

Social Security's 2025 Plain Language Compliance Report

March 2026





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INTRODUCTION

At Social Security, our commitment to plain language is central to how we serve the public. We strive to use clear and straightforward language in all our communications, including letters, emails, and reports. Our goal is to make information easy to understand for everyone who interacts with our agency.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires federal agencies to use clear, concise, and well-organized language in documents intended for the public. The Act ensures that government communications are easy to understand, helping people access information and services without confusion. Social Security complies with the Act by regularly reviewing and improving our written materials, providing training and resources to employees, and inviting feedback from the public.

When our messages are clear, people can quickly grasp the information they need without confusion or frustration. This helps reduce the need for follow-up questions and saves time for both the agency and the public. Using plain language also supports transparency, making our communications accessible to people of all backgrounds and levels of familiarity with our programs. By focusing on clarity, we build trust and reinforce our dedication to serving the public with integrity.

Plain language is not just a best practice—it is a guiding principle that improves our service and helps create a more informed and empowered community.

"...our commitment to plain language is foundational to our service."



LEADING BY EXAMPLE



Social Security demonstrates its commitment to plain language by making transparency and accessibility a priority in all our communications. We regularly review and update our materials to ensure they are easy to read and understand, especially given the complex topics we address.

Our agency consistently applies plain language principles, which are required by the *Plain Writing Act of 2010*. We believe that clear communication is essential for effective customer service and for helping people use our programs and services. Our motivation goes beyond legal compliance; it reflects our mission to serve the public efficiently and respectfully.

We aim to create written materials—such as notices, webpages, reports, and forms—that people can understand the first time they read them. By prioritizing plain language, we foster trust, empower our customers, and promote a positive experience with our agency.

We are pleased to present our *2025 Plain Writing Compliance Report*, which highlights our agency's compliance with the Act. The report also includes specific details about our accomplishments and samples of effective plain language.

WHO WE SERVE

Social Security serves over 330 million Americans with Social Security numbers, and nearly 70 million Americans who receive monthly Social Security benefits, totaling approximately \$1.6 trillion in benefits each year. We strive to explain our complex programs clearly and make them easier to understand for everyone we serve.

In addition to the public, Social Security regularly communicates with White House staff, Congressional offices, state and local government agencies, advocacy groups, and other organizations. Clear and concise communication is essential for providing outstanding customer service to these groups.

We recognize that many parts of our agency communicate with the public. To support plain writing, we provide resources to all employees, including:

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

Additionally, we:

- Train employees on the *Plain Writing Act*, plain writing best practices, and available tools
- Raise awareness and encourage a commitment to plain language across the agency





“It is for them that we strive to explain our complex programs clearly and make it easier to understand.”

PLAIN LANGUAGE RESOURCES

Social Security provides employees with several tools and resources to support plain language:



Plain Language Hub: An online tool where employees can access articles, fact sheets, videos, best practices, and links to additional plain language sources.



Commissioner's Writing Center: An online resource that promotes techniques to improve grammar and writing style, helping ensure agency correspondence is clear to the public.



Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence Handbook (QUICC): Offers guidelines for preparing, reviewing, and submitting correspondence for executive signatures, with examples of proper formatting for letters and memorandums.



Plain Language Training: Provided by the Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development, training includes video on demand, online lessons, instructor-led courses, books, and other resource materials.

These resources help employees communicate clearly and effectively with the public.





TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

We aim to communicate in a clear and organized way. We welcome comments and suggestions from both the public and agency employees at PlainLanguage@ssa.gov.

To improve our plain language practices, we regularly benchmark against other agencies and review best practices from the public and private sectors, as well as plain language experts and the Community of Practice.

Your feedback helps us continue to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of our communications.



MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

We strive to meet high standards for clear communication. The *Federal Plain Language Report Card* measures how well federal agencies use plain language, and Social Security has consistently received high marks. We also value recognition from the Center for Plain Language and the annual ClearMark awards.

Our best measure of success is the growing number of requests for plain language reviews across the agency. This means more of our written communications are easy to read, understand, and use.



