

U.S. Department of Energy  
**Plain Writing Act  
Compliance Report**  
April 15, 2022

## I. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) views the implementation of the Plain Writing Act as an important initiative that helps the Department share relevant information clearly, concisely, and informatively. The areas referenced in this report summarize some of our successes as we continue to emphasize writing in Plain Language.

## II. DOE Plain Language Officials

- A. Ingrid Kolb, Director of the Office of Management, Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing
- B. Michael Coogan, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Plain Language Point-of-Contact

## III. Examples of Agency Website Communications Available in a Format Consistent with the Plain Language Guidelines

- A. *[Office of Public Affairs](#)*. The Office of Public Affairs manages DOE's public website – [Energy.gov](#). The office has consolidated nearly 70 of DOE's staff and Program Offices from separate websites onto [Energy.gov](#). This consolidation allows visitors to enter a search term and find their information on Energy.gov; previously, relevant information was scattered across many stand-alone DOE program and office websites not searchable from Energy.gov.

Energy.gov represents the Office of Public Affairs' commitment to principles of open government and Plain Language in several ways, including:

- *[News, Blogs, and Articles](#)*. The blog section on [Energy.gov](#) highlights timely content featuring many exciting innovations across DOE, from Program Offices to the National Laboratories. [Energy.gov](#) blogs and articles provide Plain Language summaries of complex scientific processes and discoveries in a conversational style for the public. Writers develop interactive content, such as timelines and quizzes, to explain topical energy concepts to the public. Press releases and statements from DOE leadership are written with Plain Language principles and posted to the Energy.gov newsroom. Additionally, Office of Public Affairs-managed content on Energy.gov, such as the [STEM Rising](#),

consolidates and clarifies DOE’s STEM mission and resources for students, teachers, and the workforce.

- *Training.* Contributors to [Energy.gov](#) are encouraged to follow the principles of Plain Language in the webpages they maintain. They receive content guidelines and training on using Plain Language and following web best practices for making content accessible. In addition, Energy.gov offers [blog writing and social media guidance](#) to help offices develop easy-to-understand content.
- *Accessibility.* [The Office of Public Affairs](#) helped evaluate and implement a Section 508 tool called SiteImprove. This tool helps Energy.gov content owners identify broken links, misspellings, grammatical errors, and other accessibility/usability issues.
- *Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools.* [The Office of Public Affairs](#) provides Google Analytics training to other DOE offices. This training helps content owners understand important metrics, such as website visitor trends, behavior, and keyword searches within the internal website and external search engines such as Google. Offices use these metrics to guide their digital strategy and ensure content is reaching target audiences. Using Google Webmaster Tools and Google Analytics, [the Office of Public Affairs](#) has found most user search queries consist of terms that are simple and in Plain Language.
- *Podcast.* DOE’s podcast, [Direct Current](#) – which the Office of Public Affairs manages – shares engaging, conversational stories about how DOE and the National Laboratories are making a positive difference for millions of Americans. Direct Current launched a new series this year called “People Powered” to showcase clean energy workers. Direct Current’s format is similar to National Public Radio, which hailed it as “[more ambitious](#)” than other government podcasts. To date, DOE has aired [50 episodes](#), each with corresponding transcripts and supplemental content, including blogs and videos.
- *Social Media.* [The Office of Public Affairs](#) uses Plain Language on social media, converting complex, scientific information into easy-to-understand, bite-sized messages. Additionally, the Office provides style and editorial guidance to other [Department of Energy Program Offices](#) and national laboratories to encourage using Plain Language for all social content.

[The Office of Public Affairs](#) manages several agency-level social media platforms, including:

ACCOUNT	FOLLOWERS
Energy Twitter	802,700
SecGranholm Twitter	106,300
EnergyPress Twitter	25,400
Energy Facebook	149,000
SecGranholm Facebook	9,900
Energy LinkedIn	144,000
Energy Instagram	117,000
SecGranholm Instagram	15,900

- *Video.* [The Office of Public Affairs](#) produces video content summarizing the Secretary of Energy’s trips and outreach, major announcements, and public engagement. The team is focused on short video summaries that accompany longer segments to further distill and clarify information for public audiences.
- *Newsletter.* [The Office of Public Affairs](#) issues a monthly STEM Rising newsletter sharing news and recaps of DOE’s STEM events using Plain Language. The “open rate” – the rate at which subscribers open the newsletter – is higher than the industry standard.
- *Language.* [The Office of Public Affairs](#) is leading the charge across DOE to eliminate words like “minority” to create a more inclusive workforce. DOE is revolutionizing how we use language about diversity, equity, and inclusion in our communications, such as blog posts, website, press releases, public remarks, and social media content. DOE’s Office of Science incorporated this guidance into its internal style guide.

