

Federal Trade Commission

Initial Report on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010

June 9, 2011 (updated May 3, 2021)

I. Background on the Plain Writing Act of 2010

This report describes the Federal Trade Commission’s (“FTC”) plans for implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (“Act”). The goal of the Act is to ensure that every “covered document” issued by an agency is in plain writing. Plain writing (also called plain language or plain English) is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. It is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.

A “covered document” is any document that:

- is necessary for obtaining any Federal Government benefit or service or filing taxes;
- provides information about any Federal Government benefit or service; or
- explains to the public how to comply with a requirement the Federal Government administers or enforces.

This includes letters, publications, forms, notices, or instructions (whether in paper or electronic form) but does not include regulations.

We have determined that the FTC’s “covered documents” primarily fall into the third category of documents that explain to the public how to comply with a requirement the Federal Government administers or enforces.

II. The FTC’s Commitment to Plain Writing

Plain writing is not a new idea at the FTC. The agency’s Division of Consumer and Business Education’s award-winning consumer outreach publications have long garnered praise for their clarity, effectiveness, and usefulness. In 2010, the FTC won the Center for Plain Language’s “Best Original Public Document” award for its new financial model privacy form – a document that financial institutions could use to develop privacy notices for consumers. Judges highlighted the document’s “easy-to-read and well-organized design.” But there is always room for improvement, so we invite feedback about our plain writing efforts, and continually seek to identify areas that can be improved.

III. The FTC’s Plan to Implement the Plain Writing Act

A. Senior Official for Plain Writing

In 2011, we designated Christian S. White, Deputy General Counsel for Legal Counsel, as the Senior Official for Plain Writing. In 2020, Elizabeth Tucci, the new Deputy General Counsel for Legal Counsel, became the Senior Official for Plain Writing.

B. Plain Writing Section of Agency Website

We created a web page that informs the public of the FTC's plans for complying with the Act and allows the agency to receive and respond to public comments and suggestions. The web page can be found at ftc.gov/plainwriting. We created a dedicated email address (PlainWriting@ftc.gov) which consumers can use to provide the agency with feedback.

C. Communicating the Act's Requirements to Agency Employees and Train Agency Employees in Plain Writing

We sent an agency-wide memorandum to staff on June 9, 2011, informing them of the requirements of the Act. We also posted information about the Act and its requirements on the FTC intranet, which contained links to plain language training, the Federal Plain Language Guidelines and other plain language resources. We offered training to our employees on plain writing.

D. Establish a Process by which the Agency will Oversee Ongoing Compliance

In divisions that publish consumer-facing documents, supervisors review work that is published to ensure it is written in plain language.