Federal Plain Language Report Card

2013 – 2022

Year	Organizational Compliance	Writing and Design Quality
2013	A	A
2014	A	B
2015	A+	A
2016	n/a	B+
2017	n/a	A+
2018	A+	A
2019	A+	A
2020	A+	B
2021	A+	B+
2022	A+	A

TRANSPARENT REPORTING

Each year, we publish a *Plain Language Compliance Report*. Communications leads this effort with support from employees across the agency.

The examples in this report show how different parts of our agency use plain writing principles. Many of these documents are the result of teamwork and cooperation across departments. Our goal is to improve written communication throughout the agency, not just in materials created by Communications.



COMMUNICATIONS

Blog Post: Social Security Announces 2.8 Percent Benefit Increase for 2026

This writing sample summarizes the 2026 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) announcement for Social Security and SSI recipients. It presents the main announcement—a 2.8 percent increase in benefits—at the outset, and explains the purpose, timing, and agency resources for further information. The post uses clear, direct language and defines technical terms like “COLA” and “CPI-W,” making the information accessible to a broad audience of 75 million Americans. Actionable guidance is provided, including instructions for viewing notices online and setting up alerts. The positive tone and step-by-step details ensure recipients understand benefit changes and notification methods. This sample demonstrates excellent plain language principles and serves as a strong model for effective federal communication.

Blog Post: Social Security Transition to Electronic Payments—Deadline Approaching: What You Need to Do Before September 30

This writing sample notifies beneficiaries who receive federal payments by paper check about the upcoming September 30 deadline to switch to electronic payment options. The main message is presented immediately, ensuring readers understand the urgency. The post uses clear, direct language, logical headings like “Why Make the Switch?” and “How to Enroll,” and step-by-step instructions for enrolling in direct deposit or the *Direct Express*® Card. Technical terms are explained, and contact information is provided. The positive and supportive tone reassures recipients that payments will not be paused. This sample demonstrates excellent plain language principles, making the information accessible, actionable, and easy to understand for all beneficiaries.



RISK AND QUALITY

Training Script: 2025 Slam the Scam Internal Frontline Employee Training

This writing sample exemplifies plain language principles through its clarity, accessibility, and actionable guidance. The purpose is immediately clear, encouraging participation in National Slam the Scam Day and raising awareness about Social Security-related scams. The sample uses short, direct sentences and common words, making the information easy to understand for a broad audience. Bullet points clearly outline scam tactics, such as “Pretend to be from an agency or organization you know to gain your trust” and “Pressure you to act immediately,” helping readers quickly identify key warning signs. Actionable guidance is provided, including instructions to “hang up on suspicious calls, ignore suspicious messages, and report Social Security-related scams at [oig.ssa.gov/report](https://www.oig.ssa.gov/report).” The sample also directs readers to additional resources and encourages sharing the information, further supporting accessibility and engagement. These features make the sample a model for effective communication in compliance materials.



LAW AND POLICY

Blog Post: How to Write Your First Resume (Even Without Job Experience)

This writing guide leads readers through the basics of creating a clear and effective resume. It is designed for people new to the workforce or returning after time away, and explains each section of a resume in simple, direct language. The post avoids jargon, uses short sentences, and organizes information with clear headings and examples. The review process further simplified instructions and improved readability, making the guidance accessible to all job seekers.

By breaking the process into manageable steps and highlighting available support from *Ticket to Work Program* service providers, the post helps readers confidently prepare for employment. The use of plain language has resulted in positive feedback and increased engagement, demonstrating the value of clear communication in helping job seekers succeed.

Poster: For field offices

This poster highlights the benefits of the *Ticket to Work Program* using clear, straightforward language and inspiring quotes from program participants. Designed for display in Social Security field offices, the poster targets adults receiving disability benefits who are interested in work, as well as their families and professionals who support them.

The poster uses simple statements, avoids jargon, and features a visually accessible layout to ensure key messages are easy to understand at a glance. The review process focused on simplifying language and making the content direct and approachable, so readers can quickly grasp the program's purpose and benefits.