**B. *U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA).*** EIA staff developed and offered an in-house writing curriculum – a series of eight writing courses aptly named *Write Right*. In 2021, EIA trained 96 Federal employees and contractors under *Write Right*. Employees who attend these courses improve their Plain Language skills –

punctuation, grammar, proofreading, and conciseness – and learn more about common writing mistakes and how to plan and revise their work. Each course is customized with EIA-relevant hands-on writing activities and EIA writing samples, and focused on areas where writers and their managers need to improve.

- In 2021, EIA offered a virtual one-hour course in the *Write Right* curriculum called “Ten Tips to Improve Your Writing.” The course topics include:
  - Plan your document
  - Write freely
  - Revise and edit your work
  - Follow Plain Language guidelines
  - Use active voice
  - Avoid false subjects
  - Limit jargon and acronyms
  - Use bulleted or numbered lists
  - Write effective titles and headings
  - Eliminate unnecessary words and noun phrases
  
- In 2021, EIA offered three virtual 90-minute courses in the *Write Right* curriculum called “Policy Neutrality at EIA.” The course topics include:
  - Define what policy neutral means
  - Explain how policy neutral is integral to EIA’s mission
  - Show trade press examples of non-policy neutral language
  - Explain where writers run the greatest risks
  - Provide sample list of words to avoid and their substitutions
  - Practice identifying non-neutral language in small groups

The *Write Right* curriculum is successful because EIA has made a serious commitment – in time, money, and enthusiasm – to helping staff write more effectively. As one senior manager said, “We’ve definitely sent a signal that the agency is taking writing quite seriously and considers it a top priority.” EIA has new writing and editing classes planned in 2022 that place more emphasis on scientific-style writing and the recent release of its revised 2021 *EIA Writing Style Guide*.

From its nearly 70 reports published in 2021 on energy topics, EIA used Plain Language principles consistently throughout all web content, including its three annual flagship reports – the *Annual Energy Outlook*, *International Energy Outlook*, and the *Summer Fuels Outlook* – and its monthly *Short-Term Energy Outlook* and daily *Today in Energy*. The related infographics and social media campaigns highlighted notable and meaningful energy and forecasting data for visitors in simple and clear terms.

EIA's [YouTube](#) channel features short how-to videos about EIA surveys and forms, short clips on featured topics, informational videos on data tools and how to use them, webinars on pressing energy issues, and product launch events with private sector partners, such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

EIA's website contains educational materials reflecting Plain Language principles, including:

- [Today in Energy](#). These short articles use Plain Language along with graphics, photos, maps, and animations to educate the public on timely energy issues and topics. Every business day, EIA provides bite-sized pieces of information that readers can use in business, government, schools, and their personal lives. Energy experts explain topical data, reports, issues, and trends to build the public's understanding of energy issues. [Today in Energy](#) celebrated 10 years of publication in 2021.
- [Energy Kids](#). This student-friendly website provides opportunities – through information and activities – to learn about energy while improving research and reading skills. The teacher guide provides activities for teachers who use Energy Kids as a resource to teach students about energy in a fun and interactive way.
- [Energy Explained](#). This extensive resource describes the different sources and uses of energy in understandable, everyday language. EIA updated more than 178 Energy Explained pages in 2021. In addition, EIA completed its redesign of [Energy Explained](#) to include enhanced navigation features, a more user-friendly interface, interactive data visualizations, and more.
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#). This EIA resource provides answers in Plain Language to sometimes complicated questions about energy asked by the public and other stakeholders through EIA's website, Twitter, and Facebook. EIA frequently updates the FAQ page to include the most current information and most popular inquiries. EIA updated all 99 FAQs in 2021.
- [Glossary](#). Because EIA's content can be very technical, EIA maintains an extensive glossary of terms that EIA authors can use to hyperlink technical terms for readers who want more detailed explanations. The glossary is also a searchable tool web users can easily find on EIA.gov.

