Brief Timeline of Plain Language Movement

1950's John O'Hayre, an employee of the federal Bureau of Land Management, writes the book *Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go*.

1970's President Nixon issues executive orders that the Federal Register needs to be written in laymen's terms.

Citibank rewrites a 99-word promissory note in plain language, reducing it to this: "*You can delay enforcing any of your rights under this note without losing them.*" The motive for taking this action was to save money and reduce litigation in small claims courts by people who couldn't understand the promissory notes. The effort was successful.

1978 President Carter issues orders to write federal regulations that are cost-effective and easy to understand.

1980's President Reagan rescinds President Carter's orders. Some agencies work independently to rewrite rules in plain language. Law professors start promoting plain language principles.

1991 8 states have passed Plain English laws.

1998 President Clinton revives plain language as a major government initiative and assigns Vice President Gore to encourage this initiative. President Clinton issues a Presidential Memorandum that formalizes the requirement for federal employees to write in plain language, requiring all new regulations to be written clearly by January 1, 1999.

"By using plain language, we send a clear message about what the government is doing, what it requires, and what services it offers…. Plain language documents have logical organization; common, everyday words, except for necessary technical terms; 'you' and other pronouns; the active voice; and short sentences."

1998 SEC issues the *Plain English Handbook*.

2008 Congress passes the "Plain Language in Government Communications Act".

2010 President Obama signs the "Plain Writing Act of 2010", which requires federal government to write documents in Plain Language.