



governmentattic.org

"Rummaging in the government's attic"

Description of document: United States Secret Service (USSS)
Writing/Correspondence Style Manual, 2013

Requested date: 23-June-2014

Released date: 11-March-2016

Posted date: 02-May-2016

Source of document: FOIA Request
Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts Branch
245 Murray Drive, Building 410
Washington, D.C. 20223
Fax: 202-406-5586
E-mail: FOIA@uss.s.dhs.gov

The governmentattic.org web site ("the site") is noncommercial and free to the public. The site and materials made available on the site, such as this file, are for reference only. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals have made every effort to make this information as complete and as accurate as possible, however, there may be mistakes and omissions, both typographical and in content. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information provided on the governmentattic.org web site or in this file. The public records published on the site were obtained from government agencies using proper legal channels. Each document is identified as to the source. Any concerns about the contents of the site should be directed to the agency originating the document in question. GovernmentAttic.org is not responsible for the contents of documents published on the website.



DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20223

Freedom of Information Act & Privacy Act Branch
Communications Center
245 Murray Lane, S.W., Building T-5
Washington, D.C. 20223

Date: MAR 11 2016

File Number: 20140750

Dear Requester:

This is the final response to your Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Acts (FOIA/PA) request originally received by the United States Secret Service (USSS) on June 23, 2014, for information pertaining to a copy of the Secret Service's Style Manual.

Enclosed are documents responsive to your request. We are granting your request under the FOIA, Title 5 U.S.C. § 552 (as amended) and 6 C.F.R., Chapter I and Part 5. After carefully reviewing the responsive documents, it has been determined they are appropriate for release. The documents are being released in their entirety. No deletions or exemptions have been claimed.

Provisions of the FOIA allow us to recover part of the cost of complying with your request. In this instance, the cost is below the \$14.00 minimum. There is no charge.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter, please contact this office at (202) 406-6370. FOIA File No. 20140750 is assigned to your request. Please refer to this file number in all future communication with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kim E. Campbell".

Kim E. Campbell
Special Agent In Charge
Freedom of Information Act & Privacy Act Officer

Enclosure(s)

PLAIN WRITING GUIDELINES

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for United States Secret Service (Secret Service) employees to comply with Federal regulations that mandate the use of clear, concise, and well organized writing on Government printed media and electronic communications, including but not limited to, official correspondence documents, public facing Web sites, Secret Service Forms, Federal Register Notices, and instructions.

Scope

This policy applies to all Secret Service offices and personnel.

Authority

5 U.S.C. 301 ("The Plain Writing Act of 2010," Pub. L. 111-274, 124 Stat. 2861 (October 13, 2010)).

Policy

In accordance with the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (hereafter, "The Act"), the Secret Service mandates the use of plain writing on all new or revised covered documents. A covered document is a document that:

- Is necessary for obtaining any Federal Government benefit or service, or for filing taxes;
- Provides information about any Federal Government benefit or service; or
- Explains to the public how to comply with a requirement the Federal Government administers or enforces.

Covered documents include the letters, publications, forms, notices, or instructions from an agency of the Executive Branch, but do not include Agency-enacted regulations. Secret Service recruitment literature, press releases, and instructional signs at or near protected locations are some examples of Secret Service covered documents.



Responsibilities

In accordance with The Act, the Secret Service is responsible for:

1. Designating one or more senior officials to oversee the implementation of The Act.
2. Communicating the requirements of The Act to employees.
3. Training Secret Service employees in the techniques of plain writing.
4. Establishing a process for overseeing the ongoing compliance of the Secret Service with The Act.
5. Creating a Plain Writing section on the Secret Service's public-facing Web site (<http://www.SecretService.gov>). (See the section entitled "Plain Writing on the Secret Service's Internet Site" below for details.)
6. Designating one or more points of contact to receive and respond to public input on the Secret Service's implementation of The Act, and on the Secret Service's compliance reports posted to the Secret Service public Internet site (<http://www.secretservice.gov>).

The Management and Organization Division (MNO) is responsible for serving as the Secret Service's component representative on the DHS Plain Writing Cross-Component Working Group. MNO oversees the Secret Service's compliance with The Act, and also produces the required compliance reports that The Act requires. (See item 3 in the "Plain Writing on the Secret Service's Internet Site" section below for details.)

