2021
Plain Writing Compliance Report

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Social Security Administration

The 2021 Plain Writing Compliance Report

Introduction

Social Security communicates with plain language that is clear, concise, and easy to understand. We are leaders in the federal government when it comes to effective use of plain language—though don't take our word for it; the results speak for themselves.

Since 2013, we have consistently received high marks on the Center for Plain Language Federal Report Card, often being the highest-scoring agency. Last year, we received an "A+" for organizational compliance and a "B+" for writing quality.

Why do we work so hard on easy-to-understand writing? Not only is it the law, it's also good customer service. Our goal is to provide the people who depend on us with useful and easy-to-understand writing.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 (Act) requires federal agencies to apply plain writing principles to written communication. The Act states that all government agencies should write in a way that the public can easily understand and use.

We are pleased to present our *2021 Plain Writing Compliance Report*, which highlights our accomplishments in compliance with the Act. The report also includes specific details about our efforts and some writing samples.

Our Commitment

We take our responsibility seriously to provide clear and concise messages in our written communication to current and future recipients. In 2021, about 65 million Americans received Social Security benefits, and about 176 million workers were covered under Social Security. We strive to explain our complex programs in easy-to-understand language.

When we apply plain writing principles, we successfully deliver information to the public that is useful, easy for anyone to access, and simple to comprehend. We do this in various ways: in letters, notices, publications, emails, policy documents, and web pages.

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

We provide the following plain writing resources to all employees:

- Plain Writing website.
- Commissioner's Writing Center.

- Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence (QUICC) Handbook.

Additionally, we:

- Use editing software tools to evaluate our written products.

- Train employees about the Act, plain writing standards, and the use of available tools.

- Keep our employees informed and trained, encouraging a commitment to plain writing.

- Maintain a plain writing mailbox, monitored by staff who respond to emails from our employees and the public.

Our content is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 508 requires all federal agencies to provide communication methods that people with disabilities can access using assistive technologies.

Our daily dedication to plain writing principles means we are committed to providing clear, concise, and easily understandable messages to everyone who interacts with us.

We encourage employees and the public to submit feedback about our plain writing efforts to PlainWriting@ssa.gov.

Our Accomplishments

We strive to comply with the Act. To accomplish this, we met basic and advanced requirements.

We developed and followed our *Plain Writing Implementation Plan for 2021* to help us monitor how offices throughout the agency apply plain writing guidelines to their written materials.

In addition, we:

- Earned an "A+" for compliance on the Federal Plain Writing Report Card.
- Received a "B+" for Writing Quality for our Coronavirus and the Freedom of Information Act webpages.
- Won a ClearMark Award for our Retirement Benefits website.
- Issued the *2020 Plain Writing Compliance Report*.
- Issued the *2021 Plain Writing Implementation Plan*.
- Promoted and trained employees to use editing software tools.
- Trained employees on plain writing, business writing, grammar, and effective writing techniques.
- Responded to hundreds of plain writing email inquiries.
- Applied plain writing guidelines to our website, documents, letters, notices, and other communication materials.
- Maintained Plain Language intranet and internet webpages.
- Continued updating high-traffic agency webpages in accordance with plain writing principles.

How We Carry Out Our Plan

Our Plain Writing Compliance Board meets 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. These board members prepare reports, monitor usage of software editing tools and promote plain writing principles within their components. We rotate board members to encourage new ideas and input.

Oversight

Social Security's senior agency official for the plain language effort is Dr. Susan Camarena, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Public Inquiries and Communications Support in the Office of Communications. The Plain Writing Compliance Board consists of the senior agency official, members of the Plain Language Implementation Team, and representatives from the Office of the Commissioner and 12 deputy commissioner-level components. 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 a list of plain writing links, including a list of Compliance Board members and plain writing contacts.**)

Plain Writing Resources

The Plain Writing Implementation Team (Team) provides agency leadership in the oversight and implementation of the Plain Writing Act to ensure written communications are clear, easy to understand, and useful to the audience for which it is intended.

