



2018

The Plain Writing Compliance Report



SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

April 2, 2019

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Social Security Administration

The 2018 Plain Writing Compliance Report

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 (Act) requires that federal agencies apply Plain Writing principles to written communication. The Act states that the information will be written in a way that the public can easily understand and use.

We are pleased to present our 2018 Plain Writing Compliance Report that highlights our accomplishments to comply with the Act. The Report also includes specific agency component details about our efforts.

Our Commitment

We acknowledge our responsibility to provide clear and concise messages in our written communication to current and future recipients. In 2018, about 63 million Americans received Social Security benefits and 175 million workers were covered under Social Security. It is a high priority for us to explain our complex programs in easily understandable language. When we apply the principles of Plain Writing, we successfully deliver information to the public that is appropriate, readily accessible and easy to understand in: letters, notices, publications, emails and webpages.

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

We have the following Plain Writing resources available for all agency employees:

- The Plain Writing website;
- Commissioner's Writing Center; and
- Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence (QUICC) Handbook.

In addition, we have expanded the use of Acrolinx, our editing software tool. We continually train employees on the Act, Plain Writing standards, and the use of Acrolinx. . Many of our components initiate compliance and training efforts to ensure that their employees maintain a commitment to Plain Writing.

We also maintain a Plain Writing mailbox monitored by staff who respond to email inquiries from agency employees and members of the public. We encourage employees and the public to submit their concerns and suggestions to PlainWriting@ssa.gov.

We ensure that our content is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 508

requires all federal agencies to provide types of communication that are accessible to disabled individuals and compatible with assistive technologies.

When we use the Plain Writing principles, we are committed to provide a clear, concise, and easily understandable message to everyone who interacts with our agency.

Our Accomplishments

To comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010, we met basic and advanced requirements.

We developed and followed our *Plain Writing Implementation Plan for 2018*, to help us monitor how offices are applying Plain Writing guidelines to their written materials. In addition, we:

- Earned an “A+” for compliance on the Federal Plain Writing Report Card;
- Received an “A” for the *my Social Security* webpage;
- Received a ClearMark Award of Distinction for our *Social Security Matters* Blog;
- Issued the 2017 Plain Writing Compliance Report;
- Promoted the use of the Acrolinx editing software tool and renewed licenses;
- Increased the number of employees trained to use Acrolinx and expanded usage among Headquarters, Operations and Regional staff;
- Trained employee on Plain Writing, business writing and grammar, and effective writing techniques;
- Applied Plain Writing guidelines to our website, documents, letters, notices, and other written materials;
- Maintained a Plain Language page on our Intranet and Internet websites; and
- Continued updating all high traffic agency webpages in compliance with Plain Writing principles.

Our Implementation

Our Plain Writing Compliance Board met bi-monthly, to plan, coordinate and carry out the *Plain Writing Implementation Plan* and related activities. This plan provides an outline of our Plain Writing goals and activities.

The Board members represent each component within the agency. The representative is our dedicated contact in each component. Component representatives prepare reports and monitor Acrolinx usage for their staff members and relay any revisions to assigned licenses. We regularly rotate members on the Board to ensure new ideas and input.

Oversight

Dr. Steven Patrick, the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Public Inquiries and Communication Support in the Office of Communications, is our senior agency official for Plain

Writing. Dr. Patrick, his staff and representatives from the Office of the Commissioner and 12 deputy commissioner-level components make up our Plain Writing Compliance Board. In addition, directors in our 10 regions serve as Plain Writing contacts and are a resource to the public for Plain Writing information (See Appendix B, for listing of Board members and regional directors).

Plain Writing Resources

We assist and support our employees and the public on our Plain Writing website by offering tools for better communication. Our website provides techniques to deliver clear and concise information. The contacts provided on our website are members of the Compliance Board and individuals who provide guidance on Plain Writing. This website also has useful links for Plain Writing tips and related resources. We encourage comments and suggestions from employees and the public at PlainWriting@ssa.gov.

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 (QUICC) 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 Learning website** is available to all employees and offers various plain language training opportunities such as, Videos on Demand (VODs), online lessons, instructor-led courses, books, and additional Plain Language resource materials.

The **Plain Writing Implementation Team** (Team) is responsible for oversight and application of the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The Team provides agency-wide support and training to improve clarity of their documents and webpages.