The Rowley Training Center (RTC) is responsible for coordinating Plain Writing training for Secret Service employees, and for assisting employees to comply with The Act. In addition, RTC's Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) participates and represents the Secret Service on various DHS committees, which include discussion of plain writing standards.

All Secret Service employees must follow the plain writing guidelines outlined in this policy when producing covered documents. All employees who are responsible for such producing documents must attend any mandatory plain writing training courses, as designated by RTC.

Plain Writing on the Secret Service's Internet Site

As stated in items 5 and 6 above, The Act requires the creation of a plain writing section on the Secret Service's Web site. This plain writing section must:

1. Inform the public of agency compliance with the requirements of The Act;
2. Provide a mechanism for the Secret Service to receive and respond to public input on the Secret Service's implementation of The Act, and on the Secret Service's compliance reports posted to this Web page (see item 6 in the previous section); and
3. Provide an Initial Report describing the Secret Service's plan for compliance with The Act, and subsequent Annual Compliance Reports on the Secret Service's ongoing compliance with The Act.

Appendix A: General Guidelines on Plain Writing

Introduction

Plain Writing is essential to achieve a transparent Government that encourages maximum public participation and collaboration. As defined in the Plain Writing Act of 2010, plain writing is "clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience."

In its memorandum entitled, "Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010," the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) lists the benefits of using plain writing, which include:

- Giving the public accessibility to benefits and services for which they are eligible;
- Improving public understanding of Government communications and agency requirements;
- Assisting the public to comply with applicable Federal requirements;
- Reducing resources spent on enforcement when the public fails to comply with applicable Federal requirements as a result of poor writing;
- Saving money and increasing efficiency;
- Reducing public requests for clarification from agency staff;
- Improving public understanding of agency forms and applications, and thereby assisting the public to complete them; and
- Reducing the number of errors caused in response to poor writing, and thus reducing the amount of time and effort the agency and the public need to devote to correcting those errors.

OIRA instructs Federal agencies to avoid using jargon, redundancy, ambiguity, and obscurity on agency documents. In addition, OIRA states that agencies should follow the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, available at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>.

MNO has abstracted OIRA's and The Plain Language Action and Information Network's (PLAIN) guidance in this Appendix and tailored it for Secret Service employees. These guidelines are by no means meant to be exhaustive. You are encouraged to view the entire text of the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, and to use plain language training resources available through RTC.

Audience

Plain writing is always applicable to the audience for which it is intended. Your writing should always employ tone, style, and diction that is appropriate to your audience. Often the general public is the audience of Federal Government communication, so your writing will have to be understood by people with varying degrees of knowledge about the subject.

The following guidelines are suggested:

- Be brief, clear, and direct;
- Keep documents free of jargon and highly technical language that could be unfamiliar to your audience;
- Present information in eye-appealing formats such as bulleted lists, graphs, charts, and tables;
- Avoid the passive voice; and
- Use the first and second person (i.e., I, we, or you), to speak directly to your audience.

Don't "dumb down" your writing, but rather be succinct. Don't define obvious terms, or readers may perceive the tone of your document as overbearing or didactic. In addition, never define a word you don't use in your document, and never define a word to mean something other than its commonly accepted meaning.

Never compose a document for two different audiences. For example, suppose you are responsible for writing instructions for special agents working on a protective detail, and for agents working on an investigative case. The instructions for both groups are different, so you send separate instructions to each of these audiences.

Sentence Structure

Use a separate sentence for each idea (some guidance suggests limiting sentences to about 20 words). At the same time, you should avoid continuous short, choppy sentences. For example:

Members below the rank of Captain often prepare memoranda and reports. These reports may require the signature of these members. These members shall affix their given and surname in full. The middle name should not be written out. It may be represented by an initial. *(These sentences are too short and choppy.)*

When members below the rank of Captain prepare memoranda and reports requiring their signature, they shall affix such signature with their given and surname in full, and represent the middle name by an initial. *(This sentence gives the reader too much information all at once.)*

Members below the rank of Captain who prepare memoranda and reports requiring their signature should sign their full names (first and last). Middle names may be represented by an initial. *(These sentences are not too brief but use a separate idea for each sentence.)*



Organization

An organized document will ensure the clarity of your message. When preparing to write a document, it helps to first organize your thoughts into an outline. This will ensure that the structure of your document is organized in paragraphs that follow a logical order. Including transition phrases and words such as "after this," or "finally," help to solidify each paragraph into a clear message. If your document is lengthy, use headings for each separate section.

