services in the Office of Communications and Outreach, serves as the designated senior official. Jacquelyn Zimmerman and Jill James assist her in leading the Department's Plain Writing effort. They also work in the Office of Communications and Outreach. Jacquelyn Zimmermann is the director of Editorial Policy, Print and Art Services. Jill James is the director of the Web Team. The Department's Plain Writing Webpage has their contact information (<http://www.ed.gov/plain-language>).
2. **Response to Comments on Plain Writing:** The Department received comments on its Plain Writing Webpage in 2011. Staff in the appropriate offices reviewed the comments. The various types of writings cited were reviewed, and the Department has worked to make subsequent documents easier to read. The Department welcomes further comments to test whether we have been successful.
3. **Calls for Public Comment:** The Department works to be responsive to the needs of the Department's customers. We regularly call for public comment on technical documents. For example, in March 2015, we posted "Significant Guidance Documents," <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/significant-guidance.doc> . This gave readers the opportunity to let us know their concerns about the information contained in the documents. This list of guidance documents spans the years 1970-2015. The list also gives readers the option to file complaints in compliance with OMB Final Bulletin for Agency Good Guidance Practices.
4. **Multiple Platforms for Public Comment:** Just as we know that students learn in different ways, the Department realizes that customers process and receive information in different ways. To accommodate that, the Department invited public comment on the Promise Zone Initiative grant program that enables people to learn about the program through different media. Customers can read the notice in the *Federal Register* and submit an application online. They can view Webcasts and Webinars to hear and see an overview of the program and ask questions. All of these efforts provide the public with multiple ways to receive information that is clear, concise and well-organized in the spirit of the *Plain Writing Act*.
5. **Training—Plain Writing:** Department employees received training in plain writing. An employee in the Institute for Education Sciences is a certified Plain Writing trainer. She conducted the following six classes in 2015:
 - 3 classes for the Office of the Chief Financial Officer;
 - 2 classes for the National Center for Education Evaluation;
 - 1 class for the National Center for Education Research.

6. **Training—Digital Writing and Editing Workshop:** The Department’s Web and Digital Engagement Teams put together a new workshop on digital writing and editing. The target audiences were writers, editors, and reviewers in 10 offices across the Department. Sixty-two staff members in the DC area attended one of the in-person sessions. Sixty-four staff members across the country tuned in for a webinar session of the workshop. The trainers shared best practices for how to write and edit text for webpages, email newsletters, blogs, and social media. They offered plain writing tips and guidance on tone and style. The teams also talked about how to use web analytics tools to find the most popular content and keywords to highlight. The team of trainers created slide shows, an interactive demo on writing good titles, and group exercises. All of the materials from the workshop are available at ed.gov/web-guidance/writing/.
7. **Grants Information Experience:** The Department’s Web Team manages a project to improve access to grants information on www.ed.gov . Informed by testing and analysis, the team changed the link label in the ED.gov footer from “Open Competitions” to the plain language “Apply for a Grant.” This increased clicks by more than 58%. All improvements to grant-related pages increased traffic to the [Apply page](#) by more than 150%. Customers can now sort results and search on the Apply page. They spend on average 55% more time on the page, because the plain language link leads the reader to a page that is easy to read. The page clearly states and displays the information people want most: the names of the grants and who is eligible to apply for them.
8. **Popularity of Plainly Written Documents:** The U.S. Department of Education delivers information through news documents and e-newsletters that are written clearly and concisely and are well organized. Those who subscribe to our news through the GovDelivery system receive messaging from the following most popular sources of information:
 - Top News from the Department of Education—taken from <http://www.ed.gov/news> (97,601 subscribers);
 - The Teachers Edition at <http://www.ed.gov/teaching/teachers-edition-archive> (93,054 subscriptions);
 - Educational Excellence for Hispanics (email announcements—see <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/hispanic-initiative/>)

These subscribers receive information from the Department on a regular basis, and we receive few “unsubscribe” requests.

9. **Future:** We are working on several new and ongoing projects.
 - **“What Is”:** The Department’s Office of Communications and Outreach will develop a “What Is” series of blogs. The blogs will explain to the public what education policy terms and initiatives mean. We will use plain writing to define terms we use to help prevent and correct misinformation.

- **Most Popular Online Content:** The Department's website is the "front door" to the Department and houses the Department's library of documents and information. We are currently assessing the top 15 most read Web sections for plain writing and design. The web editors will use the results of this assessment to revise and update the sections. Our goal is to provide more inviting and user friendly language on the Website.
- **E-Book:** We are piloting the development of an e-book. The e-book will incorporate multiple media to convey information in plain language graphics and video features.
- **Training:** The Department's Office of Communications and Outreach recently issued a reminder to all newsletter editors of the plain writing requirement. We will continue to conduct customized training for Department employees. We also will continue to train employees, who write, edit and manage the Department's website and use social media, in plain writing techniques.