Department of Defense

INSTRUCTION

NUMBER 5025.13
April 11, 2013

DA&M

SUBJECT: DoD Plain Language Program

References: See Enclosure 1

1. PURPOSE. This instruction:

a. Establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for the DoD Plain Language Program in accordance with the authority in DoD Directive 5105.53 (Reference (a)) and pursuant to Public Law 111-274 (Reference (b)) (also known as the "Plain Writing Act of 2010," and referred to in this instruction as the "Plain Writing Act") and Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum (Reference (c)).

b. Promotes DoD use of clear, concise, and well-organized language in documents (as defined in this instruction) to effectively communicate with intended audiences. This is in accordance with the guidance in Presidential Memorandum (Reference (d)), Office of Management and Budget Memorandum (Reference (e)), and Director of Administration and Management (DA&M) Memorandum (Reference (f)).

c. Establishes the DoD Plain Language Committee.

2. APPLICABILITY. This instruction applies to OSD, the Military Departments, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DoD Field Activities, and all other organizational entities within the DoD (referred to in this instruction collectively as the "DoD Components").

3. POLICY. It is DoD policy that:

a. The DoD:

(1) Maintains a DoD Plain Language program.

(2) Requires DoD personnel to use plain language concepts in new or substantially revised documents prepared after the date of this instruction. Documents requiring technical or specialized language should be as clear and concise as possible.

(3) Maintains the DoD Plain Language Website (referred to in this instruction as "the Website") at http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/plainlanguage.html as the official DoD source for Plain Writing Act requirements, training, and compliance information.

(4) Offers, on the Website, a chance for users outside DoD to provide feedback and identify unclear DoD communications in documents defined in this instruction as "covered."

(5) Offers a chance for DoD users to provide feedback on and identify unclear DoD communications in documents.

(6) Publishes an annual report on the Website describing DoD Component plain language compliance efforts for covered documents in accordance with References (b), (d), and (e).

b. All DoD personnel who regularly write or edit documents must take plain language training, either via the Website or as described in Enclosure 3. All other DoD personnel are encouraged to take plain language training.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES. See Enclosure 2.

5. PROCEDURES. See Enclosure 3.

6. INFORMATION COLLECTION REQUIREMENTS. The DoD Annual Plain Language Compliance Report and DD Form 2960, "DoD Plain Language Compliance," referred to in section 2 of Enclosure 2 and section 5 of Enclosure 3 of this instruction, have been assigned report control symbol DD-DA&M(A)2523. This is in accordance with the procedures in Directive-type Memorandum 12-004 (Reference (g)) and DoD 8910.1-M (Reference (h)).

7. RELEASABILITY. **Unlimited**. This instruction is approved for public release and is available on the Internet from the DoD Issuances Website at http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives.

8. EFFECTIVE DATE. This instruction:

a. Is effective April 11, 2013.

b. Must be reissued, cancelled, or certified current within 5 years of its publication in accordance with DoD Instruction 5025.01 (Reference (i)). If not, it will expire effective April 11, 2023 and be removed from the DoD Issuances Website.

Michael L. Rhodes
Director of Administration and Management

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ENCLOSURE 1

REFERENCES

(a) DoD Directive 5105.53, "Director of Administration and Management (DA&M)," February 26, 2008
(b) Public Law 111-274, "Plain Writing Act of 2010," October 13, 2010
(c) Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Implementation of Public Law 111-274, the 'Plain Writing Act of 2010,' in the DoD," September 13, 2011
(d) Presidential Memorandum, "Transparency and Open Government," January 21, 2009
(e) Office of Management and Budget Memorandum, "Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010," April 13, 2011
(f) Director of Administration and Management Memorandum, "Requirements and Initial Implementation of Public Law 111-274, "Plain Writing Act of 2010," (the Act) in the Department of Defense (DoD)," November 22, 2011
(g) Directive-type Memorandum 12-004, "DoD Internal Information Collections," April 24, 2012
(h) DoD 8910.1-M, "Department of Defense Procedures for Management of Information Requirements," June 30, 1998
(i) DoD Instruction 5025.01, "DoD Directives Program," September 26, 2012

ENCLOSURE 2

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. DA&M. Pursuant to Reference (c), the DA&M:

a. Serves as the Senior Official for Plain Language to oversee DoD Component implementation of the Plain Writing Act.

b. Establishes DoD policy, standards, and procedures for implementation and compliance with the Plain Writing Act through the DoD Plain Language Program.

2. DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS SERVICES (WHS). Under the authority, direction, and control of the DA&M and through the Directives Division, Executive Services Directorate, the Director, WHS:

a. Manages and administers the DoD Plain Language Program.

b. Develops and maintains DoD-specific policy and procedural information.

c. Communicates Plain Writing Act requirements to the DoD and OSD Components and offers training options on the Website.

d. Maintains the Website to:

(1) Post Plain Writing Act requirements, training, and compliance information.