We are committed to creating websites and online services accessible to our employees and the public. We confirm our online content meets Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 508 requires all federal agencies to provide communications that are both accessible to people with disabilities and compatible with assistive technologies.

Editing Tools

In 2018, our use of the Acrolinx editing tool has increased throughout the agency. This software allows us to evaluate websites, PDF files, and Word documents in large batches as well as check individual documents. We have approximately 350 agency employees who are trained to use Acrolinx, expanding its use throughout Headquarters, Operations and Regional offices across the country. We strive to provide updated training materials as the software is upgraded. We also provide additional video conference training as requested. Acrolinx training videos on demand are currently available on our Office of Learning website.

One noteworthy benefit of Acrolinx is its capability to produce a wide range of analytics data. We

use this data to monitor Acrolinx usage at our agency, identify problem areas as they relate to Plain Writing, and gauge our progress in applying Plain Writing principles in our written communication. Acrolinx also helps us streamline our training efforts. The software not only allows individuals to evaluate their written products, but also allows managers to evaluate the quality of writing across their offices and identify training needs.

Supporting Activities

In FY 2016, we acquired 350 Acrolinx licenses for continued use throughout the agency. We provide training and support for our users of the Acrolinx editing software. We continuously monitor the allocation of Acrolinx licenses to maximize their efficacy as a tool to help us comply with the Act.

In 2018, we continued to promote the application of Plain Writing principles in all of our communication methods. We used internal publications and websites to promote Plain Writing and provide guidance on how to put Plain Writing principles into practice.

We routinely televise Plain Writing guidelines on HQTV, our internal Headquarters television network. We electronically broadcast announcements on *SSA Update*, a monthly video news program for agency employees.

Mechanism for Public Feedback and Measurements of Performance

It is our goal to improve the way we communicate with the public in a clear, organized way. We encourage members of the public and employees to make comments and suggestions at PlainWriting@ssa.gov. We make every effort to respond to all emails within one business day.

We use customer satisfaction reports such as the ForeSee Experience Index (FXI): E-Government (formerly called the ForeSee E-Government Satisfaction Index) to enhance our website and respond to the needs of our customers. ForeSee measures customer satisfaction on a 0-100 scale and considers scores of 80 or above as the threshold of excellence.

The 2018 report reflects feedback from over 224,236 citizens that used federal government websites, mobile sites, or applications. Top drivers of satisfaction for digital government experiences are Site Information and Information Browsing. Site Information is the extent to which information is thorough and provides answers to questions. Information Browsing focuses on the ability to sort information, narrow choices, and have useful site features. Clear and easy-to-understand content goes a long way.

In 2018, ForeSee also conducted surveys of more than 163,000 users to measure the clarity and conciseness of our written products. We received a Plain Language score of 86.

Compliance Report

We will issue the 2018 Plain Writing Compliance Report on April 2, 2019.

Table 1 - Examples of Notices and Publications Using Plain Writing Principles

The following are component-specific examples of notices and publications used in external communications. These entries show our efforts to improve our written communication products. Please see [Appendix A](#) for examples.

Office of the Chief Actuary

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: 2018 OASDI Board of Trustees Report	Congress, Public	We update and edit this publication each year to promote the use of plain language wherever possible.	This annual report is one of our highly requested publications. We typically receive dozens of formal requests from the public after its release each year and visits to its webpage number over 13,000. We continuously improve our use of Plain Writing concepts within the Trustees Report wherever possible.

Office of Communications

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: Media Information Page (MIP)	News Media, Public	We applied plain writing principles to each MIP article to bring awareness to key agency initiatives.	Our application of plain writing principles ensures that we provide clear and concise information to the news media and the public we serve.

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Publication: Commissioner Broadcast</p>	Employees	We applied plain writing principles to each ACOSS Broadcast bring awareness to key agency initiatives.	Our application of plain writing principles ensures that we provide clear and concise information to our employees.