Each paragraph should contain a topic sentence and convey one main idea to the reader. Including more than one topic within a paragraph can overburden your audience and obscure your message. Example:

The Secret Service Valor Award is presented by the Director to Secret Service employees who have demonstrated an extreme act of heroism while voluntarily risking personal safety. Such an act or deed need not occur during the employee's official duty hours. General police actions such as thwarting a robbery or apprehending a felon would not necessarily qualify an employee for nomination unless the above criteria were involved. Employees can be nominated for the award by their immediate supervisor or their Assistant Director. Supervisors should use the strictest interpretation of the criteria when determining whether an employee should be nominated. Each nomination must clearly state in detail all facts and events indicating the manner and extent to which the employee distinguished himself or herself.

This paragraph combines both the topic of who should receive a Secret Service valor award with how employees can be nominated for this award. Separating this paragraph into two paragraphs as illustrated below would clarify each topic.

The Secret Service Valor Award is presented by the Director to Secret Service employees who have demonstrated an extreme act of heroism while voluntarily risking personal safety. Such an act or deed need not occur during the employee's official duty hours. General police actions such as thwarting a robbery or apprehending a felon would not necessarily qualify an employee for nomination unless the above criteria were involved.

Employees can be nominated for the award by their immediate supervisor or their Assistant Director. Supervisors should use the strictest interpretation of the criteria when determining whether an employee should be nominated. Each nomination must clearly state in detail all facts and events indicating the manner and extent to which the employee distinguished himself or herself.

Diction

One of the most important ways of achieving clear communication is through appropriate diction, or word choice. *The Federal Plain Language Guidelines* suggest the following:

Use common, everyday words instead of technical jargon or flowery speech.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
That, now, any, etc.	Aforementioned, hereafter, whatsoever, etc.
Sign the document	Affix your signature to the document.

Use the pronoun "you" to address your audience.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
If you want to request annual leave.	If an employee wishes to request annual leave.

Don't turn verbs into nouns.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
I was tasked to do this.	I have received a tasking to do this.

Use active voice.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
All supervisors should attend this meeting.	The meeting should be attended by all supervisors.

Use the simplest form of a verb.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
It is appropriate for you to attend.	It would be appropriate for you to attend.

Use "must" instead of "shall" or "will" to indicate requirements.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
Employees must complete this form.	Employees will complete this form.

Avoid hidden verbs.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
He needed to study the problem.	He needed to carry out a study of the problem.

Use contractions when appropriate.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
Don't let anyone break the rules.	You should not allow anyone to break the rules.

Omit unnecessary words.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
The experiment didn't work because:	The following are the reasons that the experiment didn't work:

Use the same term consistently for the same thing.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
All Secret Service Forms are saved to the Secret Service Forms Library. The library is located on the Secret Service Intranet.	All Secret Service Forms are saved to the Secret Service Forms Library. The catalogue is located on the Secret Service Intranet.

Don't use slashes.

<i>Use</i>	<i>Instead of</i>
Please call GSA for building or maintenance services.	Please call GSA for building/maintenance services.
Please call GSA for either building or maintenance services, or both.	Please call GSA for building and/or maintenance services.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

When writing for the general public, minimize your use of abbreviations and acronyms. You may use common abbreviations or acronyms without defining them, (e.g., U.S., P.O. Box, ZIP Code).

Introduce acronyms only if you use them again in the document. Define the acronym the first time you use it, but do not define it again. When an acronym has not been used for several pages in a large document, you may redefine it at your discretion.

When writing for an internal Secret Service audience, you do not need to introduce certain well-known abbreviations. Examples:

- State Abbreviations (like VT or AZ)
- FY
- DHS
- Abbreviations for Offices staffed by an Assistant Director (e.g., OPO or INV)
- POTUS and VPOTUS
- SA, SAIC, DSAIC, ASAIC, or ATSAIC
- HQ

When referring to an organizational unit of the Secret Service, use the three-letter office codes listed in the District Directory. For example:

The U.S. Secret Service's Criminal Investigative Division (CID) investigates crimes involving access devices, including debit cards, automated teller machine (ATM) cards, computer passwords, personal identification numbers (PIN), credit card or debit card account numbers, long-distance access codes, and the Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) contained within cellular telephones that assign billing. CID exercises broad investigative jurisdiction over a variety of financial crimes...