The use of plain language has made the poster more effective for outreach in busy field offices, helping visitors and staff engage with the *Ticket to Work Program*. Positive feedback from field staff and prominent display in offices demonstrate its value as a clear and welcoming communication tool.

Ready to Work?
We're Ready to Help.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION **TICKET to Work**

Free support for eligible people with disabilities who want to work.

- Career and benefits counseling, vocational rehabilitation, and job placement assistance from authorized service providers.
- Continued Medicare or Medicaid while working.
- A chance to try working while keeping your benefits.
- No medical reviews while making progress toward your work goals.
- A safety net if your disability prevents you from continuing to work.

LEARN MORE
For more information about the Ticket Program, visit ChooseWork.ssa.gov or call the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 or 1-866-833-2967 (TTY).

ChooseWork.ssa.gov

Testimonials:

- "Participating in the Ticket to Work Program was the best decision I ever made. The help I received was amazing."
- Jeff
- "I would recommend the Ticket to Work Program 1,000%! I'm living proof that you can transition back to work."
- Frances
- "I gain a sense of autonomy and agency from working. I like to be self-reliant. Working just adds to your self-confidence."
- Kushal

Find all the Ticket to Work Success Stories at ChooseWork.ssa.gov

Discover What's Possible When You Choose Work!

FIELD OPERATIONS

Announcement: SE Dear Colleague Automated Phone Service

This announcement informs the public about the launch of a new automated phone service in all Georgia Social Security offices. The service is available 24/7 and allows users to complete common tasks—such as requesting benefit verification letters, changing addresses, and checking claim status—quickly and without waiting for a representative. The document also explains the shift to appointment-only in-person visits.

Plain language principles are used throughout: information is organized with bullet points, instructions are clear and direct, and technical terms are avoided or explained. The review process focused on simplifying language, providing step-by-step guidance, and highlighting user benefits.

The result is a clear, accessible announcement that helps increase awareness and makes it easier for the public to use Social Security services. The document serves as a strong example of effective plain language communication.



TRAINING

RISK AND QUALITY

Plain Language Reminders

This training presentation provides disability quality reviewers with guidance on complying with plain language requirements during case reviews. The session emphasizes clear, concise communication and practical strategies for applying plain language principles in written materials.





FIELD OPERATIONS

Explain the Fundamentals of Good Customer Service

This training introduces entry-level employees to the principles of good customer service, emphasizing the importance of plain language in every interaction. Through realistic scenarios and practical exercises, trainees learn to communicate clearly and effectively, selecting appropriate responses and using multiple resources to support their learning.

Apply the Principles of Good Communication

This training helps management trainees understand and apply the elements of good communication, with a focus on using plain language. Activities include assessing communication styles, identifying and correcting issues in business emails, and practicing writing clear, accessible emails. Realistic scenarios and hands-on exercises reinforce the value of plain language in both written and verbal communication.

Advanced Writing Skills

This training teaches management trainees how to write for different purposes—querying, informing, and documenting—by applying plain language principles. Trainees evaluate and rewrite sample documents to improve clarity and accessibility, using situational examples and multiple resources to develop effective writing skills.

APPENDIX A: PLAIN WRITING EXAMPLES

BLOGS

Social Security Matters Blog:

Social Security Announces 2.8 Percent Benefit Increase for 2026

Social Security Matters Blog:

Social Security Transition to Electronic Payments—Deadline Approaching: What You Need to Do Before September 30

Ticket To Work Blog:

How to Write Your First Resume (Even Without Job Experience)





APPENDIX B: PLAIN WRITING LINKS

This Appendix lists external plain language resources that support our agency compliance with the Plain Writing legislation.

- *Plain Writing Act of 2010 - Public Law 111 - 274*
- *Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Language Act of 2010*
- *Federal plain language guidelines*

The following are external agency links that support compliance with the Plain Writing Legislation.

- Social Security Administration Agency Notice Standard - NL 00610.000 - *Social Security Administration (SSA) Notice Standards - Table of Contents*
- Social Security Administration Plain Writing Site - *Plain Writing*



Social Security Administration

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