

Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles



In March 2007, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles finalized its Plain Language Plan. The plan includes a review of all written communications and a guideline and process for the review. The Department reviewed a total of 1,974 documents in 2007 with plain language edits made as necessary. The Department also uses a Plain Language review for all external documents.

Training

The Department now incorporates Plain Language training in two member classes. The first, New Member Orientation is an instructor-led module for all new employees. The second is our basic supervision class, Super*Vision, a requirement for all new supervisors. This class covers active voice, passive voice, a Plain Language Checklist and the use of Microsoft Word to check readability statistics. The class instructs supervisors to write in plain language and to encourage their members to use it in communications with customers, both in writing and verbally.

2008 Training Statistics

Number of Members completing New Member Orientation	101
Number of Members completing Super*Vision	51

Education

The Department e-mails a bi-weekly newsletter to all members entitled *HSMV Hi-Lights*. The publication includes information from the Executive Director and other news of interest to members. The Department includes Plain Language tips to remind members of the importance of communicating with our customers in a way they can understand. Examples include:

Open Government: *This week Governor Charlie Crist released an annual report of Plain Language Initiatives and also celebrated open, transparent government. "I applaud our employees for their effort and enthusiasm for the Plain Language Initiative and ensuring that the people of Florida have uncomplicated access to the information they need," said Governor Crist. "Our commitment to communicate clearly and concisely is not only a one-year project. Instead, understandable communication is vital to our mission to embrace a culture of high quality customer service within state government." At DHSMV, our job in plain language is not done. Please take a few minutes to review our DHSMV Plain Language Handbook. Good communication with our customers is essential!*

Plain Language Tidbit: *Hidden or weak verbs can be found in sentences in the form of "to be," "to make" or "to have." As you change nouns to verbs, your writing becomes more vigorous and less abstract. Some examples include:*

Before After

We made an application
We made a determination
We will make a distribution

We applied
We determined
We distributed

Plain Language Tidbit: *Limit the use of acronyms. In this day of text and instant messaging, we are often looking for ways to shorten our communications. However, it is frustrating to readers when they read and hear acronyms they are not familiar with. We use them so frequently ourselves we assume everyone must know their meaning. However, this is not always true.*

Plain Language Tidbit: *Positive sentences are shorter and easier to understand than their negative counterparts. For example:*

Before: Persons other than the graduates may not sit in the auditorium.

After: Only the graduates may sit in the auditorium.

Plain Language Tip:

Words are unnecessary when they can be replaced with fewer words that mean the same thing. Sometimes you can use a simpler word for these phrases:

<i>unnecessary</i>	<i>simpler</i>
<i>in order to</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>in the event that</i>	<i>if</i>
<i>subsequent to</i>	<i>after</i>
<i>prior to</i>	<i>before</i>
<i>despite the fact that</i>	<i>although</i>
<i>because of the fact that</i>	<i>because, since</i>
<i>in light of</i>	<i>because, since</i>
<i>owing to the fact that</i>	<i>because, since</i>

Plain Language Tip: *This week's tip takes us to Governor Crist's Plain Language website. Here are great examples of real life state agency before and after plain language efforts.*

Plain Language Tip: *The Federal Government has a great site on Plain Language. Take a minute and review <http://www.plainlanguage.gov> for some good information (as well as some humorous examples) on how to improve your communication through plain language.*

The Department will finalize a communications manual in early 2009. The manual incorporates the Plain Language guidelines already in use and expands them with other directives to make communicating with our customers more effective.

Awards

As part of our plan, we incorporate use of plain language standards in the Department's award program. The Department's ABCD Award (Above and Beyond the Call of Duty) is for each Division to honor any deserving member for exemplary performance. Any member may nominate another for an ABCD Award. The ABCD Award criteria directly relates to our agency's core values (Service, Integrity, Courtesy, Professionalism, Innovation and Excellence.)

We presented one ABCD award to a member who assisted in working on a database to make certain letters were in plain language format. The nomination reads:

*Kim's computer knowledge/savvy was an immediate help to our section upon her rejoining us in August of 2005. On many occasions she has been called to assist other members with computer issues which has greatly helped our section to keep on functioning without bothering ISA. She has recently **volunteered to learn the in's and out's of our MedRev Database by working closely with Deb Berlinger. This alone has helped our section in continuing to operate smoothly with the updating of our letters on our database to the plain language format.** I personally feel that she has been asked to do projects that are well outside of her normal realm of responsibility and has done so willingly to benefit the section.*

Future Efforts

The Department recognizes that Plain Language training and efforts are a continuous effort and priority. Department managers lead the way by ensuring that communication from their members is Plain Language compliant. We have made tremendous strides in limiting our use of acronyms and using Plain Language principles in all Department press releases, website material and other publications. We will continue to use regular publications, training and our website as tools to educate our members regarding the use of plain language. Additionally, we look forward to reviewing other agencies efforts and adopting their best practices.