



## DoD INSTRUCTION 5025.13

### DoD PLAIN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

---

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Originating Component:</b> | Office of the Performance Improvement Officer and Director of Administration and Management  |
| <b>Effective:</b>             | January 23, 2020   |
| <b>Change 2 Effective:</b>    | February 9, 2024   |
| <b>Releasability:</b>         | Cleared for public release. Available on the Directives Division Website at <a href="https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/">https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/</a> .  |
| <b>Reissues and Cancels:</b>  | DoD Instruction 5025.13, "DoD Plain Language Program," April 11, 2013, as amended  |
| <b>Cancels:</b>               | Director for 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 |
| <b>Approved by:</b>           | Lisa W. Hershman, Chief Management Officer of the Department of Defense  |
| <b>Change 2 Approved by:</b>  | Jennifer C. Walsh, Performance Improvement Officer and Director of Administration and Management   |

---

**Purpose:** In accordance with the authority in DoD Directive 5105.53 and the January 11, 2021 Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum, this issuance:

- Establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for the DoD Plain Language Program, pursuant to Public Law 111-274 (also known as the "Plain Writing Act of 2010," and referred to in this issuance as the "Plain Writing Act"), and the September 13, 2011 Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum.
- Promotes DoD use of clear, concise, and well-organized language in documents and websites (as defined in this issuance) to effectively communicate with intended audiences. This is in accordance with guidance in the January 21, 2009 Presidential Memorandum and the April 13, 2011 Office of Management and Budget Memorandum.
- Establishes the DoD Plain Language Committee.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| SECTION 1: GENERAL ISSUANCE INFORMATION .....  | 3  |
| 1.1. Applicability. ....   | 3  |
| 1.2. Policy. ....  | 3  |
| 1.3. Summary of Change 2. ....   | 4  |
| SECTION 2: RESPONSIBILITIES.....   | 5  |
| 2.1. Performance Improvement Officer and Director of Administration and Management<br>(PIO/DA&M). .... | 5  |
| 2.2. Director, Washington Headquarters Services (WHS). ....  | 5  |
| 2.3. DoD and OSD Component Heads. ....   | 6  |
| SECTION 3: PROCEDURES .....  | 7  |
| 3.1. Using Plain Language. ....  | 7  |
| 3.2. Training.....   | 10 |
| 3.3. DoD and OSD Component Head Plain Language Contacts.....   | 10 |
| 3.4. DoD Plain Language Committee.....   | 11 |
| 3.5. Compliance Reporting.....   | 11 |
| GLOSSARY .....   | 12 |
| G.1. Acronyms.....   | 12 |
| G.2. Definitions.....  | 12 |
| REFERENCES .....   | 14 |
| TABLES   |    |
| Table 1. Plain Language Concepts.....  | 7  |
| FIGURES  |    |
| Figure 1. Procedures for Users Outside DoD to Request Language Clarification .....                     | 8  |
| Figure 2. Procedures for DoD Personnel to Request Language Clarification .....                         | 9  |

## **SECTION 1: GENERAL ISSUANCE INFORMATION**

### **1.1. APPLICABILITY.**

a. This issuance 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 Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DoD Field Activities, and all other organizational entities within the DoD (referred to collectively in this issuance as the “DoD Components”).

b. The Office of Inspector General of the Department of Defense will serve as a non-voting observer on the DoD Plain Language Committee. The Inspector General of the Department of Defense will determine the appropriate level of involvement or participation so as to not impair the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Defense’s independence.

### **1.2. POLICY.**

a. The DoD:

(1) Implements a plain language program.

(2) Requires DoD personnel to use plain language concepts in its documents and on its websites. Documents and websites requiring technical or specialized language should be as clear and concise as possible.

(3) Maintains the DoD Plain Language Website (referred to in this issuance as “the Website”) at <https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/plainlanguage> 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 on unclear DoD communications in covered documents as defined in this issuance.

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

(6) Publishes an annual report on the Website describing DoD Component compliance efforts in accordance with the Plain Writing Act; the January 21, 2009 Presidential Memorandum; and the April 13, 2011 Office of Management and Budget Memorandum.

b. All DoD personnel who regularly write or edit documents and manage or create content for websites must take plain language training, either via the Website or as described in Section 3 of this issuance. All other DoD personnel are encouraged to take plain language training.