Office of Analytics, Review and Oversight

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Notice: Denial Notices and Decisions</p>	Public	Revised language to improve clarity when evidence is exhibited.	Improved information and clarity in notices.
<p>Notice: Remand notice (REM-10) Used when vacating administrative law judges' dismissals when contact procedures are not followed</p>	Employees, Public	Updated and clarified language in the notice.	Improved information and clarity in notices.
<p>Publication: The Social Security Administration's Hearings, Appeals and Litigation Law (HALLEX) Manual (See Appendix A)</p>	Employees, Public	Rewrote and reorganized instructions in HALLEX to improve readability and understanding.	Improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of policy guidance.
<p>Form: 800 Number Telephone Service Evaluation Report</p>	Employees	Streamlined information and updated the look and feel of the entire report. Combined similar information into one chart and changed chart types to reduce redundancy. Increased white space to improve readability.	The document provides clear, concise information on the agency 800 number telephone service. In addition, we were able to deliver the report form faster than in previous years.

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Form: Field Office Telephone Service Evaluation Report</p>	<p>Employees</p>	<p>Streamlined information and updated the look and feel of the entire report. Combined similar information into one chart and changed chart types to reduce redundancy. Increased white space to improve readability.</p>	<p>The document provides clear and concise information regarding field offices' telephone service. In addition, we were able to deliver the report form faster than in previous years.</p>

Office of Hearings Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Form: Updated Fully Favorable Decision Writing Template</p>	<p>Employees</p>	<p>Decision writing template language was streamlined and simplified.</p>	<p>Substantially revised the fully favorable template to focus writers on the key points of analysis.</p>
<p>Form: Voluntary Standby Program (English & Spanish) (See Appendix A)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>This is a new document.</p>	<p>This document was developed for claimants and their representatives to provide an easy understanding of the Voluntary Standby List and the process.</p>

Office of the Inspector General

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Publication: Congressional Response Report, Field Office Closures in the Philadelphia Region</p>	<p>Congress</p>	<p>Report incorporates plain language principles to improve clarity.</p>	<p>Report content is clear and the data can be easily located.</p>

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Publication: Audit Report, High-volume Individual Representative Payee in the Chicago Region</p>	<p>Congress, Public</p>	<p>Report incorporates plain language principles to improve clarity.</p>	<p>The content, including the statistics and analysis, are quickly understandable, enabling the audience to review and evaluate with greater ease.</p>
<p>Letter: Response to Whistleblower Reporters</p>	<p>Employees, Public</p>	<p>Updated the educational letter we send to those who report whistleblower allegations using plain writing principles.</p>	<p>The rights and responsibilities of whistleblower reporters are clearly identified and explained, thereby assisting reporters with this complex matter.</p>
<p>Publications: OIG Factsheets About Our Organization Career Opportunities Cooperative Disability Investigations Program Fraud Hotline Legal Enforcement and Financial Penalties Protecting Personal Information (See Appendix A)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>Trimmed the paragraphs, used plain-language techniques, utilized bulleted lists, added graphics and headers, and used familiar social media icons on our contact information page.</p>	<p>The redesigned one page factsheets present information regarding the organization, programs, and public outreach matters in a more concise and cohesive manner.</p>

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Publication: Social Security Congressional Inquiries Guide (See Appendix A)</p>	Congressional Staff	Used Plain Writing techniques and guidelines to eliminate passive voice, grammar, and style.	The agency overview and program descriptions are clear and easy to understand.

Office of Operations

Atlanta Region

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Notice: General Notices (Southeastern Program Center- SEPSC)</p>	Public	Our Operations Analysts use Acrolinx software for internal policy and external customers to improve the readability of documents.	Notices are in compliance with Plain Writing by guiding the writer with spelling, grammar, style and terminology use.

Office of Central Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Notice: T2 Overpayment Notices</p>	Employees	Conducted monthly meetings to identify errors found in overpayment notices and provide plain writing reminders and instructions on the proper construction of an overpayment letter.	Notices are easier to understand.

Office of Budget, Finance and Management

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Publication:</p> <p>FY 2019 Budget Overview</p>	Congress, Public	Integrated new functions, i.e., agency strategic planning and organizational performance reporting, into the BFM mission; coordinated the review of documents to ensure consistent messaging.	Budget was delivered to Congress timely, with OMB approval.
<p>Publication:</p> <p>FY 2018 Agency Financial Report (See Appendix A)</p>	Congress, Public	Integrated new functions, i.e., agency strategic planning and organizational performance reporting, into the BFM mission; coordinated the review of documents to ensure consistent messaging.	FY 2018 AFR was submitted to the Association of Government Accountants for review.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Notice:</p> <p>Educational Correspondence Announcement</p>	Public (Employers)	We revised this notice using plain writing principles to remove extraneous information.	This notice provides clear and streamlined instructions to help employers' correct wage reporting errors.
<p>Publication:</p> <p>Agreement Between the United States and Brazil</p>	Public	New publication.	Provides comprehensive information in a concise manner.

