

# Plain Writing Act Compliance Report — April 13, 2017

This report outlines the progress towards implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 within the Department of Defense. Please check back for updates.

## I. Senior Agency Official

Michael L. Rhodes, Director of Administration, Office of the Deputy Chief Management Officer (DCMO) of the Department of Defense, is the DoD Senior Official for plain language. The Washington Headquarters Services, Directives Division, oversees implementation and administration of the DoD Plain Language Program through the plain language point of contact. The point of contact may be reached at [whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil](mailto:whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil).

## II. Using Plain Language

DoD received no plain language amendment requests in 2016.

DoD agencies took many actions to implement plain language requirements in 2016.

- DoD
  - Writing style guides and plain language resources on the DoD Plain Language Website are available to action officers who write policy documents.
  - The DoD Plain Language Committee met to share ideas and information.
- Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA)
  - DeCA reviewed and clarified 78 documents that were subsequently released to military resale trade publications and U.S. military news outlets, as well as being published on the DeCA website.
- Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA)
  - DCAA posted the updated Contract Audit Manual to the DCAA public website. This update simplified the language and removed outdated information.
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)
  - The DFAS Corporate Communications Office prepared or reviewed all official customer communications for message clarity and ease of understanding. These include Facebook posts, articles, videos, letter and email content for public release, and web content.
- Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)
  - DLA required procedural writers to process drafts through StyleWriter4 Professional editorial software to ensure final documents comply with Federal Plain Language Guidelines.
- Office of the Director of Administration, DCMO
  - Staff and issuance compliance analysts in the Directives Division use plain language guidelines when reviewing and revising publications that establish and implement DoD policy. The Division published 108 new or revised DoD issuances incorporating plain language in 2016.
  - The standards and templates for DoD issuances were reviewed and updated as needed to encourage action officers to use plain language when writing issuances.
  - The Directives Division conducted 6 classes on writing DoD issuances in 2016 that included basic principles of plain writing and referred class attendees to available plain writing training.

### III. Communicating Requirements

Communication about the Act's implementation, plain language guidelines, and compliance requirements is provided to the DoD workforce through:

- Publication of the DoD Plain Writing Act implementation plan, known as DoD Instruction 5025.13. It is available on the DoD Issuances website at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives>.
- Distribution of memorandums from the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.
- Meetings of the DoD Plain Language Committee, which consists of representatives from different organizations within the DoD.
- Training and helpful resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website and individual agency websites.
- Notices placed in various public forums such as:
  - DoD newspapers
  - DoD newsletters
  - Mass electronic information systems

### IV. Training

- DoD
  - A plain language training course is available on the DoD Plain Language Website to all DoD personnel.
  - DoD organizations that already have internal training available will incorporate plain language guidance in those programs.
  - DoD organizations that do not have internal training will use the DoD plain language training and the other resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website.
- Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA)
  - DeCA identified and provided online plain language training for 208 employees who write policy or instructional documents for external audiences.
- Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA)
  - The DCAA Defense Contract Audit Institute (DCAI) updated the Audit Report Writing Course to include plain writing basics. The course gives students the fundamental skills to create a clear and concise audit report that supports the audit opinion through the use of effective writing techniques. Poorly written audits make it difficult for contracting officers to understand the audit finding and opinions and may not be fully used to negotiate fair and reasonable prices. This course has been given approximately 12 times at DCAA offices across the nation.
  - As part of the normal curriculum review cycle, DCAI is now reviewing the basic plain language online course, which is mandatory for all DCAA employees.
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)
  - DFAS provided 15 training courses in its annual course curriculum that provide key principles of the Plain Writing Program:
    - Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing
    - Business Writing Basics
    - Business Writing Basics for DFAS
    - Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading
    - Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely
    - Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose
    - Foundations for Sound Business Writing
    - The Plain Writing Act