EIA maintains several data tools to make browsing EIA data interactive and easy for users. In 2021, EIA launched the first edition of its [Monthly Biofuels Capacity and Feedstocks Update](#). This report helps its customers better track production capacities and feedstock consumption for biofuels and increases understanding of the effects biofuels have on the energy industry and our economy.

As several extreme weather events affected large areas of the country, EIA published real time and retrospective analysis of these energy disruptions. To help its customers track the impacts of disruption events on energy infrastructure and markets, EIA:

- [Directed](#) users to its [Southern California Daily Energy Report](#) for up-to-date information on how drought and wildfires affected the local energy market.
- Published a [Today in Energy](#) article outlining EIA tools monitoring energy infrastructure in the path of Hurricane Ida.
- Published articles on how a cold-snap in Texas and surrounding areas [changed electricity generation and demand](#), which, in turn, affected [natural gas production](#); [natural gas withdrawals from storage](#); [refinery operations](#); [electricity prices](#); and [energy supply and demand](#).
- Analyzed the [impacts of the cyberattack](#) that temporarily shut down the Colonial Pipeline.

EIA uses social media to promote *Today in Energy* stories and newly published reports and analyses, and is active on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, and YouTube. EIA social media statistics from April 2021 March 2022:

ACCOUNT	FOLLOWERS
EIA Twitter	165,700
EIA Facebook	43,047
EIA LinkedIn	13,252

EIA data show the audience for these social platforms is significantly larger than the number of followers.

EIA uses social media to connect consumers with useful EIA tools, such as the [U.S. Electric System Operating Data](#) tool, the [Status of U.S. Nuclear Outages](#) page, and the [Flood Vulnerability Assessment Map](#).

EIA continues to enhance its ability to respond to electricity emergencies with the [Energy Disruptions](#) web page, hurricane status reports, and *Today in Energy* articles that provide information on a storm’s potential to disrupt the energy system and analyses of the resulting impacts after landfall.

- C. ***Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE)***. EERE manages its popular main website along with its consumer favorite – [Energy Saver.gov](#). In 2021, EERE’s content was about 17 percent of [Energy.gov](#) content but represented about 35 percent of all page views. The Alternative Fuel Data Center’s [fuel station locator](#) was EERE’s most visited page.

EERE websites contain several features reflecting Plain Language guidelines, including:

- EERE’s [Energy Saver site](#) provides practical, easy-to-understand consumer advice for saving energy. Blog posts are written in Plain Language and amplify the information on the site’s static pages, which have been updated to make the content more approachable. More complex topics were moved to other parts of the EERE site where versed stakeholders would benefit from them.
- [EERE Success Stories](#). The stories are short features spotlighting the positive impact of EERE’s work with businesses, industry partners, universities, research labs, and other entities.
- [EERE Blog](#). This blog discusses energy topics and technologies in a conversational tone.
- [How Do Wind Turbines Work?](#) This popular EERE web page provides an easy-to-understand explanation of how wind turbines operate and defines technical terms in Plain Language.
- Social Media Posts. EERE manages 15 social media accounts and blogs. In 2021, EERE’s three main social media accounts – Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn – had a total audience of more than 218,000 followers. These three channels gained about 16,400 new followers in 2021, due in part to their simplified and conversational-style language and engaging graphics and photos.
- Infographics. EERE condenses highly technical information about clean energy topics into simple infographics used for multiple purposes, including social media posts, reports, and web pages.
- EERE’s [Communication Standards](#) website. This page includes guidelines for content writers and editors and a [section explaining the Plain Writing Act](#) and its requirements. The Communication Standards section also includes EERE’s style guide and guidelines to ensure content is 508 compliant and accessible to those with disabilities.
- EERE provides a large assortment of Adobe InDesign and Microsoft PowerPoint templates for internal users to develop high-quality printed materials and presentations. The InDesign templates are in a variety of formats, including fact sheets, scientific and technical reports, pamphlets, and

handouts. These templates include a pink-colored layer, which may be toggled on and off, that provides guidance on writing, including Plain Language references.

- [The EERE Online Publications Library](#). This library includes search terms and allows searches by category that are simple and easy to use to find publications by topic. Special emphasis makes certain search terms relevant and meaningful.

EERE participates in the DOE Web Council, which meets monthly to address common issues, including Plain Writing Act compliance.