Table 2 - 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
Individual Changes Modifying Social Security	Members of the public, legislators	We show a summary statement of the actuarial effect of a specific change, in addition to the detailed data behind the result. Our aim is to help the public understand how different policies can work, alone or together, to address the financial solvency of the Social Security program.	We create summary statements on these pages with Plain Writing concepts in mind.

Office of the General Counsel

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Guide to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) at SSA (See Appendix A)	Employees, Public	We made updates to apply plain writing principles to the FOIA webpage.	The webpage provides clear and concise policy pertaining to the Freedom of Information Act.

Office of the Inspector General

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Whistleblower Coordinator	Employees, Public	Revised the narrative using plain writing principles to ensure that whistleblower information did not contain legalese and was clearly stated.	Readers can quickly navigate and access useful tools and information.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Achieving A Better Life Experience (ABLE) ACT – 2018 Edition (See Appendix A)	Congress/public and other government agencies	New webpage for the ABLE policy using plain writing principles.	Information on the site is easy to understand and it is visually appealing.

Table 3 - Examples of Policy Documents Using Plain Writing Principles

The following are examples of policy documents. These entries show our efforts to improve clarity.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Program Operations Manual Systems (POMS) - Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)	Employees, Public	Applied plain writing principles to create a new section, to provide clear and easy to understand information and instructions on reviewing a PASS involving self-employment.	POMS section is clear, concise, and easy to understand.
POMS - Expedited Reinstatements (EXR)	Employees, Public	Updated the section using Plain writing principles to reflect the new eligibility requirements for EXR; and consolidated the general workflow into this section.	POMS section is clear, concise, and easy to understand.
Publication: Young and Mid-Adult Women's Household Retirement Preparation and Family Status	Congress, Employees and Public	A new 1-page summary of an in-depth research paper published by staff in a professional journal.	A clear, condensed, time-saving summary of a longer research paper.

Table 4 - Examples of Congressional and Public Inquiries Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of the Chief Actuary

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Publication:</p> <p>Analysis of Proposals Affecting Trust Fund Solvency</p>	Congress	We promote the use of Plain Writing as much as possible in all such memoranda. We are mindful that part of our duty is to explain actuarial concepts and analytic results in terms understandable to non-actuaries.	We strive to improve clarity and outreach through the use of Plain Writing concepts in all responses to non-actuaries.
<p>Letter:</p> <p>August 31, 2018 memorandum to Senator Marco Rubio</p>	Congressman	We promote the use of Plain Writing as much as possible in all such memoranda. We are mindful that part of our duty is to explain actuarial concepts and analytic results in terms understandable to non-actuaries.	We strive to improve clarity and outreach through the use of Plain Writing concepts in all responses to non-actuaries.

Office of the Legislation and Congressional Affairs

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
<p>Response to Inquiry:</p> <p>Response to Member of Congress on behalf of constituent inquiries</p>	Members of Congress	Used Plain Writing techniques and guidelines to eliminate passive voice, grammar, and style.	The response is clear and concise.

Table 5 - Training on Plain Writing Principles

Office of Human Resources/Office of Learning: Agency-wide Training

Online Courses & Classroom Training – Writing and General Knowledge

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Using the Parts of Speech – X13669	1	31 minutes
Getting the Details Right: Spelling Basics – X13670	1	29 minutes
Abbreviating, Capitalizing, and Using Numbers – X13842	27	33 minutes
Using Punctuation Marks – X13676	1	30 minutes
Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Usage Mistakes In Writing – X13679	188	29 minutes
Creating Well-Constructed Sentences – X13843	7	36 minutes
Audience and Purpose In Business Writing – X13897	51	28 minutes
Clarity and Conciseness In Business Writing – X13607	47	31 minutes
Editing and Proofreading Business Documents – X13836	36	30 minutes
Developing An Effective Business Case – X14006	3	30 minutes
Writing Effective Emails and Instant Messages – X13666	48	28 minutes
Sending E-mails To the Right People – X13667	1	29 minutes
Organizing Your Email – X13668	2	28 minutes
The Plain Writing Act – X10137	5	1 hour
Written Communication – PC09126	42	15 minutes
Writing for Business – PC09205	51	6 minutes

