



U.S. Railroad Retirement Board Plain Writing Act of 2010 Annual Compliance Report May 2024

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) strives to communicate with its customers and stakeholders in a clear, understandable manner. As part of this effort, we have incorporated the intent and requirements of the Plain Writing Act, with the ultimate goal of improving our ability to clearly communicate information to our stakeholders about our various programs 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 email 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 online courses on improving clarity and content of written communication.

Most agency employees have completed the online training on the Plain Writing Act, with recent course participants either being new employees or individuals taking an updated course as refresher training. In the past year, 118 employees completed the Plain Writing Act training,

compared to 87 the previous year. Of the 118 employees, 83 were assigned to headquarters units and 35 worked in the agency's network of 53 field offices.

Several other online classes related to plain writing and effective communication are also offered through *RRB University*. In the past year, 44 employees completed "Audience and Purpose in Business Writing," nine completed "Clarity and Conciseness in Business Writing," and eight completed "Creating Well Constructed Sentences." Also, in light of the growing prevalence of electronic communication, 18 employees completed the course titled "Writing Effective Emails and Instant Messages."

The RRB reviews all written content, including letters, publications, and online content, on a recurring basis to make them clearer, following guidelines and best practices related to plain language and effective communication. The focus continues to shift to online content, given its increasing share of direct customer communication, including the improved appearance and navigation of **RRB.gov**.

In its most recent report card, released in January 2023, on federal agencies' efforts in this area, the Center for Plain Language emphasized the "contact us" feature of agency websites. The RRB has two links on the **RRB.gov** home page that outline how customers can contact the agency: the "FAQ" link at the top of the home page and a "Contact Us" link at the bottom of the page. Both links provide detailed information on contacting the RRB by telephone or email, along with a description of online services available through the website. Both links are thorough and understandable, effectively outlining methods of contacting the RRB and obtaining benefits, services, or other forms of assistance.

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

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