

Congruency of
***Writing to Get Things Done*® and**
***Federal Plain Language.gov* Training Mandate**

BLUF

Recommendation

Schedule *Writing to Get Things Done*® (WGTD) with your group to comply with the *Federal Plain Language* training mandate and to give them communication skills necessary for successful leadership in getting things done.

Conclusion

The *Writing to Get Things Done*® (WGTD) class not only meets the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*, but surpasses them in many critical ways.

Summary

WGTD Meets Federal Plain Language Guidelines:

1. The purpose of *WGTD* and the *Plain Language* initiative is identical.
2. The content of *WGTD* matches the content and guidelines of *Plain Language*.
3. My expertise in improving government writing skills is extensive.

WGTD Surpasses Federal Plain Language Guidelines:

1. *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* textbook's focus is on writing clear regulations, which hasn't changed over the past 20 years, whereas *WGTD*'s focus is on writing the kinds of documents federal employees most often write on the job.
2. *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* textbook offers the use of headings as the only model of organization, whereas *WGTD* offers three models of organization depending on the length of the document.
3. *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* textbook is a 120 page text, whereas *WGTD* has three workbooks totally over 300 pages.
4. *WGTD* is a learning and development process, not a training event, and includes pre-seminar and post-seminar support so students can use their new writing skills throughout their careers in the federal government.

The following pages discuss this **Summary** in the same order and in more detail.

DISCUSSION

How *WGTD* Meets *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*

1.) The purpose of *WGTD* and the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* initiative is identical.

The focus of *Writing to Get Things Done*® is to teach federal government professionals to use writing as a tool for getting things done. *WGTD* has cultivated many United States Navy “before and after” documents that demonstrate the difference between writing to get things done and the academic writing that people learn in English classes.

This focus on writing to get things done is also the intent of the *Federal Plain Language* training mandate. Its Website states, “Clarity [of purpose] matters....Researchers have learned people often read and “use” information because they *want to get a job done*....That’s especially important for those of us who work in or with the federal government. Our *performance* matters. We *perform* better—we understand and *accomplish* more—when information is structured so we can find *what we want to do*.” (Italics added for emphasis.) See

[Http://www.plainlanguage.gov/populartopics/index.cfm](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/populartopics/index.cfm).

2.) The content of *WGTD* matches the content and guidelines of the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*. *WGTD* teaches all of the 36 writing skills (excluding Web-based design) that are listed in the *Federal Plain Language* Table of Contents. Also, the *WGTD* course objectives are congruent with this Table of Contents. See

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/TOC.cfm>.

***WGTD* Course Objectives**

The skills/concepts/models of *WGTD* teach people to present ideas clearly in all government communications, regardless of length or medium, including emails, letters, memos, reports, technical documentation, voice messages, and verbal presentations.

Participants learn to:

- Clarify thoughts before writing.
- Separate the readers’ needs from the writer’s needs.
- Use the inverted-pyramid principle of organization.
- Use a listing paragraph format to highlight key ideas.
- Use paragraph unity and coherence to simplify complex data.
- Make the organization apparent with multiple-level headings.
- Use the language of getting things done vs. business speak.
- Develop a professional tone that encourages cooperation.
- Use our three models of organization for all government writing.
- Write technical information to non-technical people.
- Organize the document in a logical, sequential manner.
- Edit for correct grammar usage.

3.) My expertise in improving federal government writing skills is extensive. Upon completing my graduate work at Yale University, I authored five books on business communication that I've been using in my corporate and government seminars with over 100,000 graduates.

- Since 1975 I have taught writing classes at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Social Security Administration and many city and county governments.
- Since 2006 I have taught over 150 *WGTD* classes at 35 U.S. Navy installations around the world. See <http://www.berrywritinggroup.com/u-s-military-clients/> for locations and <http://www.berrywritinggroup.com/u-s-department-of-defense-testimonials/> for verbatim comments from Navy seminar evaluations.

How *WGTD* Surpasses *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*

First, *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* textbook began in the mid-90s with the focus on writing clear regulations, and it hasn't changed much over the past 20 years, whereas *WGTD*'s focus in on the kinds of documents people most often write on the job, such as emails, letters, memos, reports and procedures. The Plain Language Guidelines Textbook, Revision 1 May 2011, states:

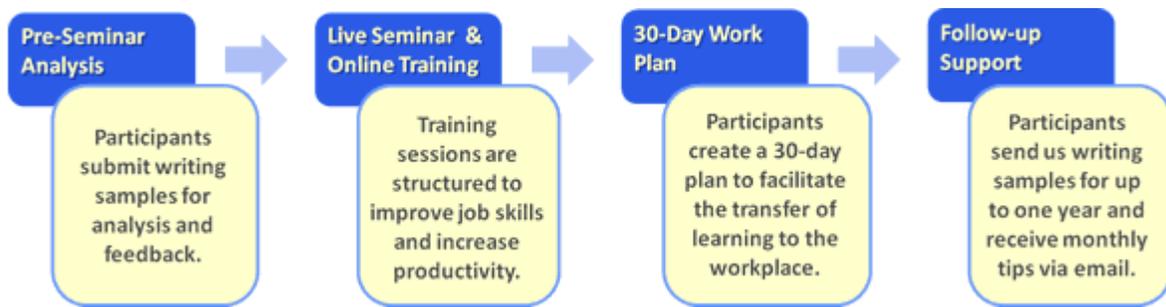
- “When we first wrote this document, we were primarily interested in regulations.” (*Introduction* on Page 1)
- “We have not made any substantive changes in revision. We fixed the footer, corrected a few misspelled words, and modified our choice of words to be more concise.” (*Revision 1 Changes* on Page 2)

Second, *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* textbook offers the use of headings as the only model of organization, which is great for regulations, whereas *WGTD* offers three models of organization depending on the length of the document. These three models fit every writing situation and makes writing—and reading—clear, simple and quick, regardless of the length and kind of document.

Third, *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* textbook is a 120 page workbook, whereas *WGTD* has three workbooks that I wrote and have been updating since 1976:

- *Writing to Get Thing Done* is a 118 page book.
- *Taming the Wild Grammar Beastie* is a 71 page book.
- *Writing Clear Policy and Procedures* is a 210 page book.

Fourth, *WGTD* is a learning and development process, not a training event, and includes pre-seminar and post-seminar support for the participants. This process has these critical learning and development components:



These supports are critical components that help students transfer their new writing skills to their particular on-the-job writing tasks. They also enhance the learning curve so students can continue to use their new skills throughout their careers in the federal government. Upon course completion, participants perfect their new writing skills with these learning activities:

- Send me post-seminar writing samples for feedback.
- Share weekly feedback with their learning buddy.
- Keep their WGTD Skill Card near their computer for easy reference.
- Execute their 30-day Work Plan near the back of their workbook.
- Reinforce new writing skills from our monthly *Writing Tips*.

For further discussion, contact:

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