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Focus On Your Business Writing Level 1	87	21 days
Focus On Your Business Writing Level 2	41	21 days
IVT Instructor Training: Scriptwriting (Classroom Training)	42	4 hours

Video On Demand

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Principles of Plain Language Operations	2,089	26 minutes
Principles of Plain Language Part 1	1,053	19 minutes
Principles of Plain Language Part 2	755	32 minutes
Principles of Plain Language Part 3 – Workshop	112	45 minutes
Program Leader Leadership Academy: Improving Technical Writing Skills Part 1	3	42 minutes
Program Leader Leadership Academy: Improving Technical Writing Skills Part 2	1	42 minutes
Social Media for SSA: Writing for Facebook	42	7 minutes
Leadership Competencies Series – Written Communication	155	23 minutes

Headquarters Component Training

(Any classroom training not sponsored by the Office of Learning)

Office of Budget, Finance, & Management

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Performance Assessment and Communication Systems for Managers	85	1.5 hours
Leaders' Summit	180	6 hours
Fundamentals of Writing	1	3 days
Administrative Officers Workshop	2	3 days

Office of the General Counsel

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Writing Training for Staff	27	3.5 hours
Business Writing and Grammar Skills Made Easy and Fun	4	2 days

Office of Hearings Operations

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Administrative Law Judge Supplemental Training	238	20 hours
Decision Writer Training	610	3 weeks
Legal Assistant Training	306	80 hours

Office of the Inspector General

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Audit Report Writing With Plain Language	26	24 hours
Common Mistakes In Writing	1	30 minutes

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Business Writing: Mechanics of Writing	1	1 hour
Changing Behavior Through Communication	1	25 hours
Why You Should Conduct a Communications Audit	1	1.5 hours
Web Writing and Content Strategy	1	25 hours
CIGIE Public Affairs Workgroup	1	2 hours
Granicus Government Communications Summit	1	6 hours

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Continued Use of Acrolinx	2	Ongoing
Basic Analyst Training	2	20 hours

Office of Operations/Office of Central Operations

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
WBDOC Business Writing and Grammar	10	16 hours
Focus On Your Business Writing – KEYS Program (WBDOC)	5	4 hours
Business Writing for Staffers	5	8 hours
Business Writing for Managers – Writing With Purpose	11	8 hours (BETA), 16 hours (course)

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
PPS and Plain Language	200	1 to 2 hours

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
PolicyNet Publication System: Authors (video on demand)	200	25 minutes

Regional Training

(Any classroom training not sponsored by the Office of Learning)

Atlanta

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Monthly Meetings on Uniform Text Identifiers, Agency-approved Language, Proper Grammar, and Minimizing the Use of Dictated Language (SEPSC)	46	1 hour
Notices for Claims Specialists	79	24 hours
Notices for Benefit Authorizers	79	8 hours

Kansas City

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Completed Staff Work Refresher	33	1 hour
Advanced Correspondence Guidelines	71	4 hours

Philadelphia

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Regional Office Refresher Analyst Training	130	4 hours
Effective Writing for Leaders (Sponsored by Office of the General Counsel)	20	1.25 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 or StyleWriter 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
- Marketing campaigns
- Ongoing review of webpages and documents
- Access to online resources, desk guides, and videos-on-demand
- Software editing tools such as Acrolinx and StyleWriter

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.

Agency Activities and Accomplishments by Component

Office of Analytics, Review, & Oversight

- We routinely publish a newsletter containing reminders about Plain Writing.
- We revised our publications to clarify policy on using Plain Language
- We edited templates in the Document Generation System, a system used by the Office of Appellate Operations, to make notices easier to read and understand.

Office of Budget, Finance, and Management

- Our agency received an unprecedented 20th consecutive Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting (CEAR) award for our fiscal year (FY) 2017 Agency Financial Report (AFR.) The AFR was compiled with all Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements and demonstrated to stakeholders our stewardship and accountability for the financial resources provided to the agency. The CEAR recognizes outstanding accountability reporting and is the highest form of recognition in Federal Government financial management reporting. The AFR provides financial management and high-level performance information. This information enables the President, Congress, and public to assess how well our agency accomplished its mission, achieved its goals, and managed its financial resources. With the Acting Commissioner's approval, we send the report to the President, OMB, and Congress.
- We held meetings with components to provide guidance on the use of Plain Language in our agency's budget and performance documents.
- We continued to conduct multiple reviews of our component's documents to ensure

technical accuracy, appropriate tone, and compliance with Plain Writing guidelines. We also set up group reviews of major reports.

- We continued to use Acrolinx to review webpages, Microsoft Word documents, and PDF files for spelling, grammar, style, and readability, and to flag areas that may not conform to the agency's Plain Writing objectives.
- At the direction of our agency's Web Governance Steering Committee (WESCO), we are completing the annual review and certification of our public-facing web content to ensure information is accurate, current, and compliant with Plain Language guidelines.
- The following resources from our 2015 Office of Budget, Finance, and Management (OBFM) Writing Month remain available to employees:
 - Quality Initiative for the Commissioner's Correspondence (QUICC) Video On Demand (VOD): We partnered with the Office of Public Inquiries and the Office of Learning to provide a QUICC VOD (QUICC Guide VOD and QUICC Guide VOD for employees with disabilities).
 - Online resources: We provided a Writer's Toolkit on our Intranet site that serves as an additional writing resource for our authors. The Writers Toolkit includes:
 - a Communications Guide,
 - links to the QUICC Handbook, QUICC training VODs, and Plain Language VODs, and
 - a link to the Commissioner's Writing Center, which provides information on formatting letters and memoranda, the Commissioner's Priority Correspondence process, and online training courses.

Office of Communications

- We distributed 350 Acrolinx licenses throughout the agency and provided training on how to use the software.
- We promoted Plain Writing through our internal communication program, *SSA Update*, and Plain Writing website. Information on the website is available to employees and the public.

Office of Hearings Operations

- We strive to use plain writing in all communication, and emphasize plain writing in all training efforts.

Office of Human Resources

- We conducted reviews of our component's documents to ensure compliance with the Plain Writing Act, technical accuracy, and use of appropriate tone.
- We used Acrolinx to review Microsoft Word and PDF documents. Acrolinx flags areas in our documents that do not conform to Plain Writing guidelines and makes recommendations to correct spelling, grammar, style, and readability.
- At the direction of the agency's Web Governance Steering Committee (WESCO), we completed the annual review and certification of our public-facing web content for relevance, accuracy, Plain Language, and 508 compliance.
- Posted Plain Writing information and resources on our Office of Information Technology for Human Resources website for our employees

- We are redesigning all OHR intranet websites. The redesign includes a review of all documents and web content for clear and concise communication, technical accuracy, appropriate tone and plain writing compliance. It also focuses on making sure information is current and improving the layout, flow, and organization of content on websites.

Office of the Inspector General

- We redesigned our Whistleblower Webpage to help guide reporters through the whistleblowing process. When updating the Whistleblower Coordinator website for statutory changes, we revised the narrative to ensure the information does not use legalese and is clearly stated.
- We updated the educational letter sent to whistleblower reporters who contact us via the Whistleblower Coordinator email mailbox, advising them of their rights and responsibilities.
- We revised organizational fact sheets using less verbiage, more graphics, and plain language guidance to inform the public about our organization and programs.
- We produced audit reports of reviews and evaluations, incorporating guidelines that increase readability and allowing for greater comprehension.
- Our staff completed extensive training courses encouraging the use of plain writing, accumulating over 100-hours agency-wide. As an example, our Office of Audit in the Chicago Region had 26 employees participate in a three-day writing class, with the last day specifically focused on the rules and guidelines of plain language and actual writing.

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

- We reviewed correspondence for accuracy, responsiveness, and plain writing compliance prior to release.
- We developed and maintain an electronic repository for all writers to reference.
- We provided instructions to staff on identifying and handling concerns about new correspondences.
- We established and updated protocol for developing and storing new agency approved language that complies with the Plain Writing Act.
- We reviewed and revised staff correspondence procedures on an ongoing basis.
- We include plain writing feedback to staff as part of our quality control efforts.
- We used the Commissioner's Writing Center, the Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence (QUICC), and Acrolinx to prepare responses to White House and congressional inquiries.