### **1.3. SUMMARY OF CHANGE 2.**

The change to this issuance:

- a. Adds the requirement to follow plain language guidelines in the management of or content creation for websites.
- b. Removes the information collections paragraph in accordance with DoD Instruction 8910.01.
- c. Reinforces records management requirements in accordance with DoD Instruction 5015.02.
- d. Corrects administrative errors and updates references.

## **SECTION 2: RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **2.1. PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT OFFICER AND DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (PIO/DA&M).**

The PIO/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.

### **2.2. DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS SERVICES (WHS).**

Under the authority, direction, and control of the PIO/DA&M, 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) Provide Plain Writing Act requirements, training, and compliance information.
  - (2) Collect amendment requests on DoD covered documents.
  - (3) Publish the DoD Annual Plain Writing Act Compliance Report.
- e. Compiles implementation data for the DoD Annual Plain Writing Act Compliance Report and publishes the report on the Website.
- 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.

### **2.3. DOD AND OSD COMPONENT HEADS.**

The DoD and OSD Component heads:

a. Require the use of plain language concepts in all new or substantially revised documents and websites.

b. Communicate Plain Writing Act requirements throughout their respective Components and oversee compliance.

c. Require Component personnel who regularly write documents and manage or create content for their websites to complete plain language training in accordance with Section 3 of this issuance.

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

(2) Components using contractors to help write documents and manage or create content for their websites will ensure that relevant contracts entered into after the effective date of this issuance include a requirement that employees of the contractor complete plain language training and use plain language when performing those duties.

d. Designate a Component plain language contact to serve as a representative on the DoD Plain Language Committee and implement the procedures in Section 3 of this issuance. Provide written documentation of the designation and any changes in that designation to WHS at [whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil](mailto:whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil).

e. Encourage Component personnel to seek clarification from within their organization, as appropriate, before submitting an amendment request on the Website.

f. Ensure annual reports and documentation cited within this issuance are retained in accordance with the DoD Component records management policies, procedures, and records disposition authorities approved by the National Archives and Records Administration and in accordance with DoD Instruction 5015.02 and Chapters 29, 31, and 33 of Title 44, United States Code.

## SECTION 3: PROCEDURES

### 3.1. USING PLAIN LANGUAGE.

a. When drafting new documents, revising existing ones, or creating or updating websites, DoD personnel will follow the Federal Plain Language Guidelines available at <https://www.plainlanguage.gov>, and use its resources at <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/> as appropriate.

(1) Specialized language may be required depending on the intended audience, but language and document or website organization should be as clear as possible.

(2) DoD personnel may also use the DoD Brand Guide at <https://www.defense.gov/Brand-Guide/> or the DoD Visual Style Guide at <https://www.dimoc.mil/VI-Training/DoD-VI-Style-Guide/>, as appropriate.

b. Key concepts of plain language to keep in mind are noted in Table 1.

**Table 1. Plain Language Concepts**

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Be Clear    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use plain language whenever possible; avoid jargon</li><li>• Avoid overuse of acronyms (if used, make certain they are established upon first use)</li><li>• Use the active voice</li><li>• Organize and filter information with readers' needs in mind</li><li>• Format the document so that it's easy to read and understand</li><li>• Use tables or figures if that's the best way to show information</li></ul> |
| Be Concise  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove unnecessary words</li><li>• Write sentences with 20 words or fewer and that contain a single thought, action, etc.</li><li>• Use seven sentences or fewer per paragraph</li></ul>  |
| Be Specific | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include only information that the reader must know</li><li>• Use words with precise meaning</li><li>• Include details that are directly relevant to the main point</li></ul>  |