(2) Collect amendment requests on DoD covered documents.

(3) Publish the DoD Annual Plain Language Compliance Report.

e. Compiles implementation data for the DoD Annual Plain Language Compliance Report.

f. Monitors amendment requests on DoD covered documents submitted through the Website. Reviews requests received to determine their legitimacy and, if warranted, routes amendment requests to the appropriate DoD or OSD Component for further action.

g. Chairs the DoD Plain Language Committee.

3. DoD AND OSD COMPONENT HEADS. DoD and OSD Component heads:

a. Communicate Plain Writing Act requirements throughout their Component and oversee compliance.

b. Require Component personnel who regularly write documents to complete plain language training in accordance with this instruction.

(1) Component heads or personnel supervisors may direct personnel to repeat plain language training, if needed.

(2) Components using contractors to help write documents will ensure that relevant contracts entered into after the effective date of this instruction include a requirement that employees of the contractor use plain language when preparing those documents.

c. Designate a Component plain language contact who will serve as a representative on the Plain Language Committee and be responsible for overseeing Component implementation efforts and compliance with the Plain Writing Act.

d. Encourage Component personnel to seek clarification from within their organization before submitting an amendment request on the Website.

e. Require the use of plain language concepts in all new or substantially revised documents.

ENCLOSURE 3

PROCEDURES

1. USING PLAIN LANGUAGE

a. When drafting new documents or revising existing ones, DoD personnel will follow the Federal Plain Language Guidelines available at http://www.plainlanguage.gov, as appropriate. Specialized language may be required depending on the intended audience, but language and document organization should be as clear as possible.

b. Key concepts of plain language to keep in mind are noted in the Table.

Table. Plain Language Concepts

Be Clear	• Use plain language whenever possible; avoid jargon • Avoid overuse of acronyms (if used, make certain they are established upon first use) • Use the active voice • Organize and filter information with readers' needs in mind • Format your document so that it's easy to read and understand • Use tables or figures if that's the best way to show information
Be Concise	• Remove unnecessary words • Write sentences with 20 words or fewer and that contain a single thought, action, etc. • Use seven sentences or fewer per paragraph
Be Specific	• Include only information that the reader must know • Use words with precise meaning • Include details that are directly relevant to the main point

c. Procedures for users outside DoD to request amendment of covered documents are in Figure 1. Procedures for DoD personnel to request amendment of all documents (including covered) are in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Procedures for Review of Covered Documents by Users Outside DoD

