



# U.S. Railroad Retirement Board Plain Writing Act of 2010 Annual Compliance Report May 2022

---

## Background

The Plain Writing Act, enacted in October 2010, requires agencies to communicate in a manner “that the public can understand and use,” and applies to any application, form, informational material, letter, or notice. It also defines plain writing as “clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field or intended audience.”

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has always tried to communicate with its customers and stakeholders in a clear, understandable manner. We have continued this effort with renewed emphasis in the context of the intent and requirements of the Plain Writing Act, with the goal of improving our ability to clearly communicate information about our benefits and services, and how to access them.

## Implementation

The RRB has a page on its website – **RRB.gov** – dedicated to plain language, as required by the law, which is accessible by clicking on the *Plain Writing @ RRB* link at the bottom of the home page. The page includes information on guidelines and best practices in this area, as well as an e-mail address should a visitor to the page have any questions or concerns about agency documents. The agency also posts its most recent annual compliance reports on this page, with the RRB’s Public Affairs unit overseeing these activities. The home page also includes a link to the comprehensive website on this subject – **PlainLanguage.gov** – which provides additional background as well as many examples throughout government.

## Current Activities

The RRB has a Learning Management System (LMS) that includes an online training platform known as *RRB University*. The LMS helps the RRB manage and plan training activities. It includes a specific online course on the tenets of the Plain Writing Act, along with several other in-person and online courses on the subject of written communication.

In the past year, 130 employees completed the Plain Writing Act training. This was almost three times the number who completed the course in the previous year, with most of them being new hires. (The vast majority of agency employees first completed this training in 2016, when initially offered, although some have subsequently repeated it as a refresher course.) Of the 130 employees, 67 were assigned to headquarters units and 63 worked in the agency's network of 53 field offices.

Continued use of a maximum-telework policy due to the coronavirus pandemic limited training to online instruction, with several classes related to plain writing offered through *RRB University*. In the past year, 24 employees completed "Audience and Purpose in Business Writing," 18 employees completed "Clarity and Conciseness in Business Writing," and 10 completed an entry-level course titled "Writing for Business." In total, agency employees took seven online courses related to effective writing, including courses such as "Clarity and Conciseness in Business Writing," "Improving Your Technical Writing Skills," and "Writing Effective Emails and Instant Messages."

The RRB reviews all written communications, including letters, publications, and online content, on a recurring basis to make them clearer, following guidelines and best practices related to plain language and writing. The focus in recent years has been on online content, as it represents an increasing share of direct customer communication, including the improved appearance and navigation of **RRB.gov**. This included a continued focus on printed and online communication related to the pandemic, including press releases and frequently asked questions regarding benefits provided in coronavirus relief legislation.

Questions or requests for additional information can be directed to Director of Public Affairs Michael P. Freeman as follows.

**Public Affairs**  
**U.S. Railroad Retirement Board**  
**844 North Rush Street, 4NE**  
**Chicago, IL 60611-1275**  
**(312) 751-4777**  
**opa@rrb.gov**