

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.