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

Figure 1. Procedures for Users Outside DoD to Request Language Clarification

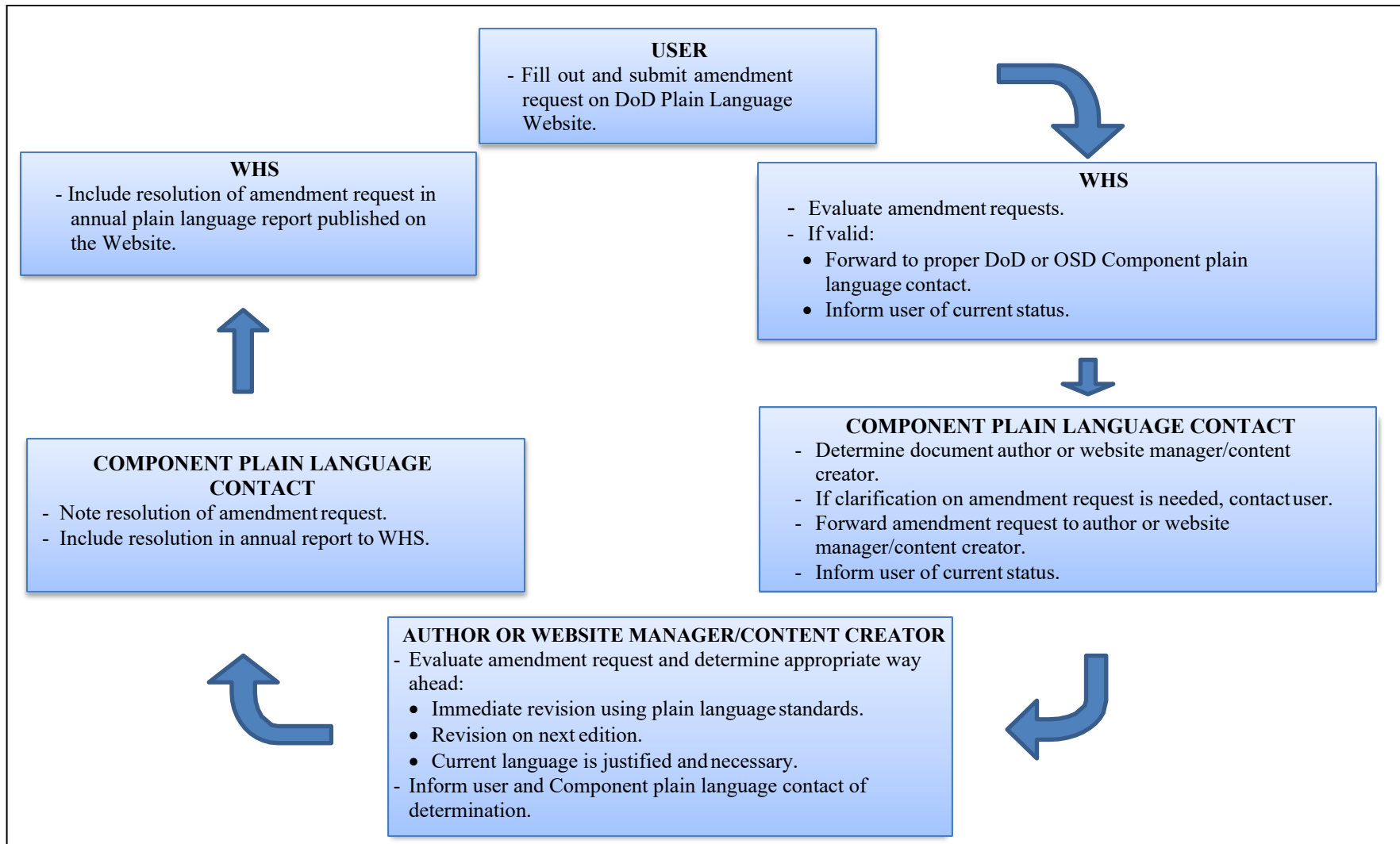
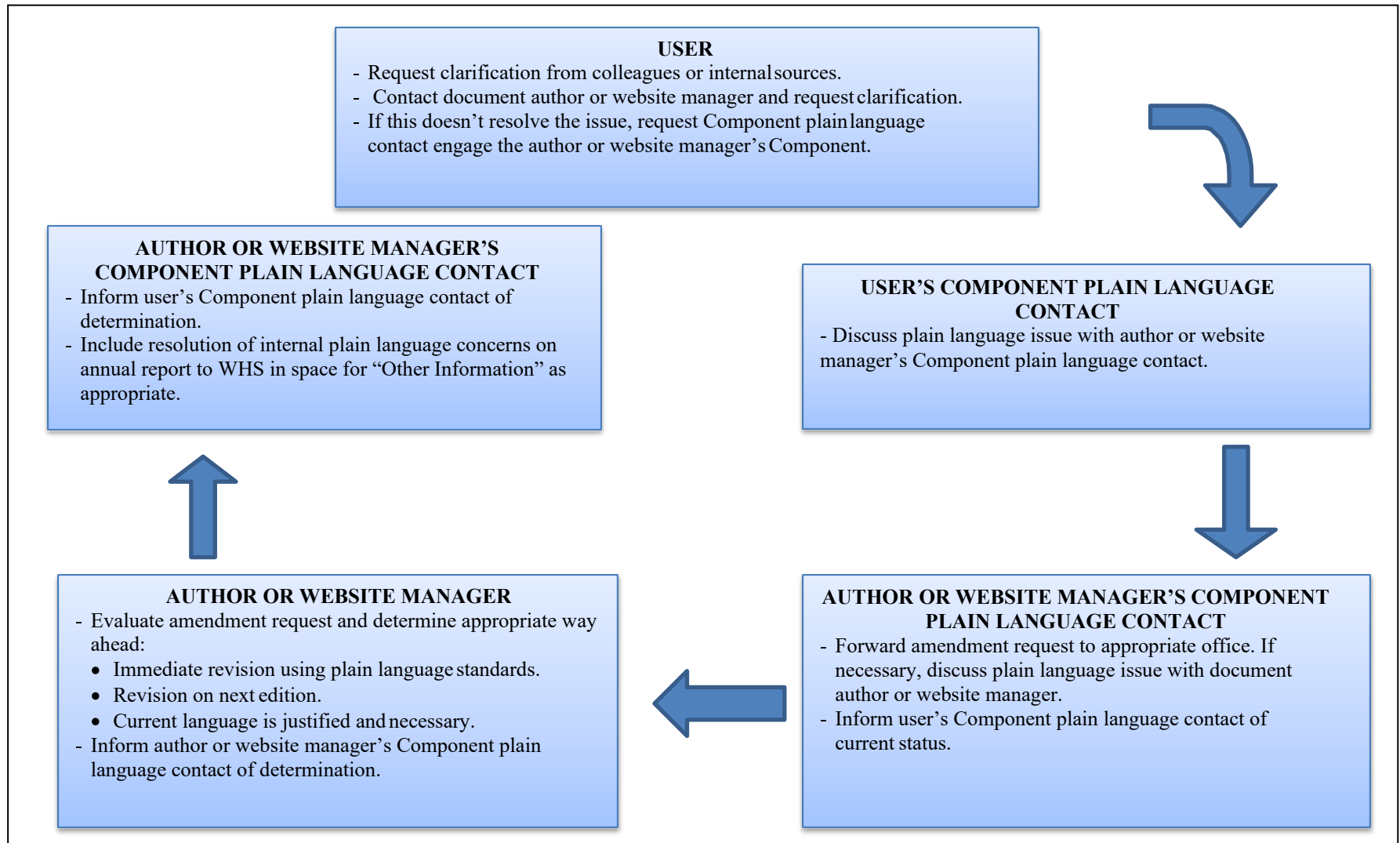




