

2015 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report: U.S. Census Bureau

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Web Site: https://www.census.gov/about/policies/plain_writing.html

Feedback: cnmp.plain.language@census.gov

Serving the Public

As we have reported in past reports, the Census Bureau has a strong commitment to plain language that predates the Plain Writing Act of 2011. As an agency that depends upon public cooperation, we recognize that clarity is essential in collecting quality data from respondents and presenting the findings in return.

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:

- We perform usability studies and cognitive testing in developing our surveys and censuses and in our communications with people who use our statistics.
- We are in the process of a multi-year project to make our website easier to navigate and understand.
- We have simplified our survey pages so people can obtain the most recent statistics more quickly.
- We continue to develop or refine web tools that make it easier to navigate our data without confusion.
- In September 2015, for example, we released the [Census Business Builder](#), a web application that makes it easy to use Census Bureau data from various sources.
- In August 2015, we released a revised version of the popular [World Population Clock](#), providing population and trade data for 228 countries.
- In the past, we have released mobile apps that make data accessible for people on the go; we are currently making our web site more mobile-friendly.
- We have increasingly used infographics and news graphics to make our data more visual.

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

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.

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>.

[Detailed Report](#)