Note: Since the acronym "USSS" is generally unknown outside a small circle of Government agencies, use "United States Secret Service" or "U.S. Secret Service" when initially referring to this agency on external documents. For subsequent references, use "Secret Service" instead of "USSS."

Lists, Tables, and Illustrations

Using lists, tables, and illustrations appropriately in a document will present your information with more clarity. This does not mean that a document should consist solely of lists and diagrams, as straightforward text can sometimes be the best way to state your ideas. The following sections give some examples where these techniques might be best employed.

Lists

Lists can convey a good deal of information all at once. Consider the following text that directs the user through a multi-step process:

To change the privacy settings for your account, you must first go to the log in screen in our online system. Once you are at the log in screen, type in your username and password. Your account information will now appear. Click on "my personal information" from the options on the left, and update your privacy settings accordingly. Then, click on the "save my information" button. Finally, log out of the system using the "log out" button on the top right of your screen.

This information would be more precisely conveyed using a numbered list:

To change the privacy settings for your account, follow these instructions:

1. Go to the log in screen in the online system.
2. Type in your username and password. Your account information will appear.
3. Click on "my personal information" from the options on the left.
4. Update your privacy settings.
5. Click on the "save my information" button.
6. Log out of the system using the "log out" button on the top right of your screen.

In the example above, a numbered list is appropriate since the steps must be done in an exact order. You should use bulleted lists when the sequence of the information does not matter, either because all of the items are of equal importance or because the items do not constitute a complete list.

Be consistent when using lists. If you use bullets, use the same type of bullet throughout your document. Indentation, capitalization, and punctuation should be uniform.

Tables

Tables can make complex material much easier to understand, and they force you, as the author, to eliminate ambiguity. See in the example below how much easier it is to find the information you need in the table, and note how the use of headings presents the information more clearly.

You are welcome to park in either of our parking lots. If you park in Parking Lot A, you must arrive before 9:00 a.m. You must show a valid I.D. to park in this lot. You may validate your parking ticket at the kiosk marked "Parking Lot A" on Concourse 2. If you park in Parking Lot B, you must depart prior to 6:00 p.m. You do not need an I.D. to park in Parking Lot B. You may validate your parking ticket at the kiosk marked "Parking Lot B" on Concourse 3.

<i>If you park in Parking Lot A:</i>	<i>If you park in Parking Lot B:</i>
You must arrive before 9:00 a.m.	You must depart prior to 6:00 p.m.
You must show a valid I.D.	You do not need an I.D.
You may validate your parking ticket at the kiosk marked "Parking Lot A" on Concourse 2.	You may validate your parking ticket at the kiosk marked "Parking Lot B" on Concourse 3.

Illustrations and other Visual Aids

Illustrations, flow charts, graphs, diagrams, and other types of visual aids may present relationships between data in a way that is not possible using only text. They may also highlight or clarify information that might otherwise be ignored or misunderstood.

Poor quality pictures may interfere with the depiction of the appropriate data, so be sure to present illustrations and visual aids accurately, using appropriate sizes and pixels.

References

Executive Order 13563, "Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review." January 18, 2011.

Executive Order 12988, "Civil Justice Reform." February 7, 1996.

Executive Order 12866, "Regulatory Planning and Review." October 4, 1993.

63 FR 31885, "Plain Language in Government Writing." June 1, 1998.

Berent, Irwin. *Plain Writing Legislative History — 2007- 2010*. The Plain Writing Association, n.d. Web. (<http://www.plain-writing-association.org>).

Cunningham, et al. *Technical Writing*. Washington: Graduate School, USDA, 2007.

Strylowski, John. "Using Tables to Present Complex Ideas." n.d.

The Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN). *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*. May, 2011 (Revised).

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). *Plain Writing Act Compliance*. April 13, 2012.

U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). *Style Manual*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2008.

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). *The Federal Register*. n.d. Web. (<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/the-federal-register>).

U.S. Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA). *Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010*. April 13, 2011.

U.S. Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA). *The Regulatory Process*. n.d. Web. (<http://www.regulations.gov>).