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 Handbook (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 Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development website is available to all employees and offers plain writing training opportunities, such as Video on Demand (VOD), online lessons, instructor-led courses, books, and additional plain language resource materials.

Our websites and online services are accessible to our employees and the public.

Editing Tools

In 2021, we continued to use Acrolinx editing software to evaluate websites, PDF files, and Word documents. About 300 agency employees are trained to use Acrolinx, and we have worked to expand the software's use throughout Headquarters and Regional offices across the

country. We strive to provide updated training materials as the software is upgraded, such as reference guides and training materials. We also offer Acrolinx training VODs for employees on our intranet and one-on-one training upon request.

Acrolinx can produce a wide range of analytics data. We use this data to monitor Acrolinx usage at our agency, identify problem areas related to plain writing, and gauge our progress in applying plain writing principles in our written communication.

In addition to Acrolinx, we measure our plain writing success using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. We are investigating the use of other tools, such as Grammarly.

Supporting Activities

In 2021, we continued to promote the application of plain writing principles in 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 share plain writing guidelines and tips to employees in a variety of ways, including on our website, through our Compliance Board members, in emails and other electronic delivery methods, and through training.

How We Measure Performance and Get Public Feedback

Our goal is 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 ForeSee E-Government Satisfaction Index) to enhance our website and respond to the needs of our customers. ForeSee measures customer satisfaction on a scale of 0-100 and considers scores 80 or above as the threshold of excellence.

The most recent ForeSee report, from 2020, reflects feedback from approximately 1.5 million citizens that used federal government websites, mobile sites, or applications. The top drivers of satisfaction for digital government experiences are Site Information, Navigation, and Information Browsing.

Site Information measures how thorough information is and whether it provides answers to questions. Navigation measures how well the site is organized and helps the user to find what they need. Information Browsing focuses on the ability to sort information, narrow choices, and have useful site features.

In the H1 2020 Report (Jan-June 2020) we secured the top three Customer Satisfaction Scores (CSATs) for Desktop websites, SSA Extra Help either Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs (92 percent), SSA Retirement Estimator (91 percent), and *my* Social Security (90 percent). Clear and easy-to-understand content goes a long way to doing well in these measurements.

The most recent ForeSee survey data we have is from 2020. ForeSee conducted surveys of more than 335,241 users to measure the clarity and conciseness of our written products. In 2020, we received a plain language score of 78.

Compliance Report

Each year, we publish an annual *Compliance Report*. You are reading our *2021 Compliance Report*, published in March 2022.

Examples of Notices and Publications Using Plain Writing Principles

The following are component-specific examples of notices and publications. Although released by a specific component, many of these documents reflect cooperation across teams and departments. Each of these examples reflects plain writing efforts across the agency. These entries show our efforts to improve our written communication products. Please see Appendix A for examples.

Office of Communications

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: Redesigned *Social Security Statement (Statement)*	Public	Redesigned *Statement* using plain language and a modern design; reduced 4 pages to 2. Organized information for quick and easy access. Added a bar chart that shows benefit estimates at up to nine claiming ages.	Usability and cognitive testing validated customers prefer the redesigned version. Received accolades from *Forbes*, *The Washington Post, The Motley Fool*, *The Week*, and advocates.
Publication: Medicare Ready Fact Sheet **Publication:** Social Security Basics for New Workers **Publication:** Retirement Ready: Fact Sheet for Workers Ages 49 -60	Public	The redesigned *Statement* is now accompanied by fact sheets targeting a person by age group and earnings situation. All fact sheets are available on our website.	The *Statement* fact sheets are tailored to a person's earnings category and age group, making it easier for readers to find information they can use.
Publication: Acting Commissioner (ACOSS) Broadcast – Honoring the Fallen on Memorial Day	Social Security and Disability Determination Services Employees	The electronic broadcast announcement is produced using plain language.	The broadcast offers an easy-to-understand summary of the government holiday.
Publication: ACOSS Broadcast – Labor Day	Social Security Employees	The electronic broadcast announcement is produced using plain language.	The broadcast offers an easy-to-understand summary of the government holiday.

Office of the Chief Actuary

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: 2021 Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance (OASDI) Trustees Report	U.S. Congress and the Public	Updated using plain language where possible.	The 2021 OASDI Trustees Report explains complex information in plain language.

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: Request for the Social Security Congressional Inquiries Guide (Guide)	Congressional staff only and our Regional Communications Directors	The *Guide* was updated using plain language.	The agency overview and program descriptions are clear and easy to understand.

Office of Budget, Finance, and Management

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: SSA Economic Impact Payment Notice	8 million Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients	The notice was developed at the request of the Internal Revenue Service using plain language.	The notices provided SSI recipients Child Tax Credit and other refundable tax credits information and relevant information about 2020 tax filing in easy-to-understand language.
Publication: Fiscal Year 2021 Agency Head Message	President, Congress, Office of Management and Budget, and the Public	Examined all comments and feedback received and addressed, as appropriate, in plain language.	The report took complicated and complex issues and presented them in an easily understood way.

Office of Human Resources

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: Personnel Policy Manual	Social Security Employees	Plain language and content updates.	Employees can more easily understand the content of the updated Personnel Policy Manual chapters.

Office of Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Notices: FY21 End of Year Letter	Arkansas Governor and state administrative agencies	Used plain language in the update on state Disability Determination Services (DDS) operations.	Informs the Arkansas Governor and state administrative agencies of the work the DDS does to assist Social Security with disability claims processing in language that is easy to understand.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Publication: Special Benefits for World War II Veterans	Public	Included factual updates that are clear, useful, and easy to understand.	Clearly organized in easy-to-understand language.

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 Communications

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: *Social Security Statement*	Public: People interested in learning more about the *Statement* and related fact sheets.	In addition to showing a sample of the redesigned *Statement* and providing "*my* Social Security" information, we provide sample PDFs of all nine fact sheets. We provide these documents in English and Spanish.	The webpage provides more information with PDFs organized by earnings category and age group, making it easier for readers to find information they can use. Material is now provided in both English and Spanish.
Webpage: Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)	Public	The wepage is organized in a way the public can easily access information about how Social Security is operating during COVID-19.	The wepage provides updates on how Social Security is operating during the COVID-19 pandemic in easy to understand language.
Webpage: Protecting Your Identity is Important to Us Blog	Public	Applied plain writing principles to blog post to help people understand ways to protect their identity and gives contact information for those seeking additional information.	In a conversational style, clear and concise language draws in the reader and provides useful and understandable information.
Webpage: Disagree with Your Disability Decision Blog	Public	Applied plain writing principles to blog post to help people understand the detailed steps they may take to appeal a disability decision.	Clear and concise language in a conversational style to provide useful, understandable information.

Office of Hearings Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: SSA Limited In-Person Hearing Office Service During COVID-19	Public	Provides important COVID-19 information for people scheduled for in-person hearings.	Language that is easily understood related to in-person hearings.

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs	Members of Congress, Congressional Staffers, and the Public	Improved organization of agency reports, testimony, budget information, historic documents, regulations, and frequently used brochures.	Organized complicated and complex information and made it easier to navigate.

Office of Operations

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: SSA New York Region	Public	Completed annual review and updated in plain language.	Communicates clear and concise webpage information.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Social Security's Ticket to Work Program	Public	Highlighted program resources, program benefits, and steps to follow to apply.	Provides relevant information in plain language.

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 Analytics, Review, and Oversight

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Webpage: Our Role, Mission Statement, Our Responsibilities	Social Security Employees	Updated and edited to improve readability and understanding.	Updated content and improved readability, clarity, tone, and formatting of agency website.

Examples of Congressional and Public Inquiries Using Plain Writing Principles

Office of General Counsel

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Written responses to "Numident Record for Deceased Person Requests"	Public	Added language about the requirements of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 and section 205r of the Social Security Act	Using plain writing principles ensures we provide clear and concise responses to the various requestors.
Written responses to "First Party Numident Requests"	Public	Clarified instructions regarding fee payments and added Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Public Liaison contact information.	Clear and detailed instructions assist requesters in submitting complete, valid requests. Adding the FOIA Public Liaison contact information provides requesters with multiple methods to contact us.

Office of the Chief Actuary

Type and Name of Communication	Audience	Improvements	Result
Individual Changes Modifying Social Security	Legislators and the Public	Using plain writing concepts, provided a summary statement of the actuarial effect from a specific potential change in law or policy.	Provide useful and complex information in a way that is easy to understand.

Training on Plain Writing Principles

Agency-wide Training

Online Courses & Classroom Training – Writing and General Knowledge

Office of Human Resources/Office of Learning

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Leadership Competency Series: Written Communication	175	26 min
Communication & Interviewing - Part II - Oral and Written Communication	349	1 hr 30 min
Principles of Plain Language (Operations)	125	27 min
Principles of Plain Language Part 1	158	19 min
Principles of Plain Language Part 2	115	32 min
Principles of Plain Language Workshop	155	12 min
Business Writing and Grammar	118	16 hours
Advanced Business Writing	170	16 hours

Headquarters Component Training

(Any classroom training not sponsored by the Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development)

Office of Systems

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Writing to the Max	45	1 hour
Quality Staff Work	40	1 hour
Ten Tips to Create an Effective Presentation	70	1 hour

Office of Budget, Finance, and Management

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
BFM LEADERS Summit	140	1 hour
SSA 45 Tips & Tricks	67	1 hour
Branch Out Professional Communications Workshop	20	1 hour

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Acrolinx Training	2	Ongoing

Office of Communications

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Spanish grammar classes, Plain Language, improve Spanish translations of public information materials	10	6 2-hour trainings

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Advance Writing (virtual classroom training)	24	2 days

Office of Analytics, Review, and Oversight

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Office of Quality Review (OQR)/Division of Title XVI Quality and Service Evaluation Peer Training on the QUICC Handbook and Plain Writing Tips	30	1 hour

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Office of Appellate Operations (OAO) Supplemental Training Exchange Programs:		
• Procedures for Deceased Claimants	435	1 hour
• Medical Support Staff Referrals	310	1.5 hours
• Program Uniformity	400	2 hours
• Continuing Disability Reviews	340	2 hours
OAO Division of Quality Roundtables:		
• Writing Effectively, From Analysis to Final Action	55	2.75 hours
• Inability to Sustain Residual Functional Capacity	55	2 hours
OAO Denial Notice Refresher Training	305	2.5 hours
OAO Remand Order Refresher Training	335	3 hours

Office of Operations/Office of Central Operations

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Business Writing for Managers "Writing with Purpose"	91	16 hours
Disability Examiner (DE) Section 301 Tech Notice Training	134	1 hour
Policy In Focus – Temporary Protected Status	Field Offices Nationally	10 mins

Regional Training

Atlanta

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Business Writing and Grammar	22	16 hours
Working on Virtual Teams	25	1 day
Basic Analyst	25	4 days

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Advanced Business Writing	25	2 days
Intro to Project Management	25	3 days
Met monthly with technical team leads to provide notice reminders, specifically addressed Uniform Text Identifiers (UTI), approved agency language, minimal use of dictated language, and the use of proper punctuation	68	1 hours
Formal classroom instruction for Benefit Authorizers and Customer Service Representatives: Training on notices, Manage Text processing system (AURORA), and macro scripts	147	22 hours

Dallas

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Completed Staff Work Training	25	1 hour
Advanced Business Writing	25	16 hours
Fundamentals of Writing	15	20 hours

Kansas City

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Management and Communication	25	8 hours
Briefing Techniques & Presentation Skills	15	16 hours

San Francisco

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Effective Presentations, Written, and Oral Communications	19	2 hours
Advanced Business Writing	10	3 hours

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Focus on Your Business Writing – Business Writing Essentials (SF-Sponsored)	30	20 hours
Preparing for the Written Narrative – Leadership Development Program Workshop	89	2 hours
RO Analyst Training: Introduction to Business Writing	26	4 hours
Critical Congressional Unit: Virtual Detailees Training	4	2 hours

New York

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Transition to Leadership 301 – Nuts and Bolts Regional Supplement course	45	1 hour
How to Become a Better Communicator	23	1 day
Cogs and Wheels	28	1.5 hours
Business Writing and Grammar	22	2 days

Philadelphia

Training Course	Number of Employees Trained	Training Duration
Online Business Writing Essentials	20	10 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, Grammarly, or grammar and spelling checks in Microsoft (MS) software 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.
- Ongoing review of webpages and documents.
- Access to online resources, desk guides, and VODs.

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 the Chief Actuary

- Strive to make its numerous publications, which are generally technical in nature, understandable to readers of both technical and non-technical background.

Office of General Counsel

- The Office of General Counsel submitted a sample to be judged by the Center for Plain Language in Fall 2021. Their submission, Social Security's Freedom of Information (FOIA) website (https://www.ssa.gov/foia/), was reviewed and received a "B+" for writing quality. This was instrumental in the agency receiving an overall "A+" for organizational compliance. The judges found that the language on the FOIA website adhered to plain writing principles, active voice usage, and anticipated the needs of the intended audience.

Office of Hearings Operations

- Use plain writing in all communications and emphasize plain writing in all training efforts.

Office of Human Resources/Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development

- Used the Commissioner's Writing Center and *Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence Handbook* (*Handbook*) to review its websites, documents, internal correspondences, and emails to ensure complicity with the Act.

- Developed and maintained an electronic repository for team members and content writers to reference.

- Posted plain writing information with updated resources on the Office of Information Technology for Human Resources website for employees.

- Completed the annual review and certification of their public-facing web content for relevance, accuracy, plain language, and 508 compliance, at the direction of the agency's Web Governance Steering Committee.

Office of Budget, Finance, and Management

- Reviewed documents at various organizational levels to ensure plain writing compliance, technical accuracy, and appropriate tone. We also set up group reviews of major reports and use screen sharing technology for real time editing.

- Used Acrolinx tool to assist with reviewing webpages, documents, and PDF files for spelling, grammar, style, readability, and to flag areas that may not conform to the agency's plain writing objectives.

- Reviewed all correspondence in accordance with the current agency guidelines on plain writing using the *Handbook* and Government Publishing Office (GPO) Style Manual.

- Encouraged employees to complete training courses, offered by the Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development, that relate to writing and communications.

Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs

- Reviewed congressional inquiry responses from agency components for accuracy, responsiveness, and plain writing compliance prior to release.

- Maintain an electronic repository for staff to review and reference.

- Instructed staff on identifying and handling new correspondence concerns.

- Updated their protocol for developing and storing new agency approved language that complies with the Act.

- Reviewed and revised staff correspondence procedures.

- Include plain writing feedback to staff as part of our quality control efforts.

- Used the Commissioner's Writing Center, the *Handbook*, the Correspondence Guide Language, and Acrolinx to review responses to congressional inquiries.

Office of Communications

The Plain Writing Implementation Team (Team) oversees plain writing compliance efforts at the agency. They encourage plain writing adherence for communications so that the language is useful and easily understood.

To this end, they:

- Developed and solicited new ideas for engaging writers throughout the agency.

- Created a Plain Language Project Plan and Work Matrix to help with becoming more proactive than reactive with plain writing efforts.

- Engaged with other plain language entities (such as the Center for Plain Language, Plain Language Action & Information Network, and Acrolinx) to discuss best practices and ways to engage with writers in the agency and the broader plain language community.

- Maintained internal and external Plain Language webpages.

- Reviewed and revised written communication products (such as the *Statement*, agency webpages, publications, and correspondence) to ensure the language is compliant with the Act.

- Rolled out a new version of Acrolinx.

- Collaborated with their broadcast studio and the Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development to create training videos for users of the new Acrolinx version.

- Reviewed and responded to inquiries from the ^PlainWriting@ssa.gov mailbox.

Office of Retirement and Disability Policy

- Continued to review and improve Program Operations Manual System instructions for writing and clearing notice language (NL 00610.000).

Office of Analytics, Review, and Oversight

- Developed a report template, for use by the Office of Quality Review (OQR), to ensure plain writing usage for all OQR internal report publications.

- Routinely published newsletters that included reminders about plain writing.

- Regularly revised policy publications to clarify policy using plain writing.

- Routinely evaluated templates in the Document Generation System to make external notices more readable and understandable.

Office of Central Operations

- Continued to use Tech Notice Template Creation and Training. Tech Notice uses templates and previously prepared dictated text (that is authorized and reviewed by

Technical Expert and analyst staff) to create beneficiary notices. Using prepared dictated text reduces the likelihood that a technician will make a plain writing error.

- Prepared additional Tech Notice templates for the Benefit Authorizer (BA), Claims Specialist (CS) and Disability Examiner (DE) job families. In FY21, they released additional Tech Notice templates and provided technician training. The training included a review of the Commissioner's Writing tips (such as appropriate grammar, spelling, and sentence structure) when preparing overpayment notices.

- Updated the TechNet CS and Claim Specialist Technical Expert (CSTE) page in FY21 to include a copy of the "TII Overpayment Plain Language Handbook," which introduces plain language principles to assist technicians in improving their writing skills. The handbook gives background and explains the need for clear overpayment documentation and decision notices to support plain language principles.

- In FY22, their Operation Support Branch is preparing Tech Notice templates for the Reconsideration DE job family.

- Encouraged adherence to plain writing standards established via a resource page on the Division of International Operations (DIO) website.

- Provided training on preparing overpayment notices and payment worksheets for BAs and Post-Entitlement Technical Experts in FY21. This training addressed the Commissioner's Writing tips to include fundamental grammar, spelling, and sentence structure.

- Operation Support Branch staff will provide Benefit Earnings Technicians (BETs) and CSs with training on the Document Processing System (DPS).

- DIO is building plain writing principles into the automation programs it is building.

- The AID program, similar to Tech Notice, uses preselected, dictated text for technicians to create inter-agency communications.

- DIO also emphasizes the need for informative and plainly written notices in our Learning Centers for new technicians. Notices are reviewed and are marked incorrect if not within the boundaries set by plain writing and Policy.

- Established an online Operations Analyst toolkit that provides guidance and examples on proposals, fact sheets, option papers, and talking points using plain language.

- Provided Virtual Business Writing for Managers: Writing with Purpose 2021. This two-day workshop provided managers with a guide to reinforce business writing skills. Day 1 addressed active writing, sentence structure, proper grammar, and common writing errors. Day 2 addressed managers with skills to further assist them with Performance

Assessment and Communication System write-ups, fact sheets, award justifications, and interview techniques.

Atlanta Region

Atlanta's regional Southeast Payment Service Center performs regular quality reviews on completed cases, including reviewing prepared notices. We share information directly with the technician for noted errors as a learning tool for future case processing and notice preparation.

The Atlanta Region markets the QUICC Writing Center site, specifically the Business Email Guidelines and QUICC Handbook.

Kansas City Region

New analysts and professional employees participate in *Completed Staff Work* training. They also have access to resources on the intranet website, KCNet, which include correspondence guidelines, and links to the Commissioner's Writing Center and the Plain Language website.

