

## 2014 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report: U.S. Census Bureau

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Web Site: [http://www.census.gov/aboutus/plain\\_writing.html](http://www.census.gov/aboutus/plain_writing.html)

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### Serving the Public

Even before the Plain Writing Act, the U.S. Census Bureau had a special commitment to clear communications. From asking the public to respond to censuses and surveys, to reporting our extensive statistical information, plain language is central to our communications work.

To that end, clear communication continues to be a major goal of the Census Bureau. The past year has seen many achievements in meeting this goal:

- Our new [“dwellr”](#) mobile app helps you take a virtual tour of places that meet your preferences – simple clear presentations of statistics understandable even for even the most casual user. Download it today!
- The introduction of our new census.gov Website will make it easier to find our information. The site’s new navigation and topic-based design will give you immediate access to breaking news and our most popular tools like the “Population Clock” and “QuickFacts.”
- You can explore America with [Census Explorer](#), a new interactive mapping tool that lets you map out trends at the national or neighborhood level.
- If a picture suites you better than a table, be sure to check out our “Measuring America” [infographics](#), an award winner in the National Association of Government Communicators 2014 awards competition. The judges called this work: “Clear, concise, reads smoothly; free of jargon, doublespeak, cliches.”
- Still find a word you don’t understand on our web site? Check out the meaning in our new plain language [glossary](#), which turns jargon into common speech.
- Much of our extensive [FAQ](#) site underwent a plain language rewrite.

Driving these accomplishments is a strong commitment to reaching many different audiences in multiple ways in language they understand.

Over the past year we have developed a powerful tool for measuring web metrics. In addition, we conduct usability and cognitive testing on an ongoing basis to measure customer satisfaction with our web site. We conduct more detailed studies of key sites such as the American Community Survey and the American FactFinder data tool and use the results to improve user access.

## **Developing Our Staff**

The Plain Writing Act requires agencies to educate staff on the importance of plain writing. To promote the goal of clear communication, we funded a [business case](#) aimed in part at building a “dissemination culture” in which we further enhance our employees’ communication skills. The agency’s Plain Language Team implemented this business case and developed staff training, an Intranet site, and internal communications activities to help develop the “dissemination culture.”

## **Training**

The Census Bureau has long offered training on writing. Courses vary greatly in scope. Examples include writing for the web and an intensive multi-day course designed to build critical clear thinking and writing skills.

Between January 1, 2013, and April 18, 2014, the Census Bureau offered 23 classroom courses focused on helping employees write more clearly, plus a number of online writing training courses through the Census Learning Center. In all, more than 440 employees received formal training. Our efforts were particularly directed at reaching managers. For example, 11 courses held, awarding management credit for participation. Among the training opportunities were more advanced courses aimed at making our senior program staff better communicators.

## **Intranet Site**

We have an Intranet site to help our staff understand and meet the requirements of the Plain Writing Act. The site features –

- Links to the Plain Writing Act, the Office of Management and Budget Plain Language Guidance, the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, and the many resources on the plainlanguage.gov web site.
- Testimonial videos from employees on the importance of plain writing in their work and the benefits of the plain writing training.
- Helpful tips on writing clearly.
- Recommendations for managers on creating a plain writing environment in their offices.

## **Feedback**

All Census Bureau employees from top management on down have clear communication as a part of their performance plan. We take clear communication very seriously and we are working hard to make our information easier for the public to access and understand.

We value comments from you in flagging problems and offering suggestions. Please contact us at <[cnmp.plain.language@census.gov](mailto:cnmp.plain.language@census.gov)>.