- Writing a Business Case
  - Writing for Business
  - Writing for Technical Professionals: Effective Writing Techniques
  - Writing for Technical Professionals: Preparation and Planning
  - Writing under Pressure: Preparing for Success
  - Writing under Pressure: the Writing Process
  - DFAS Correspondence Course
- In 2016, 1,226 DFAS employees successfully completed one or more of these courses. Since 2013, 1,658 DFAS employees have completed similar courses.
- The DFAS Corporate Communications Office provides plain language training for agency newsletter editors.
- Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)
  - DLA conducted 12 in-house courses to communicate plain writing program principles to Agency personnel.
  - DLA also trained 85 civilian and contract employees who write policy or procedures documents intended for Agency personnel and public audiences.
- Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA)
  - DTRA added a plain language training video into its Learning Management System.
  - Quarterly meetings were held with select staff members to provide guidance and increase awareness of plain language principles and standards. The selected staff members process, review, and edit large volumes of tasked requests received from multiple sources, both internal and external.
  - Outside vendors taught courses to DTRA employees on effective government correspondence. This course does touch on plain language standards and the increased effectiveness of correspondence when it incorporates plain language.
- Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Joint Staff)
  - The Joint Staff Training Program facilitated an active responsive writing program as a part of formal action officer and Division Chief introductory training. The responsive writing point of contact also facilitated formal individual and group training for select Joint Staff personnel.
  - During 2016 a total of 476 Joint Staff personnel received formal writing instruction.
  - Responsive writing instruction will continue to be an integral part of the existing Joint Staff Training Program. This instruction appropriately supports the mission of the Joint Staff and ensures the senior leaders of the Joint Staff receive the timely, accurate decision products necessary to perform their advisory and leadership roles and responsibilities.
- Office of the Director of Administration, DCMO
  - Plain language is emphasized in training classes offered to DoD action officers that cover the development of DoD issuances and the DoD Issuances Process.
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P))
  - Over the past 12 months OUSD(P) has offered 14 plain language courses to its personnel. Approximately 130 staff were trained in these courses. These courses continue to be offered approximately every other month. Among the courses offered were:
    - Policy Writing Seminar (four sessions) – This course teaches best practices for clear and effective writing including understanding the purpose of basic policy writing style and how to effectively engage senior leadership.
    - Public Speaking (four sessions) – This course teaches how to make ideas stick by being relevant, specific, and memorable. Personnel learn how to shape content development and delivery for a wide range of audiences.

- 1-on-1 Communications Coaching (six sessions) - This is personal one-on-one coaching and desk-side training to bolster personal presence, preparation of content, and performance in verbal communication.
- OUSD(P) also incorporated plain writing training into on-boarding programs. All new staff in the past year received approximately one hour of training on clear, concise writing of OUSD(P) products.
- The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy has emphasized the importance of clear, plain writing to the entire workforce through her Town Hall presentation, discussions with leadership, and recent emails to all staff. The Secretary of Defense repeated this message personally in a recent Town Hall appearance.

## **V. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change**

The DoD is working towards full compliance with the Act and has fulfilled requirements such as:

- Publishing the DoD Plain Writing Act Implementation Plan, DoD Instruction 5025.13.
- Maintaining the DoD Plain Language Website.
- Designating a senior official for plain language.
- Encouraging feedback from the public and stakeholders to identify communications that require improvements.
- Publishing the annual compliance report on the DoD Plain Language Website.

## **VI. Website:** <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/plainlanguage.html>

Information about the Act and its requirements; implementation plans and compliance resources; and compliance reports may be found on the DoD Plain Language Website. The site also provides an easy way for the public to contact the DoD should they have questions, and request the revision of documents that are not written in plain language. Any input received through the site will be considered and identified documents will be reviewed and revised, if necessary.

No requests for revision were received in 2016.

## **VII. Customer Satisfaction**

We want your input. Feedback is critical to help us know whether we have been successful in providing information that is clear and well-organized for its intended audience.

Comments, questions, and concerns may be sent to [whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil](mailto:whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil).