Restructuring plainlanguage.gov

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HF740, WINTER 2016

The Story

In 1996, plainlanguage.gov was created was created by the PLAIN organization.

In Fall of 2002, Thom Haller, a **professor** teaching **information architecture,** decided to use the website as a student project at Johns Hopkins University. The students decided the website needed **additional content** to accommodate users. The updated website was launched in 2005.

At the end of his article, Haller explains that “Like all Web products, this one has opportunities for progressive improvement.” I certainly agree.

http://www.plainlanguage.gov/site/aboutArticle.cfm

Business Goals

Increase adoption of plain language by more government agencies

Have plainlanguage.gov become the trusted source for copywriters and lawyers to find information about plain language

Increase global understanding of the purpose and mission of plain language and its benefits to society

Design Goals

Reorganize the website's content to provide a more intuitive structure that improves findability of the website's wide range of functionality and content

Redesign the home page so that users can quickly see the scope of resources available and find information relevant to their needs.

Implement current design patterns to make the website intuitive and consistent

Standardize the layout and navigation between sections of the website

Scope

~~**Original Scope**~~

~~Entire Website~~

Revised Scope

Primary & Secondary Structure

Homepage & Primary Layouts

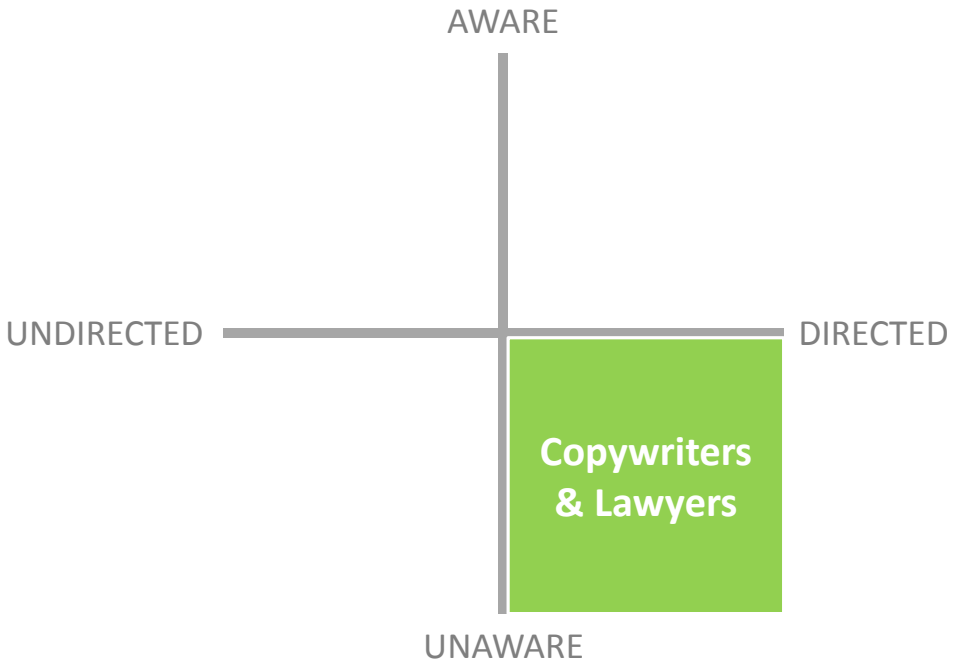
Personas

Copywriters

Looking to understand more about Plain Language

Lawyers

Looking for how Plain Language applies to their occupation and the law in general



Content Audit – Major Issues

Findability (Poor)

- Website Architecture and Navigation hide content from users
- “Search” function is broken (no results are ever shown)
- Links on the rig

Accuracy (Poor)

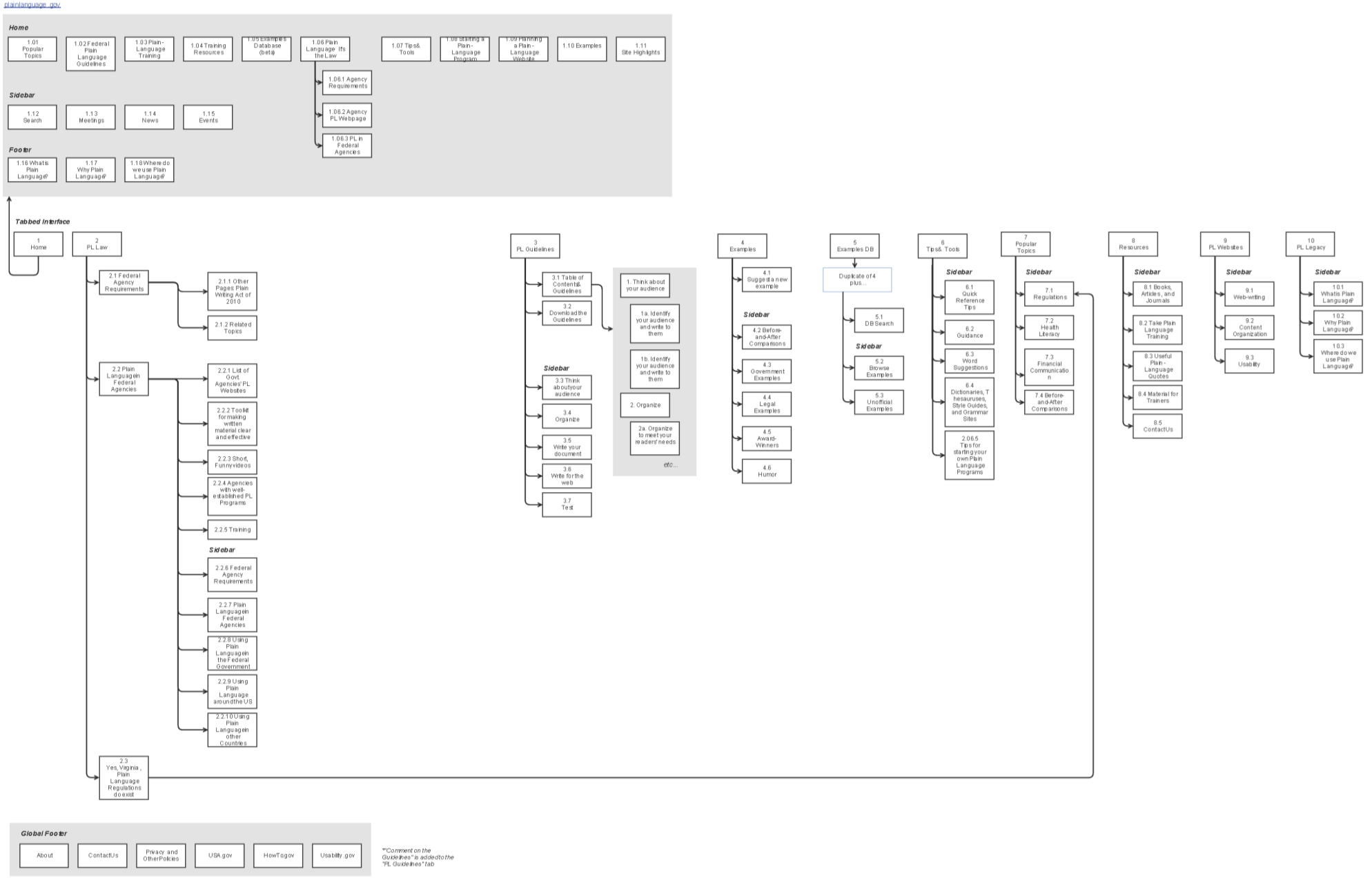
- The event displayed on the homepage is over 2 years old
- The last revision of the Plain Language guidelines was in 2011
- Many links (e.g. all on “examples” page) result in a 404

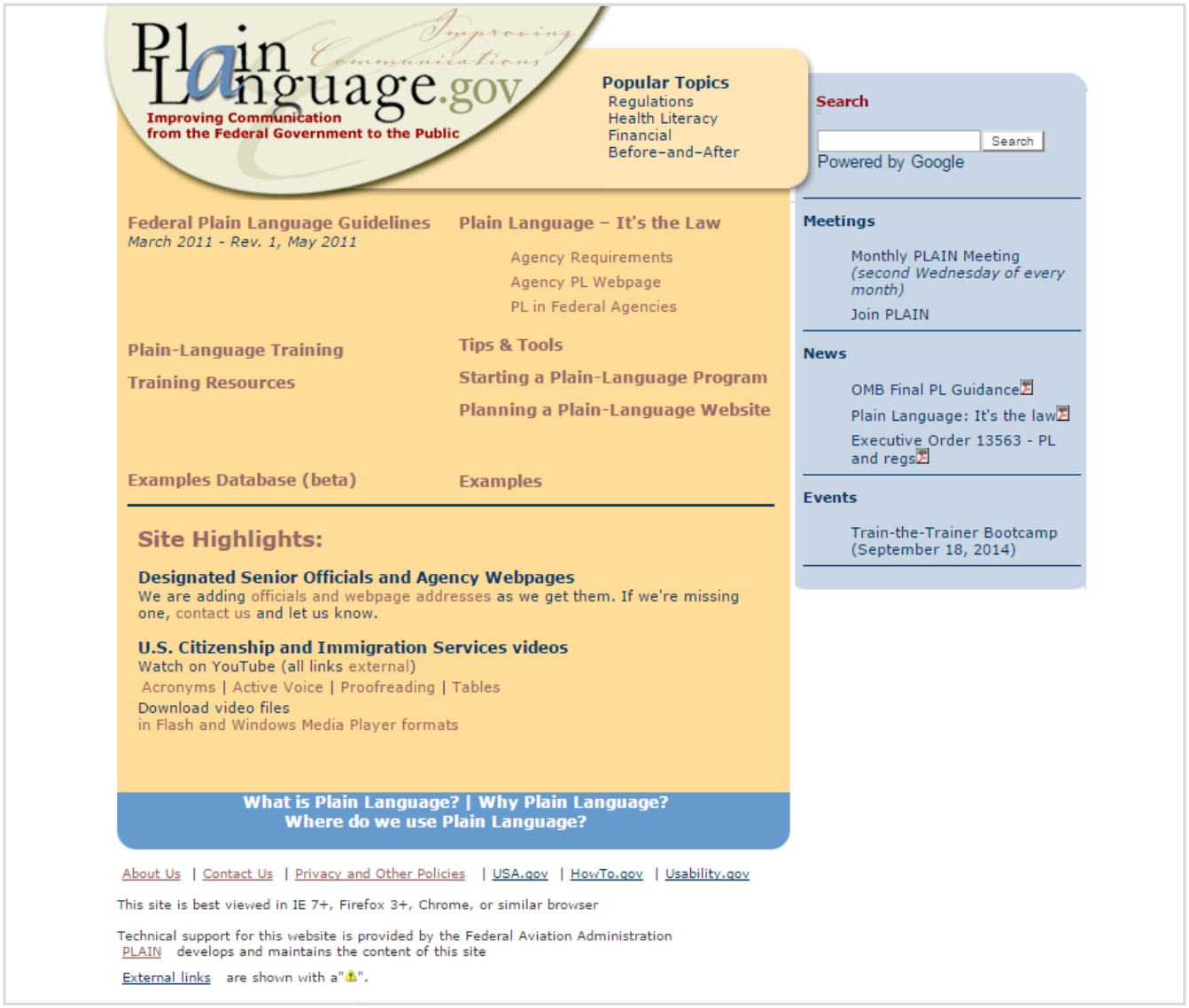
Usability (Below Average)

- Links are presented within long sentences and paragraphs, inhibiting “information scent” and skimming
- Content that should be on one page is split into multiple pages
- More apparent headers and accurate breadcrumbs could assist in wayfinding

Full content audit in the appendix

Current Site Map





Current Homepage

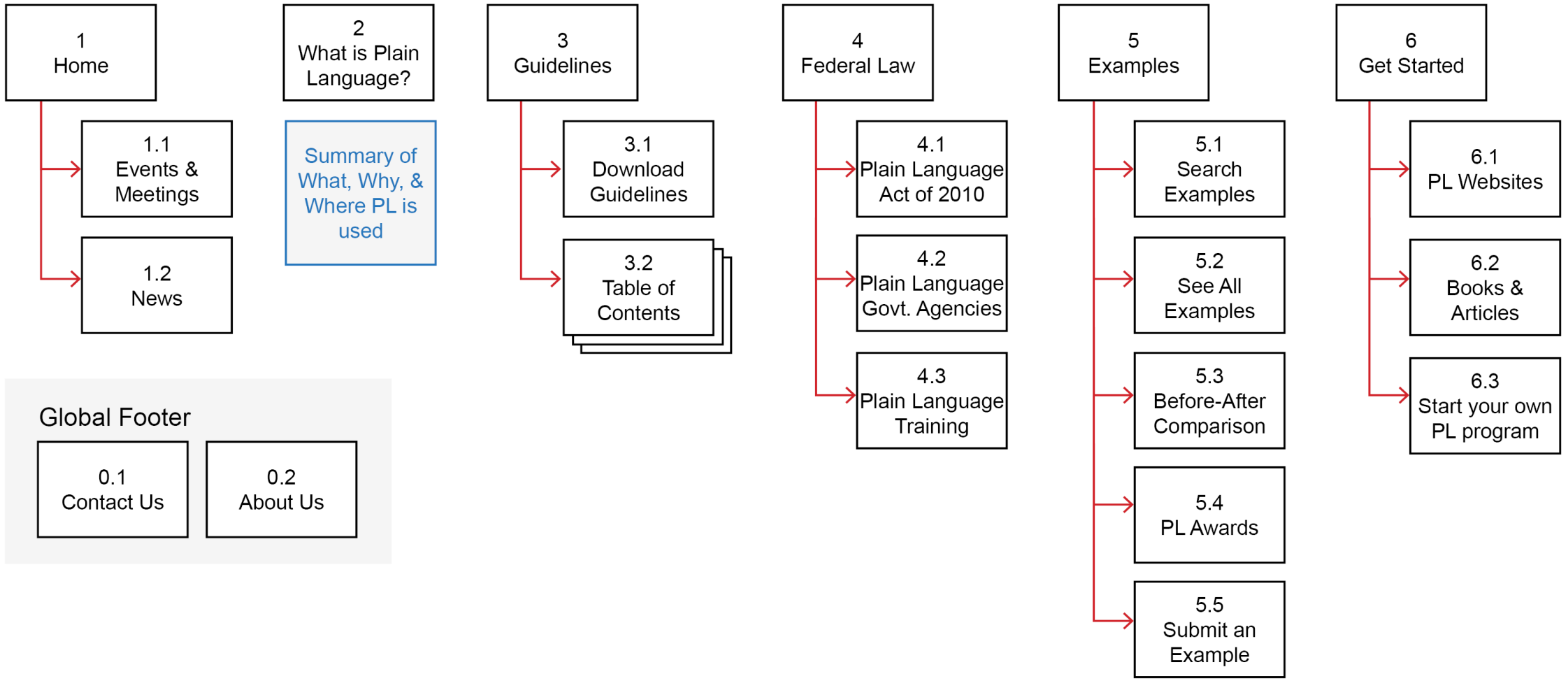
Current Primary-Level Page

Current Secondary-Level Page

New Site Map

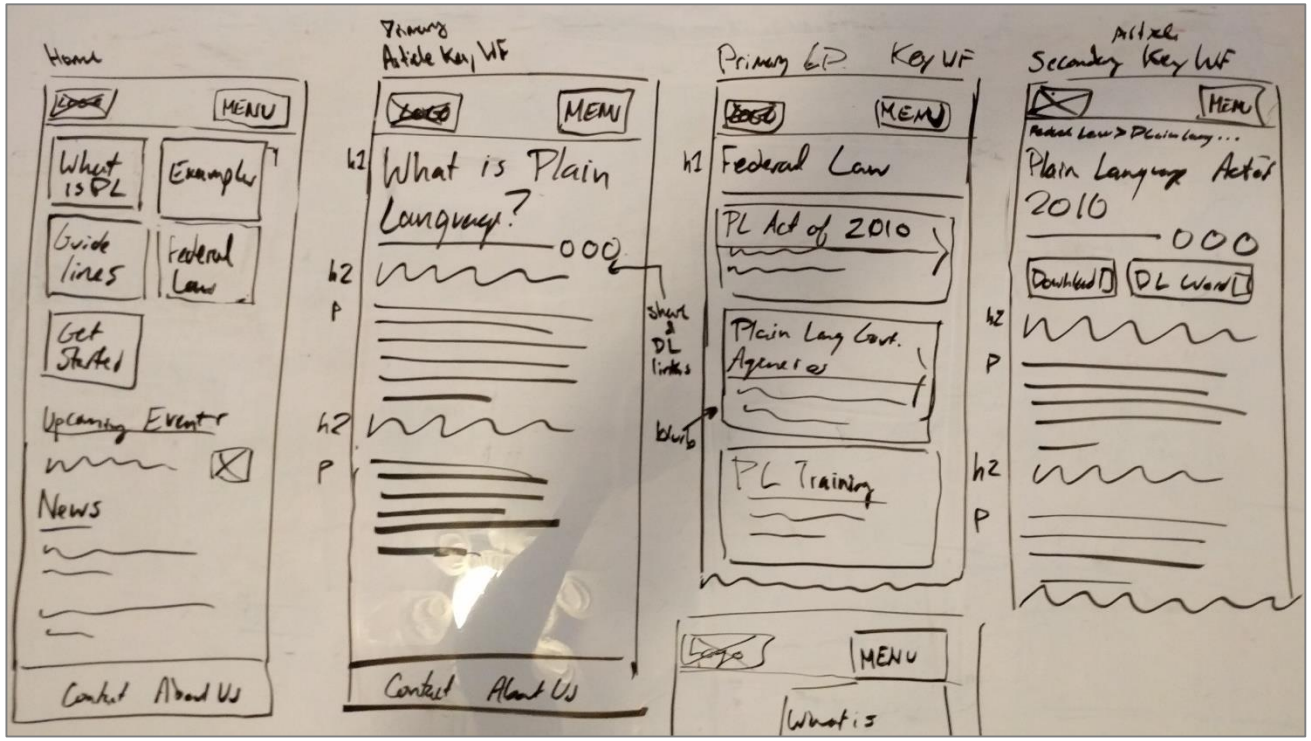
- Eliminates unnecessary pages that don't meet business goals (e.g. "Popular Topics," "Useful Plain Language Quotes," "Usability," "HowTo.gov," "Short, Funny Videos", and more)
- Restructured the architecture so the homepage lies on the primary level with other important primary categories
- Rather than supplying information in tertiary links, important content is pushed to primary pages, using the wireframe template provided.
- The new categories were extrapolated from the personas and probable use cases of the website

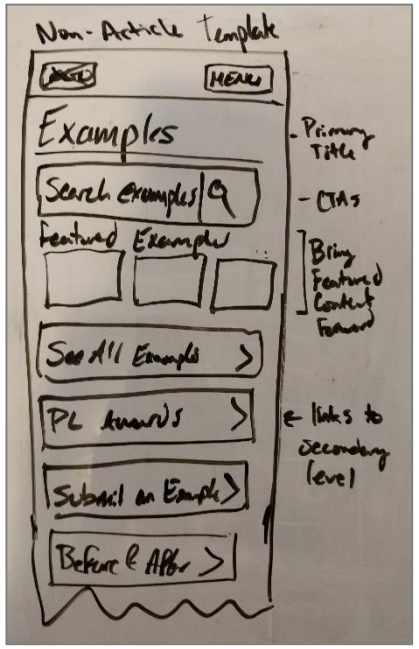
New Site Map

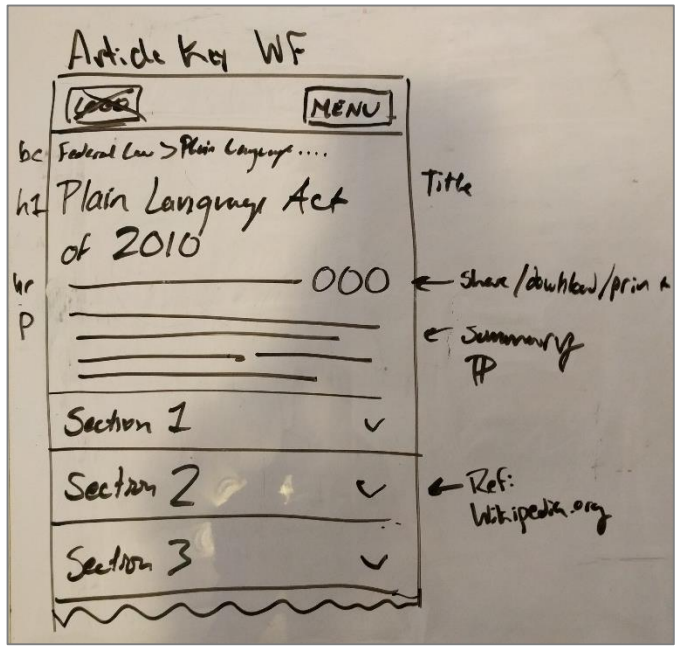

1
Home
1.1
Events &
Meetings
1.2
News
2
What is Plain
Language?
Summary of
What, Why, &
Where PL is
used
3
Guidelines
3.1
Download
Guidelines
3.2
Table of
Contents
4
Federal Law
4.1
Plain Language
Act of 2010
4.2
Plain Language
Govt. Agencies
4.3
Plain Language
Training
5
Examples
5.1
Search
Examples
5.2
See All
Examples
5.3
Before-After
Comparison
5.4
PL Awards
5.5
Submit an
Example
6
Get Started
6.1
PL Websites
6.2
Books &
Articles
6.3
Start your own
PL program
Global Footer
0.1
Contact Us
0.2
About Us

Wireframes

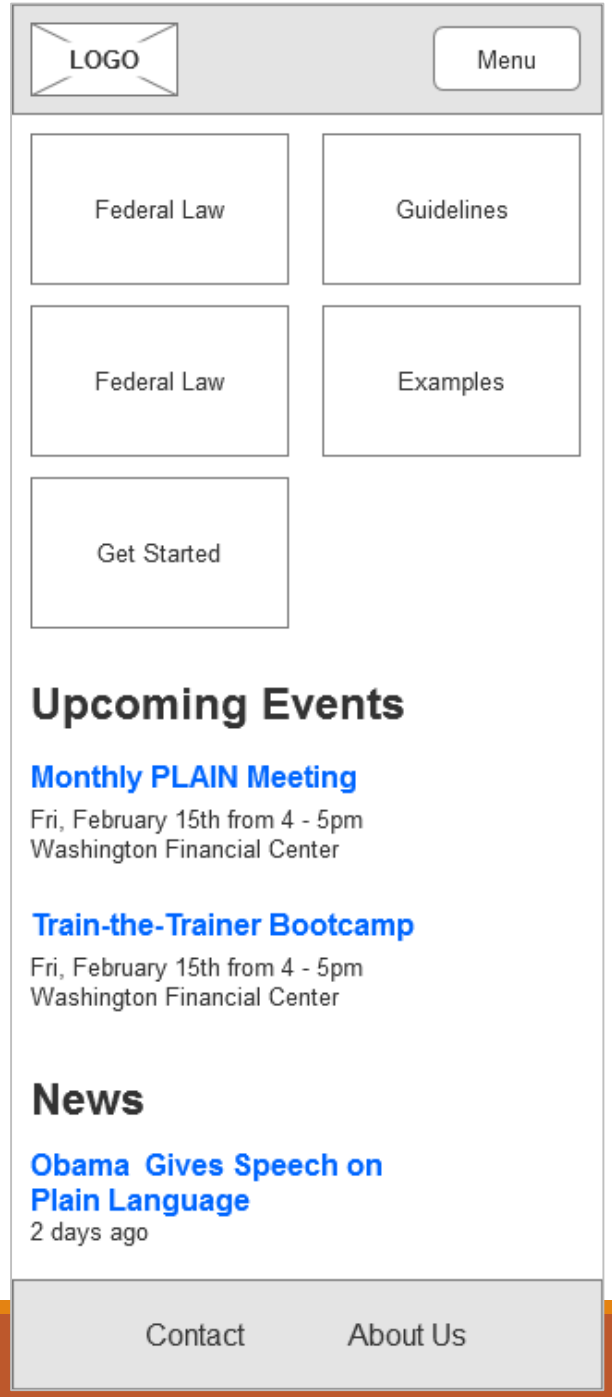
- In order to create a simple interface, I took a mobile-first approach to designing the wireframes
- The revised wireframes include these templates:
  - Home page
  - Primary landing page (with links to secondary articles)
  - “Examples” page
  - Article Template

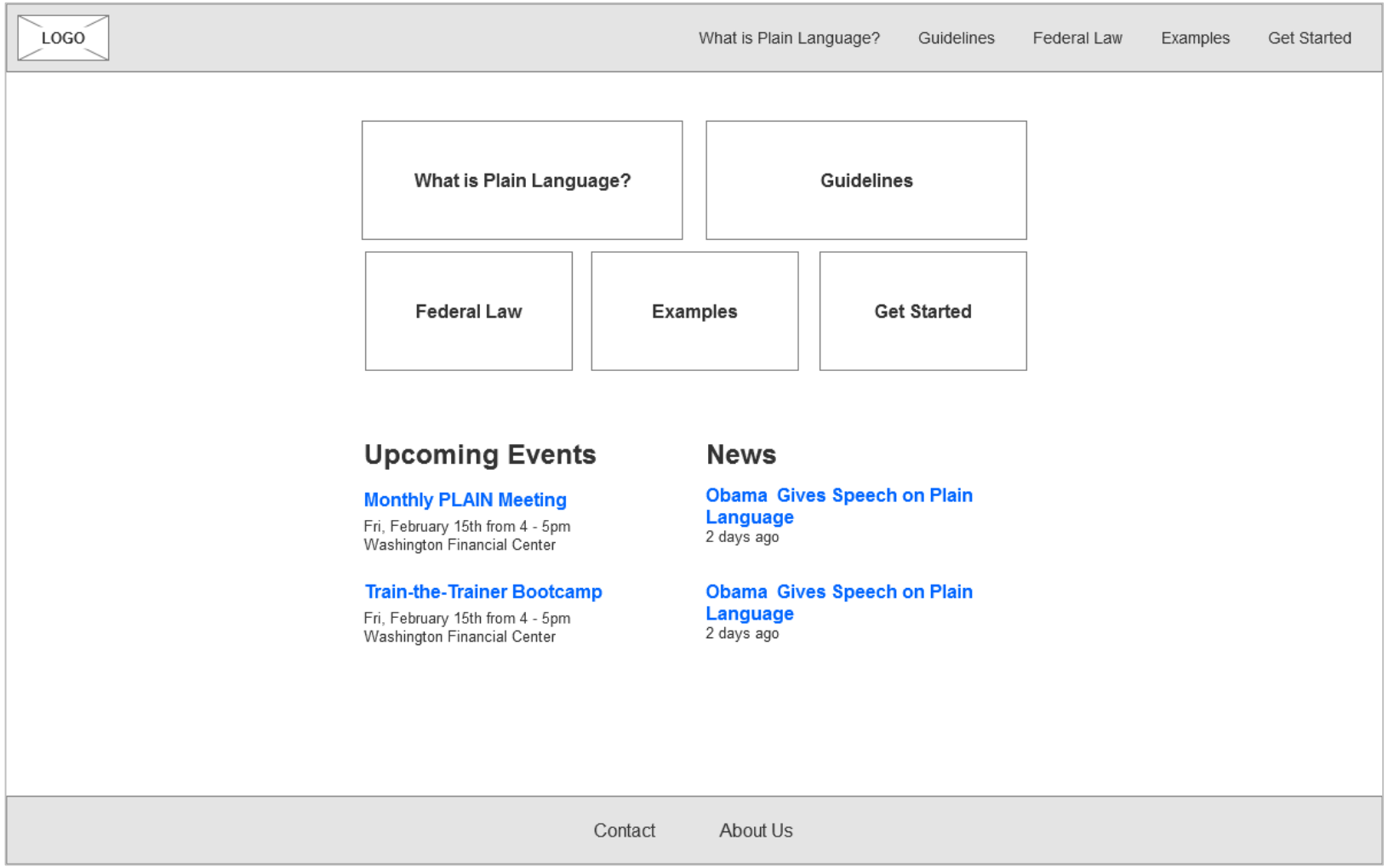


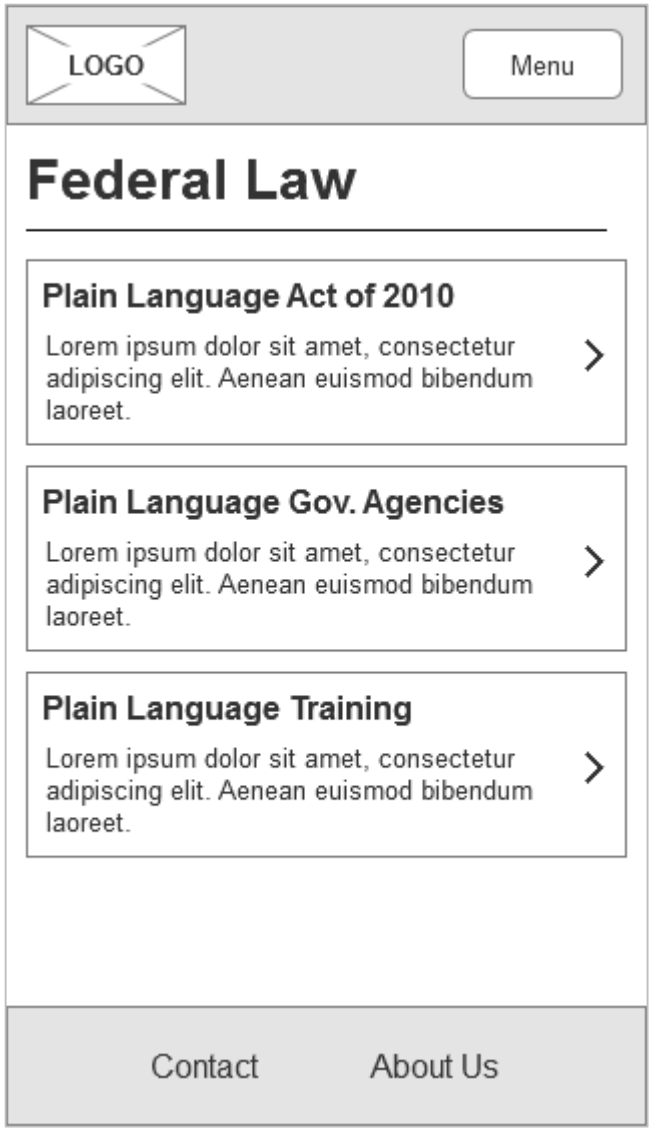




Homepage Wireframe






LOGO
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Federal Law
Plain Language Act of 2010
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Plain Language Gov. Agencies
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Plain Language Training
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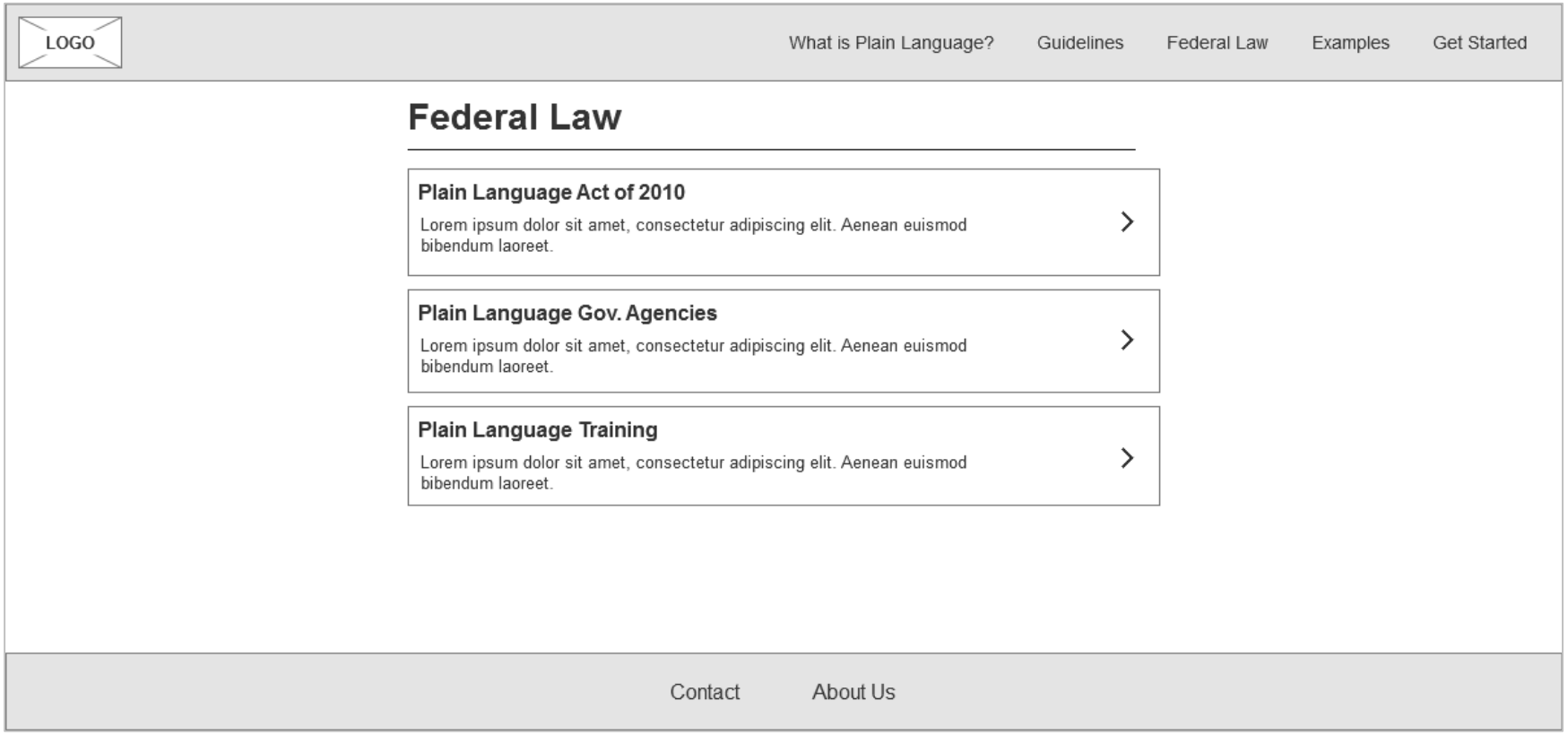
About Us


LOGO
What is Plain Language?
Guidelines
Federal Law
Examples
Get Started
Federal Law
Plain Language Act of 2010
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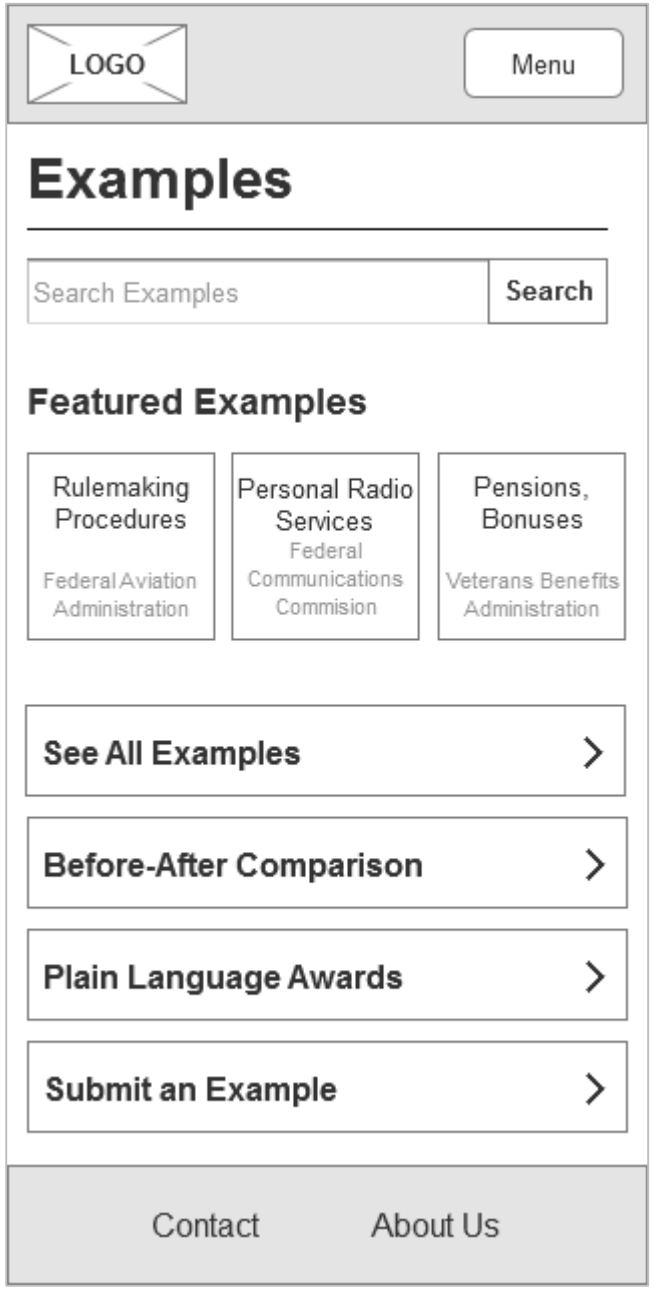
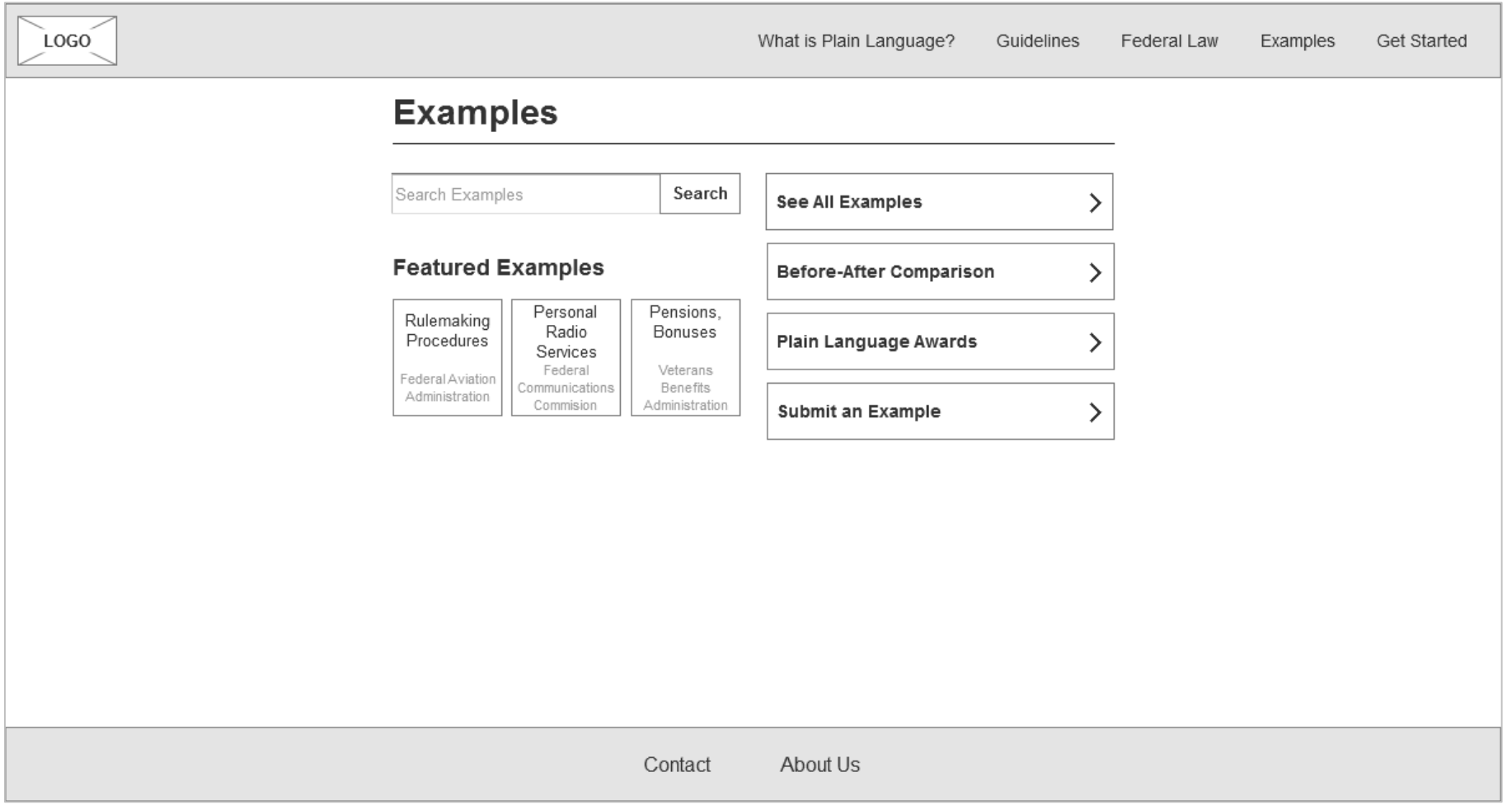

LOGO
Menu
Examples
Search Examples
Search
Featured Examples
Rulemaking Procedures
Federal Aviation Administration
Personal Radio Services
Federal Communications Commision
Pensions, Bonuses
Veterans Benefits Administration
See All Examples
Before-After Comparison
Plain Language Awards
Submit an Example
Contact
About Us


LOGO
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Get Started
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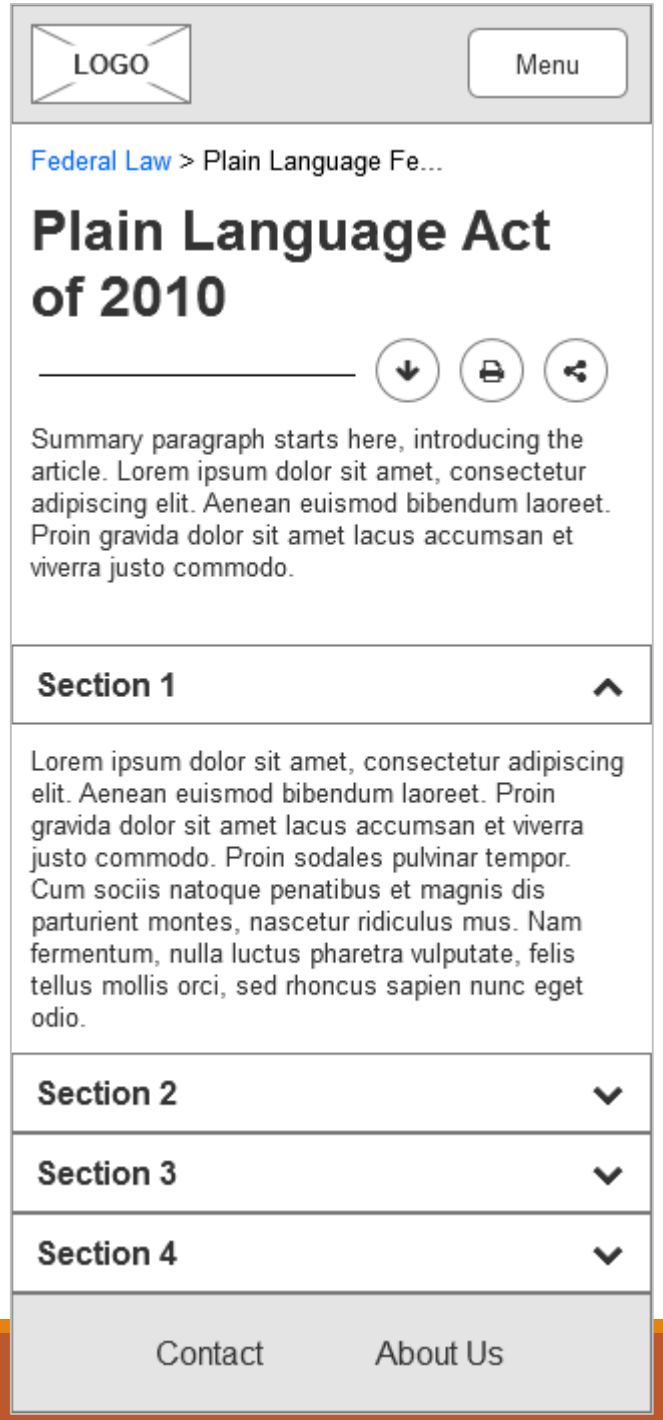
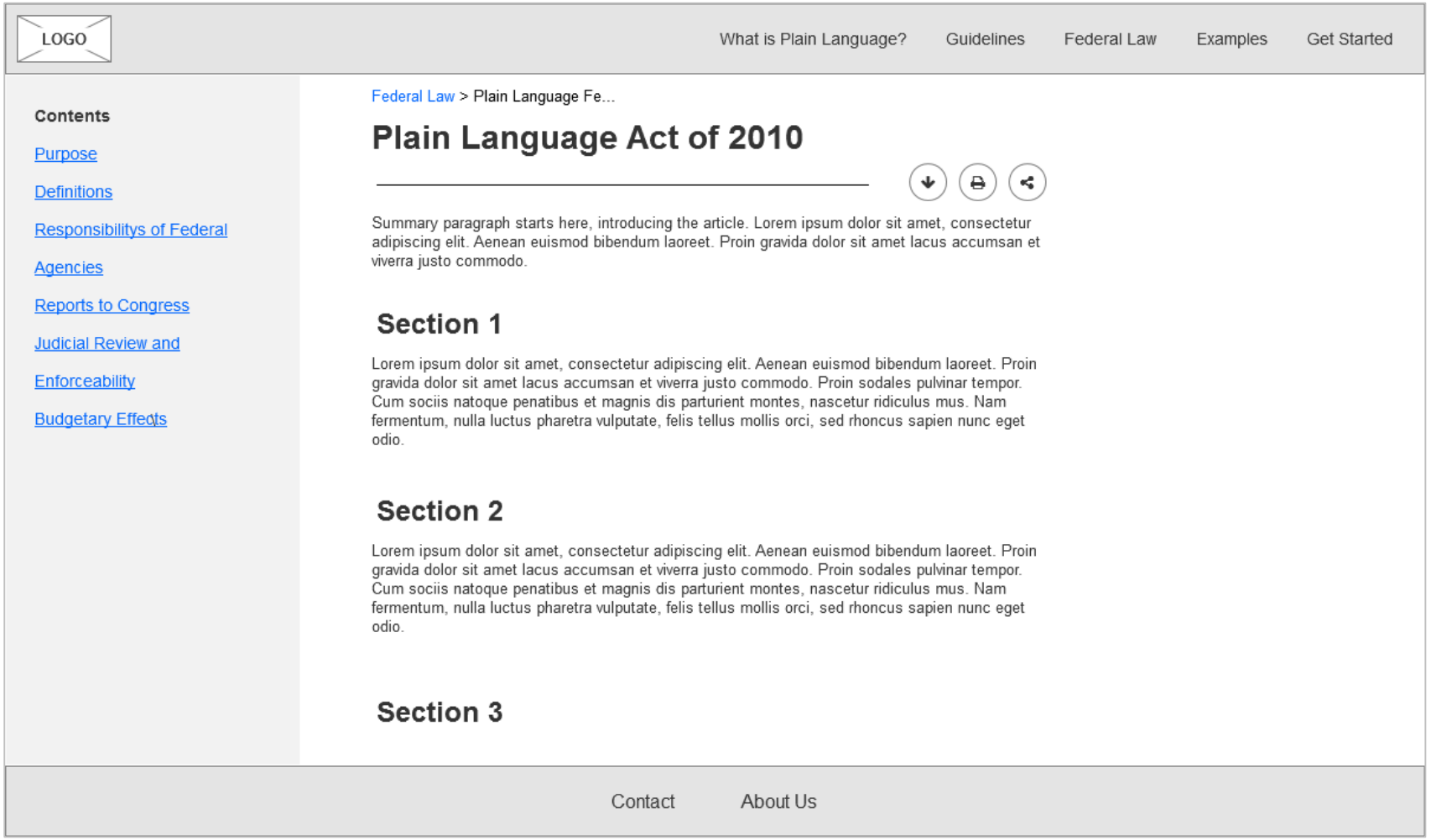
Search Examples
Search
Featured Examples
Rulemaking Procedures
Federal Aviation Administration
Personal Radio Services
Federal Communications Commision
Pensions, Bonuses
Veterans Benefits Administration
See All Examples
Before-After Comparison
Plain Language Awards
Submit an Example
Contact
About Us

Article Template





Thank you!

Appendix A

FULL QUALITATIVE CONTENT AUDIT

Qualitative Content Evaluation

Category	Description	Rating
Usability	Links are presented within sentences and paragraphs, making skimming a page impossible. By doing this, a user has to read through a sentence to get the context of a link. The paragraph length and sentence structures are good, but sometimes a header/subheader would help the user better understand their location within the website.	2
Knowledge level	The content is written at a level understandable by everyone. Although audiences will be people with a great expertise in literature (e.g. copywriting), the website needs to set itself as an example of good plain language. The reader needs no prior knowledge to understand the content.	4
Findability	Much of the content is difficult to find, hidden under tabs that might not be obvious. The search function does not work at all, revealing no results no matter what is entered in the search box. Links on the right-rail do not match the information architecture of the webpage, possibly sending the user to a different part of the website.	1
Actionability	There are not clear calls to action, and the tabs and the homepage don't give an indication of the information that exists on the website.	3
Audience	The content is relevant in some ways. Some of the content such as "Humor" examples are not relevant to users looking to learn more about Plain Language.	3
Accuracy	Much of the information is out of date. The event displayed on the homepage is for September of 2014 (over 2 years ago). The last revision of the Plain Language Guidelines was in 2011. Many of the links are dead-ends. All links to external sites on the "examples" no longer work.	1

Strategic Content Evaluation

Category	Description	Rating
Business Value	Some of the content contributes to business goals, but much of it is unnecessary for users. Content that does not support the business goals should be cut.	3
Message	The content supports the idea of using plain language through how it is written, but the structure of the content does not convey this message.	4
Brand/voice appropriateness	The voice is sometimes too fun and playful to convey a meaningful message of where plain language is often used: in government organizations (e.g. the subheader “Yes, Virginia, plain language regulations do exist.”)	3