EERE's Product Governance Team, which includes subject matter experts from EERE Technology and Program Offices, as well as Department of Energy national laboratories, reviews EERE-branded print products to ensure they adhere to EERE's branding and formatting policies and are easy to understand. Digital versions of all approved printed materials are in EERE's Online Publications Library for easy public access.

Team leads for EERE's public correspondence and websites encourage writers of public correspondence and web content throughout EERE to take DOE's Plain Language training courses. Team leads forward opportunities for Plain Language training to EERE web coordinators, including an opportunity through Digital.gov and plainlanguage.gov entitled, "Plain Language: Accessibility for Content."

To address common queries from the public, the public correspondence team developed Plain Language responses that are consistent, follow best practices, and are aligned with Federal policy. These prewritten replies expedite DOE's responses to consumers.

- D. *National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)*.** The NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the Department of Energy, responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains multiple websites that follow Plain Language principles. NNSA's primary website – [Energy.gov/nnsa](http://Energy.gov/nnsa) – is regularly updated with press releases, articles, infographics, animations and videos, newsletters, fact sheets, and other documents. This information highlights NNSA's mission and activities, including areas such as stockpile stewardship and nuclear nonproliferation. The website also provides information on NNSA careers and structure, and links to NNSA's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Flickr).

NNSA also maintains a [Directives website](#) that serves as a content and document management system for policies and procedures. This public website allows users to access and organize the Department's Technical Standards and other information simply and quickly.



NNSA's websites reflect Plain Language principles that give the public a better understanding of NNSA's programs, such as:

- [Prevent, Counter, and Respond – A Strategic Plan to Reduce Global Nuclear Threats](#). This report describes NNSA's planning and program activities on U.S. national security and advance global nuclear security. The report uses Plain Language principles to clearly define and describe its missions to prevent, counter, and respond to the threats of nuclear proliferation and terrorism.
- [Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan](#). This report describes NNSA's efforts to maintain and modernize scientific tools, capabilities, and infrastructure to ensure the success of NNSA's nuclear weapons mission.
- [Fact sheets](#). NNSA produces numerous fact sheets that outline its weapon life extension programs, important missions, other important public-facing documents, and material for the media. The fact sheets follow Plain Language principles.
- [Top 10](#). This page provides users with the ten most frequently accessed policies and directives from the preceding month.

E. [The Office of the Chief Information Officer \(OCIO\)](#). Information and technology help DOE meet its mission in energy, science, and nuclear security. The OCIO's programs span all these areas.

The OCIO also maintains the Department's internal [PowerPedia](#) wiki, which has a section educating staff on how to use Plain Language (see V.B). The OCIO uses Plain Language to convey technical and operational concepts.

#### IV. Examples of Other Agency Communications Consistent with the Plain Language Guidelines

*Office of the Executive Secretariat*. The Office of the Executive Secretariat oversees Secretarial correspondence and most DOE Congressional Reports. The office provides DOE guidance on these documents consistent with the Plain Writing Act and reviews documents for consistency with the Act's guidelines.

#### V. Informing Agency Staff of the Plain Writing Act's Requirements

- A. DOE's website contains links to the agency's previous *Plain Writing Act Compliance Reports* in its [Open.Gov](#) section.
- B. The Department's internal wiki – [PowerPedia](#) – has a Plain Language page. Through the wiki, DOE lists resources and information, including:

- Embedded YouTube videos from the Plain Language Action Information Network that highlight best practices for clear writing.
- Training schedules for Plain Language classes.
- Guidelines and links for writing in Plain Language.
- Before and after Plain Language examples.

## VI. Training

[Plain Language training](#) has been a staple at DOE since 2011. Initially directed toward its headquarters personnel in the District and Germantown, Maryland, training for employees and contractors expanded to the Department’s laboratories and field offices across the country via video conferencing. [Plain Language training](#) expanded further when laboratories and field offices requested in-person instruction. All classes are led by an in-house agency instructor.

DOE personnel have fully embraced [Plain Language training](#). The Department holds classes for employees and contractors in groups of 20-30, as well as DOE Program Offices when they request training as a group.