Figure 2. Procedures for DoD Personnel to Request Language Clarification



### **3.2. TRAINING.**

a. DoD and OSD Components are responsible for training their personnel. The Military Departments are responsible for ensuring that periodic, annual, or institutional training programs prepare their respective Service members to contribute successfully while assigned to the Joint Staff and Combatant Commands. When assigned to the Joint Staff and Combatant Commands, Service members will be guided by and responsive to the writing guidelines and staff processes of their assigned staff or command. The Components may use training already available to them if it addresses aspects of plain language. At a minimum, training information must address the concepts listed in Table 1.

b. DoD personnel who regularly write and edit documents and manage or create content for websites must take plain language training upon beginning their assignment. All other DoD personnel are encouraged to take plain language training. All DoD personnel are encouraged to refresh their training annually.

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

### **3.3. DOD AND OSD COMPONENT HEAD PLAIN LANGUAGE CONTACTS.**

DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts will:

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

b. Identify Component personnel who regularly write or edit documents and manage or create content for websites, ensuring they receive plain language training.

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

(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 or website manager or content creator to respond to the user or Component plain language contact concerned as quickly as possible with the decision reached in Paragraph 3.3.c.(2) of this issuance.

d. Work with Component personnel to improve communication efforts.

e. Approve and submit annually required information as described in Paragraph 3.5. of this issuance.

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

### **3.4. DOD PLAIN LANGUAGE COMMITTEE.**

- a. The Director, WHS, or a representative, chairs the Committee.
- 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 annually, 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.

### **3.5. COMPLIANCE REPORTING.**

- a. DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts must prepare annual compliance information (see Glossary) using the DD Form 2960, available on the Website.
- b. Examples of information to be reported include:
  - (1) For covered documents and websites:
    - (a) Number of amendment requests received.
    - (b) Number of amendment requests resolved.
    - (c) Number of amendment requests denied and the justification for those denials.
    - (d) Status and number of amendment requests still outstanding.
  - (2) Verification that the OSD or DoD Component complies with training requirements in accordance with Paragraph 2.3.c. of this issuance.
- c. DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts must submit DD Form 2960 no later than March 15 of each year to [whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil](mailto:whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil). DD Form 2960 will record compliance information gathered from the previous calendar year (January through December).
- d. WHS will compile and publish the DoD Annual Plain Writing Act Compliance Report on the Website. It will be published annually by April 13 in accordance with the September 13, 2011 Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum.

## GLOSSARY

### G.1. ACRONYMS.

| ACRONYM  | MEANING   |
|----------|---|
| DD       | Department of Defense (form)  |
| PIO/DA&M | Performance Improvement Officer and Director of Administration and Management |
| WHS      | Washington Headquarters Services  |

### G.2. DEFINITIONS.

These terms and their definitions are for the purpose of this issuance.

| TERM  | DEFINITION   |
|---|--|
| <b>amendment request</b>                              | Any inquiry from a user requesting that a covered document or website be changed or revised using plain language.  |
| <b>compliance information</b>                         | Any information demonstrating efforts towards implementation of and compliance with the Plain Writing Act. May include, but is not limited to, the number of personnel who have completed training; operational process changes to promote the use of plain language; and documentation of amendment requests and responses.           |
| <b>covered document</b>                               | Any document or publicly accessible website 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. |
| <b>document</b>                                       | A written document, including official communications, created by DoD personnel that requires user(s) to understand and implement the information it contains.   |
| <b>DoD Annual Plain Writing Act Compliance Report</b> | A comprehensive report, required by the Plain Writing Act, that is annually published on the Website. It documents DoD compliance information and ongoing implementation efforts.  |
| <b>DoD and OSD Component plain language contacts</b>  | An individual selected by their Component head to be responsible for overseeing Component implementation efforts and compliance with   |

| <b>TERM</b>           | <b>DEFINITION</b>  |
|-----------------------|--|
|                       | the Plain Writing Act, and to serve as the Component’s Plain Language Committee representative.  |
| <b>DoD personnel</b>  | All DoD civilian employees and Service members.  |
| <b>OSD Component</b>  | One of the offices that compose OSD whose principal reports directly to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense.  |
| <b>plain language</b> | 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.  |
| <b>user</b>           | Any reader of a document or covered document or user of a website who needs information in the document, covered document, or website 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. |
| <b>website</b>        | A publicly accessible or internal website maintained by a DoD Component that requires user(s) to understand and implement the information it contains.   |

## REFERENCES

- Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Implementation of Public Law 111-274, the ‘Plain Writing Act of 2010,’ in the DoD,” September 13, 2011
- Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Re-establishment of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Oversight and the Director of Administration and Management,” January 11, 2021
- DoD Directive 5105.53, “Director of Administration and Management (DA&M),” February 26, 2008
- DoD Instruction 5015.02, “DoD Records Management Program,” February 24, 2015, as amended
- DoD Instruction 8910.01, “DoD Implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act,” December 5, 2022
- Office of Management and Budget Memorandum, “Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010,” April 13, 2011
- Presidential Memorandum, “Transparency and Open Government,” January 21, 2009
- Public Law 111-274, “Plain Writing Act of 2010,” October 13, 2010
- United States Code, Title 44