Moving Forward

As we move forward, we will continue to make plain language a top priority to comply with the law and provide the best service we can in a way that the public can easily understand. We will continue the use of editing software tools, such as Acrolinx, to prepare and edit notices, websites, policies, letters, and other communications. 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 work with our Plain Writing Compliance Board to ensure the 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 current and 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.

We will continue our efforts to roll out the new version of Acrolinx to all employee license holders and will provide training to those users on the software tool. Additionally, we will investigate other editing tools, such as Grammarly.

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.

We will continue to engage our employees to promote the use of plain writing in all our communications both internally and externally.

Summary

Our 2021 Plain Writing Compliance Report documents this year's compliance activities and accomplishments across the agency. We achieved all the requirements of the Act and received an "A+" in the compliance category of the Center for Plain Language's Report Card for federal agencies. We received a "B+" for Writing Quality based on our Coronavirus webpage and the FOIA webpage. These two grades make us one of the highest-scoring agencies in the federal government yet again.

This report includes information on our plain writing resources, our editing tools, and supporting activities. We provide examples of notices, webpages, policy documents, and report 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 usability 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.

We are proud of our plain writing accomplishments throughout the years, and we know that it means better service to the public. We are committed to providing clear and concise communications to the public. We recognize that improvements in plain writing are not a destination, but a journey. We look forward to the next leg of that journey to provide the people who depend on us with information they need and can use in a clear, concise, and understandable way.

Appendix A: Plain Writing Examples

New or Revised Notices and Publications

1. Redesigned *Social Security Statement:* https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/statement.html

2. Medicare Ready: https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/assets/materials/medicare-ready.pdf

3. Social *Security Basics for New Workers:*
   https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/assets/materials/newworkers.pdf

4. Retirement *Ready Workers Ages 49-60* Fact Sheet:
   https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/assets/materials/workers-49-60.pdf

5. *Disagree with Your Disability Decision* Blog Post: https://blog.ssa.gov/disagree-with-your-disability-decision-we-will-take-another-look/

6. *Protecting Your Identity* Blog Post: https://blog.ssa.gov/protecting-your-identity-is-important-to-us-2/

7. 2021 *OASDI Trustees Report:* https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/TR/2021/index.html

8. Agency Head Message from the FY 2021 Annual Financial Report:
   https://www.ssa.gov/finance/2021/A%20Message%20from%20the%20Acting%20Commissioner_Table%20of%20Contents_Introduction.pdf

New or Revised Webpages

1. *Revised* – Social Security Statement: https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/statement.html

2. *Revised* – Coronavirus: https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/

3. *Revised* – Retirement Benefits: https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/

4. *Revised* – Request for the Social Security Congressional Inquiries Guide:
   https://www.ssa.gov/legislation/congguide.html

5. *Revised* – Social Security's Ticket-to-Work Program:
   https://choosework.ssa.gov/blog/2021-08-19-what-is-social-securitys-ticket-to-work-program

6. *New* – SSA Limited In-Person Hearing Office Service during COVID-19:
   https://www.ssa.gov/appeals/hearing_inperson.html

7. *Revised* – Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs webpage:
   https://www.ssa.gov/legislation

8. *Revised* – SSA's New York Region Homepage:
   https://www.ssa.gov/appeals/hearing_inperson.html

9. *Revised* – SSA's Office of Appellate Operations "*Our Role*" webpage:
   http://oaro.ba.ssa.gov/oao/our-role/

10. *Revised* – SSA's Office of the Chief Actuary's *Estimates of Individual Changes Modifying Social Security: https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/solvency/provisions/index.html*

Appendix B: Plain Writing Links

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

1. Social Security Administration
   https://www.ssa.gov

2. Plain Writing
   https://www.ssa.gov/plain-language

3. Plain Writing Compliance Board
   https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/complianceboard.html

4. Plain Writing Contacts
   https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/contacts.html

5. Plain Writing Feedback
   PlainWriting@ssa.gov

6. 2022 Plain Writing Implementation Plan
   https://www.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/pdf/PlainWritingImplementationPlan-2022.pdf