Office of Operations

Office of Disability Operations

- We conduct monthly meetings with Module PETEs to discuss MADCAP exception data and provide instructions and training to resolve and help prevent reoccurring exception codes. Staff has also conducted refresher training on the OQR suite of automation tools to help improve both notice quality and overall processing accuracy.

Atlanta Region

- The regional SEPSC OAS along with Atlanta’s Center for Automation and Security and Integrity, updated an obsolete version of the PC Notices application and re-launched it in August 2018. This application allows technicians to choose from dozens of notices routinely sent to the public, and then partially automates much of the notice’s language. Use of this application helps ensure technicians provide clear and concise information that meets notice policy standards and applies plain writing principles to the notices we send.
- The regional SEPSC performs regular quality reviews on completed cases that include review of any notice prepared. For noted errors, we hare directly with the technician as a learning tool for future case processing and notice preparation.
- The region’s Georgia Area Director’s Office redesigned its internal Workload Sharing SharePoint site to provide a simpler user interface and encourage field offices to report all work completed outside their service areas. The redesign eliminated extraneous functions and reports from the site. Managers using the site since the redesign report that data entry is more straightforward. The redesign has also simplified the reporting function in our Georgia Area Directors Office.

Moving Forward

We will continue the use of editing tools, such as Acrolinx, to prepare and edit notices, websites, policies, letters, and other documents. Our practice of 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 ClearMark awards process as presented by the Center for Plain Language. We will institutionalize a process to recognize our best writing. We will establish internal awards to recognize the best-written communication across all agency components. We will work with our Plain Writing Compliance Board to ensure distribution of our Plain Writing Awards criteria to employees.

We will also use metrics such as the ForeSee Feedback Surveys to gauge customer satisfaction with the clarity and readability of our letters, notices, documents, and websites. We realize that people turn to the government for accurate information in an understandable format. With that in mind, we rely on measurement tools like the ForeSee Plain Language Survey to provide the best customer service product possible.

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

Summary

Our 2018 Plain Writing Compliance Report documents this year’s agency-wide compliance activities and accomplishments. We achieved all of the requirements of the Plain Writing Act and received an “A+” in the compliance category of the Center for Plain Language’s Report Card for Federal Agencies. Our *my Social Security* webpage also earned an “A” on the Federal Plain

Language Report Card.

We are proud of our Plain Writing accomplishments over the years. We are committed to providing clear and concise communications with the public. Not only do we move closer each year to ensure that our messages are clear and concise; but also, we recognize that improvements in plain writing is a continuous endeavor.

Included in this report is information on our plain writing resources, our editing tools, and support activities. We provide examples of notices, webpages, policy documents, and report on the agency's plain writing training activities.

We receive high ratings on our websites because they are easy to navigate and information is easy to find. In addition, we employ acceptance testing, focus groups, and surveys to develop content that will meet the needs of our users. We use customer satisfaction surveys such as the ForeSee Plain Language Survey to improve the clarity in our correspondence and on our websites to respond to the needs of our customers.

Appendix A: Plain Writing Examples

New or Revised Documents

Office	Sample Document
Cooperative Disability Investigations Program	https://oig.ssa.gov/sites/default/files/CDI.pdf
OIG: About Our Organization	https://oig.ssa.gov/sites/default/files/About.pdf
2018 Agency Financial Report	https://www.ssa.gov/finance/2018/Full%20FY%202018%20AFR.pdf
SSA's Hearings, Appeals, & Litigatin Law Manual (HALLEX)	https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/hallex/hallex.html

New or Revised Webpages

Office	Link
If You Are Young And Lose A Parent	https://blog.ssa.gov/if-you-are-young-and-lose-a-parent/
Access Social Security's Educator Toolkit	https://blog.ssa.gov/access-social-securitys-educator-tool-kit/
Achieving A Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act – 2018 Edition	https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-able.html
Guide to FOIA at SSA	https://www.ssa.gov/foia/

Appendix B: Plain Writing Links

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

Site	Link
Social Security Administration	https://www.ssa.gov
Plain Writing	https://www.ssa.gov/plain-language
Plain Writing Compliance Board	https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/complianceboard.html
Plain Writing Contacts	https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/contacts.html
Plain Writing Feedback	https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/
Plain Writing Implementation Plan – 2018	https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/materials/pdfs/2018PWIP.pdf