Because of public health concerns, [Plain Language training](#) was limited from April 2021 to March 2022. Two classes were offered during this time: (1) In-Person instruction was provided to 24 first-year employees in the National Nuclear Security Administration, and (2) A hybrid in-person/virtual Plain Language class with 20 participants was given at the request of the Office of Management’s Contracting Team. In addition to these two classes, a 45-minute overview of DOE’s Plain Language training was presented remotely to DOE’s Web Council.

With more people returning to the office as of the date of this report, DOE expects to see increased numbers for Plain Language training in 2022. Virtual training will be offered to those who primarily work from remote locations. In the last full year before public health concerns became paramount – April 2019 to March 2020 – DOE provided training to 342 employees and contractors.

DOE’s Plain Language classes provide tools that allow writers to present information more clearly, including:

- Identifying passive voice and using active voice instead
- Using pronouns and everyday words
- Shortening sentences and paragraphs
- Limiting jargon and acronyms
- Identifying the audience
- Focusing not on what you want to say, but what the reader needs to know

- Using lists (bullets, numbers, letters) and tables instead of long-form paragraphs
- Making your document easier to read

## **VII. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change**

- A. All DOE employees and contractors are encouraged to incorporate Plain Language principles in their writing. Some Program Offices have developed style guides that support Plain Language concepts (EIA's *Writing Style Guide* is one example). Some offices, such as the [Office of the Chief Information Officer](#) and [Energy Information Administration](#), also integrate Plain Language concepts into their document review process.

The Office of the Executive Secretariat incorporates Plain Language standards in its review of DOE documents and external correspondence and works with Program Offices to emphasize Plain Language principles.

- B. The Department's [PowerPedia](#) internal wiki has an Acronyms List that identifies Department-related acronyms for readers and provides the acronym's description.
- C. Plain Language training is ongoing for DC headquarters, Germantown, and field facilities.

## **VIII. DOE Plain Language Websites/Links**

- A. DOE's [Plain Language website](#)
- B. The [Plain Language Page on Powerpedia](#),<sup>1</sup> DOE's internal wiki site
- C. DOE's link on its [Plain Language](#) website to [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#)
- D. DOE's link on its [Plain Language](#) website to the [Plain Language Action Information Network](#)
- E. The Energy Information Administration's [Writing Style Guide](#) and its one-page [tip sheet](#)

## **IX. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Language Communications**

The Department continues to monitor and optimize how [Energy.gov](#) is serving consumers, businesses, governments, educators, researchers, and the public. As DOE places increasing

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible only to Department of Energy employees and contractors

emphasis on mobile-friendly online content, Plain Language principles become more critical in meeting the agency's communications needs.

- A. [The Office of Public Affairs](#) is updating the [Energy.gov](#) homepage and Energy 101 content to be responsive to user interest.
- B. In March 2022, the [Energy Information Administration](#) (EIA) marked the one-year anniversary of its revised *Writing Style Guide*. After holding an all-employee meeting to gather feedback and suggestions, an EIA working group met and decided on a number of updates based on its writers' experiences and best practices in Plain Language and the energy trade press. The new focus of the style guide is creating reader-centric content in a conversational, relevant voice that aligns with energy trade press.

EIA's style guide is its central document for Plain Language, and employees use the guide for help and advice on the EIA writing style, grammar tips, and writing clearly. Many EIA employees also post the *Writing Style Guide's* [tip sheet](#) on their office walls and doors. EIA's style guide has won a ClearMark Award from the Center for Plain Language.

- C. The attendance numbers for EIA's *Write Right* curriculum show that the courses are popular. Comments on the evaluation surveys indicate that participants found the training informative and useful.

EIA's annual web customer satisfaction survey conducted in August 2021 showed that 91 percent of 29,367 respondents indicated they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the quality of the information on EIA's website. Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the design and navigation. This survey also collects information on who is visiting the website and the information they are seeking.

Other EIA product-specific surveys collect information on how customers use a particular product, if the customer finds it useful, and how EIA can improve it.

- D. Two members of DOE's Plain Language Working Group served as judges for the Center for Plain Language's *2021 Federal Plain Language Report Card*. The judges brought their expertise and knowledge of Plain Language principles to the judging process, while taking away from their experience greater insight on how Federal Government websites can use Plain Language to convey their messages more clearly to the public.
- E. Another member of DOE's Plain Language Working Group, for the fourth consecutive year, served as a judge for the Center for Plain Language's ClearMark Awards, which showcases the best in Plain Language communication.