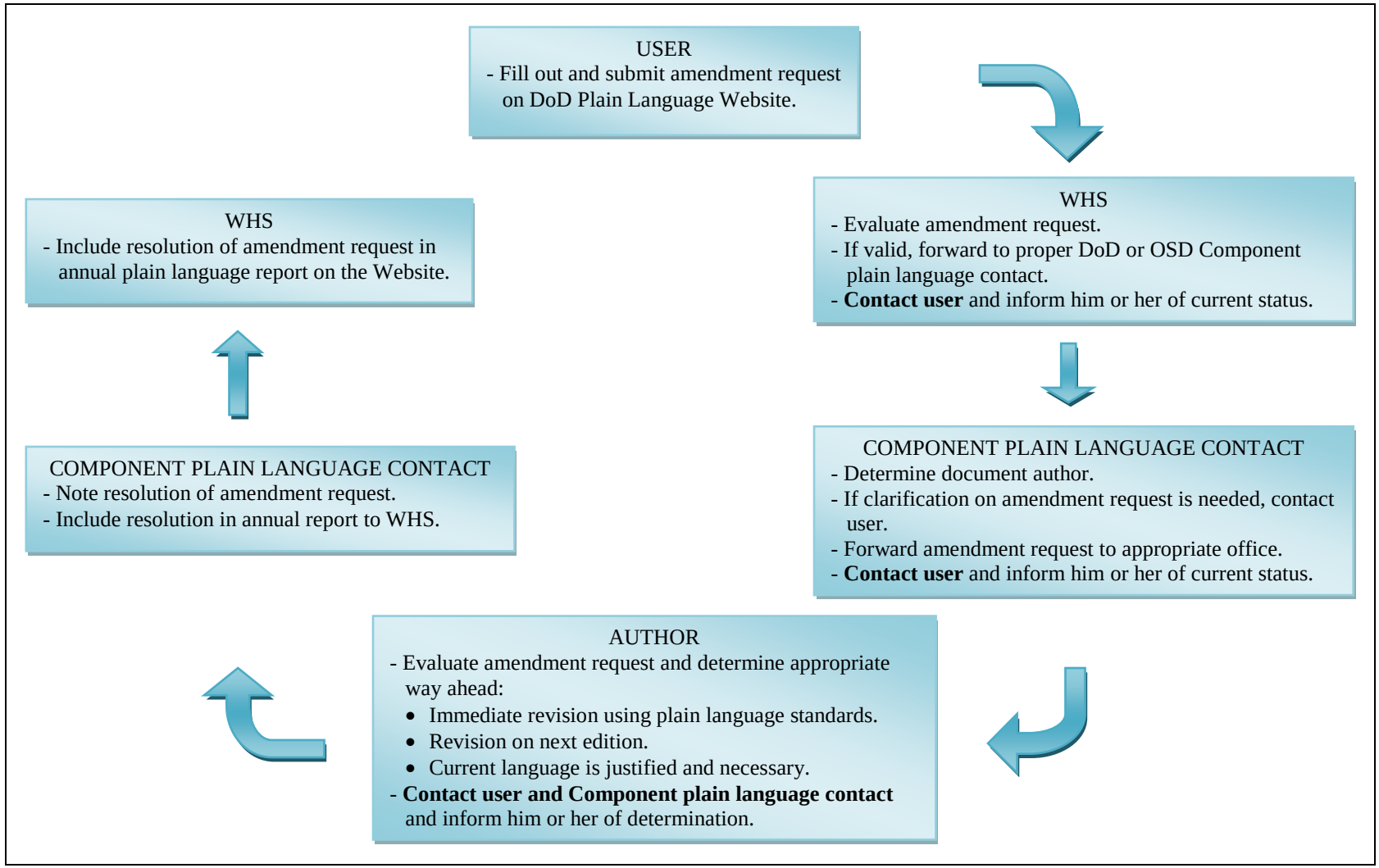
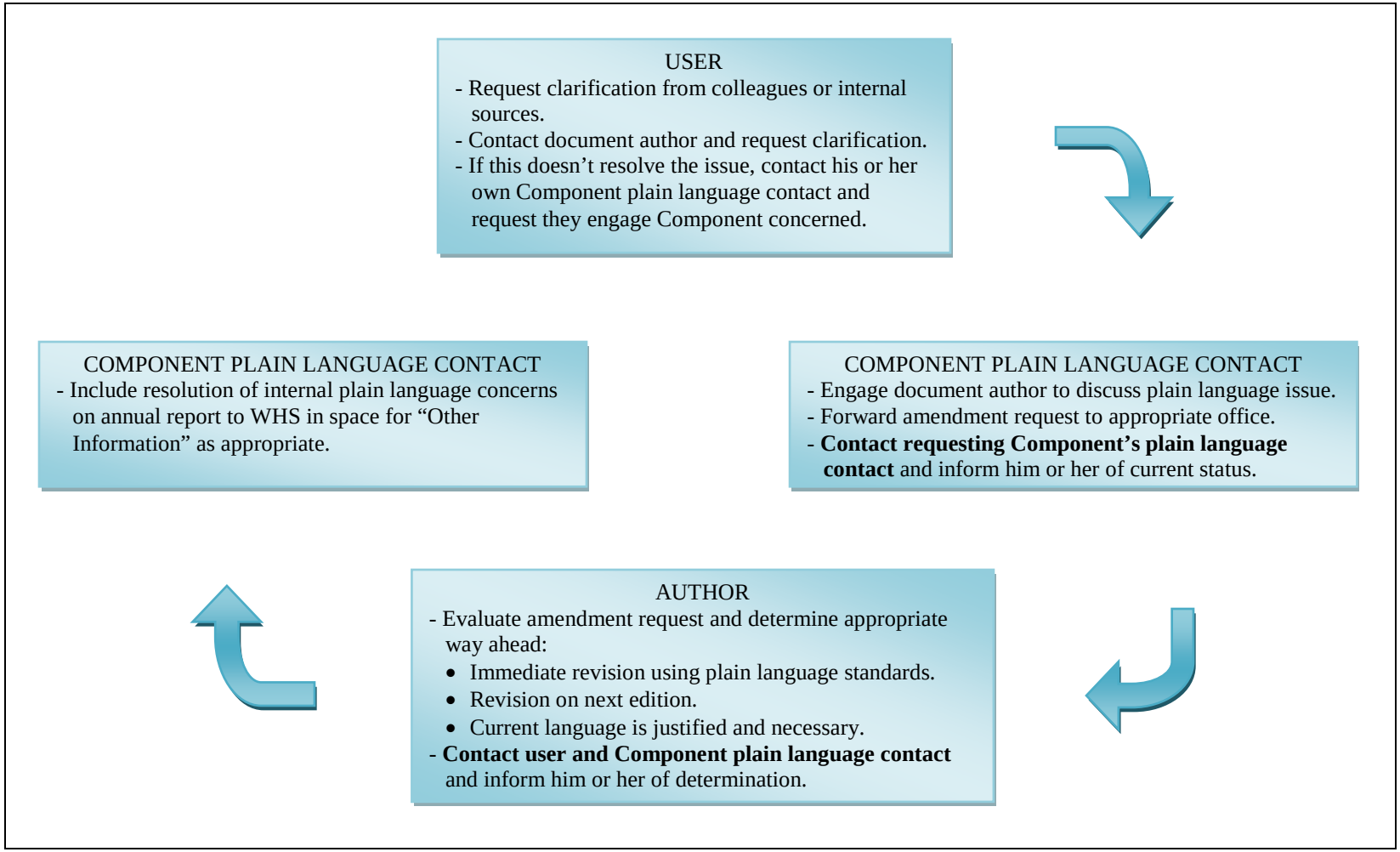


