



U.S. Railroad Retirement Board

Plain Writing Act of 2010

Annual Compliance Report

May 2023

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 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 in-person and online courses on the subject 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, 87 employees completed the Plain Writing Act training,

compared to 130 the previous year. Of the 87 employees, 46 were assigned to headquarters units and 41 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, 23 employees completed "Audience and Purpose in Business Writing," 7 completed "Creating Well Constructed Sentences," and 3 completed "Clarity and Conciseness in Business Writing." Reflecting an increasing emphasis on electronic communication, 11 employees completed a relatively recent course titled "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**. In the past few years, this included a focus on printed and online communication related to the pandemic, including press releases and frequently asked questions regarding provisions in coronavirus relief legislation that affected benefits administered by the RRB.

In its annual report card for 2022 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.

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