Figure 2. Procedures for Review of All Documents (DoD Personnel Only)



2. TRAINING

a. DoD and OSD Components are responsible for training their personnel and may use training already available to their Component if it addresses aspects of plain language. Training information must address the concepts listed in the Table.

b. DoD personnel who regularly write and edit documents must take plain language training. All other DoD personnel are encouraged to take plain language training.

c. New DoD personnel should receive plain language training either alone or as part of their orientation training.

3. DoD AND OSD COMPONENT PLAIN LANGUAGE CONTACTS. DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts:

a. Help Component personnel understand and follow the policy and procedures of the DoD Plain Language Program as stated in this instruction.

b. Identify Component personnel who regularly write or edit documents and ensure they receive training on plain language guidelines.

c. Oversee requested review of the Component's documents (including covered).

(1) Review amendment requests forwarded from WHS and received from other Component plain language contacts.

(2) Decide how best to handle amendment requests, in coordination with appropriate parties.

(3) Work with the document author to respond to the user or Component plain language contact concerned as quickly as possible with the Component's decision.

d. Collaborate with users to further enhance their Component's implementation efforts.

e. Approve and submit annually required information as described in section 5 of this enclosure.

f. Serve as a representative on the DoD Plain Language Committee.

4. DoD PLAIN LANGUAGE COMMITTEE

a. The Committee is chaired by the Director, WHS or a representative.

b. Committee membership includes DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts and other administrative staff carrying out plain language efforts who are full-time or permanent part-time government employees or military members.

c. The Committee will meet twice yearly or as needed to:

(1) Help revise policy and guidance.

(2) Monitor DoD compliance with the Plain Writing Act.

(3) Share plain language best practices and resources.

5. COMPLIANCE REPORTING

a. DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts must prepare annual compliance information (defined in the Glossary) using the DD Form 2960 available on the Website.

b. Examples of information to be reported include:

(1) For covered documents:

(a) Number of amendment requests received.

(b) Number of amendment requests denied and the justification for those denials.

(c) Status and number of amendment requests still outstanding.

(2) Verification that the OSD or DoD Component is in compliance with training requirements in accordance with paragraph 3b of Enclosure 2 of this instruction.

c. DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts must submit DD Form 2960 no later than February 1 of each year to DoDPlainLanguage@osd.mil. DD Form 2960 will record compliance information gathered from the prior calendar year (January through December).

d. WHS will compile and publish the DoD Annual Plain Language Compliance Report on the Website. It will be published annually by April 13 in accordance with Reference (e).

GLOSSARY

PART I. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DA&M Director of Administration and Management

WHS Washington Headquarters Services

PART II. DEFINITIONS

These terms and their definitions are for the purposes of this instruction.

amendment request. Any inquiry from a user requesting that a covered document be changed or revised using plain language.

DoD Annual Plain Language Compliance Report. A comprehensive report, required by the Plain Writing Act, that is annually posted to the Website. It documents DoD compliance information and ongoing implementation efforts.

DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts. Individuals selected by their Component head to be responsible for overseeing Component implementation efforts and compliance with the Plain Writing Act and to serve as the Component's Plain Language Committee representative.

DoD personnel. All DoD civilian employees and members of the Military Services.

compliance information. Any information demonstrating efforts towards implementation and compliance of the Plain Writing Act. May include, but is not limited to, the number of personnel who have completed training; operational process changes to promote using plain language; and documentation of amendment requests and responses.

covered document. Any document that is necessary for obtaining any federal government benefit or service, 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. Does not include a regulation.

documents. All written documents, including websites and official communications, created by DoD personnel that require user(s) to understand and/or implement the information they contain.

OSD Component. One of the offices that compose OSD whose principal reports directly to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense.

plain language. Language that is clear, concise, well-organized, and consistent with other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience. Such language avoids jargon, redundancy, ambiguity, and obscurity.

user. Any reader of a document or covered document who needs information in the document or covered document to perform their work duties, obtain a federal government benefit or service, obtain information about a federal government benefit or service, or comply with a requirement the federal government administers or enforces.