

From GSO:

PLAIN LANGUAGE BIG BOOK (PLBB) FAQs

1. How did the PLBB come about?

The development of a plain language Big Book can be traced back to an agenda topic in 2016, at which time the General Service Conference began the assessment of the need for plain language literature. Following lots of in-depth research and reports, in 2021 the Conference as a whole requested:

*“That a draft version of the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, be translated into **plain and simple** language and be developed in a way that is **accessible and relatable** to as wide of an audience as possible and that a progress report or draft be brought back to the 2022 Conference Literature Committee.”*

2. Will the PLBB replace the Big Book?

No. The intent was and remains for the PLBB to be a tool to access original text and be a companion piece. The original Big Book is not going away and will remain in publication.

3. Is this the first time A.A. has developed plain language literature?

No. Most of our pamphlets are in plain language. Also, at the time the Big Book was first published, Dr. Bob was concerned that the language was beyond the capability of blue-collar members to grasp and, as a result, 5 pamphlets (still available and known as *The Akron Pamphlets*) were written by Evan W. at the request of Dr. Bob during the 1940s.

4. What is Plain Language?

Plain language is a style of writing designed for word choice, sentence structure, and layout to improve readability and increase understanding.

5. Is it a word-for-word translation?

No. It is a rewrite into plain language that also reflects the scope of the task assigned to ensure that the draft “be developed in a way that is **accessible and relatable** to as wide of an audience as possible.”

6. Will it be available in Spanish and French?

We will address this question if and when the PLBB is published. However, we understand that English Plain Language is an approach not a language and so any simplified French or Spanish versions will need to spring from the original translations into French and Spanish.

7. What reading level will the PLBB be at?

5th Grade

8. Why is the draft confidential to Conference Members only and why can't I see a draft?

Historically, whenever the Conference reviews new or significantly revised books or pamphlets, only the Conference Literature Committee (or whichever Committee is reviewing the item) is provided with copies of the new or revised literature before Conference begins. In the case of pamphlets, all other Conference members have been required to sign out copies of the new or revised pamphlet(s) sometime during Conference and have been given a limited time to review the literature. In the case of books, Conference members, other than those on the reviewing committees, have not been given any opportunity to review the manuscripts and have, therefore, had to base their votes entirely on the recommendation of the committee. The reasons for operating in this way are as follows:

1) In order to retain the copyright of A.A.'s literature assets, we have to be able to assert that they were not “at large,” shared widely in whole or in part within the Fellowship or shared on social media, prior to being published.

2) It usually takes several years to complete a piece of A.A. literature. During that time, multiple versions of the piece are shared with the reviewing Conference Committee. If shared widely, it would be possible for the Fellowship and the public to become

confused about what is in revision, what is the current revision and what is “Conference Approved.”

When circumstances such as these require that we trust the Conference process explicitly, it may be helpful to remember that Tradition 2 asserts that God’s will is expressed through the group conscience and that Concept 2 states that the Conference has become “the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.”

9. What is being translated?

Five things:

1. The Doctor’s Opinion
2. The first 164 pages of the original
3. Dr. Bob’s Nightmare
4. The Appendices
5. Forewords from the first 4 editions (which, together, are now a new Appendix VIII in the translation)

There will also be a new Preface, a new Foreword, and a Glossary.

The stories (other than *Chapter 1 – Bill’s Story* and *Dr. Bob’s Nightmare*) are not being translated.

10. Does that mean the Steps, Traditions, and Warranties are being changed?

No. As laid out in the Conference Charter, only a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of all the groups in the world responding to a proposal has the authority to do that. The Steps and Traditions will be printed in their current form. However, alongside those items, an explanation in plain language will be included.

11. What will be the title of the PLBB?

Subject to the draft being approved for publication and the views of the General Service Conference, the working title is: Plain Language Big Book: A Tool for Reading *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

12. How much has this cost?

The hard costs are \$100,000 for the writer and approximately \$40,000 in publishing-related expenses. \$140,000 to date.

13. What printing options will be available if this book gets published?

As with other A.A. Conference approved literature, hardcover softcover and large print are options that will be decided if the Conference approves publication.

14. How was the writer chosen and are they an A.A. member?

Alcoholic Committee Members chose the best writer for the task through a Request For Proposal (RFI) process. Proposals were received from A.A. members and non-A.A. members. The writer who was eventually chosen is not an A.A. member. Alcoholics have been reviewing the work of the writer at all stages and making changes to ensure that the intent (as expressed in the RFI) that it “**must capture the welcoming and inclusive spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous and inspire a sense of belonging and hope** in the alcoholic seeking help” is followed.

15. Was AI (ChatGPT or similar) used in the plain language big book development?

No AI or text generator was used in the plain language draft.

16. Were any Non-Alcoholics on the Tools to Access the Big Book (TABB) or Plain Language Big Book (PLBB) subcommittees?

No. All members were alcoholics.

17. How will the PLBB address gender and God?

The gender of named individuals will not be changed, but where the example given is of an archetype, e.g. the Jaywalker, we will switch up things so that there is a broader representation of both men and women. The original Big Book contains about 250 he/him/his to about 50 she/her/hers. The plain language big book will be more balanced.

Where God is mentioned, and will continue to be mentioned, this is sometimes paired with “Higher Power.”

18. When the 2023 General Service Conference got to review the work in progress, i.e., the draft of the first 6 chapters, what did the Conference think?

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Even those who initially expressed concerns liked the plain language BB after reviewing it.

19. If published, who will own the copyright?

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

20. What happens next?

The 74th General Service Conference will review the complete draft at the Conference. Possible outcomes include:

- Approving the draft for publication as presented
- Approving the draft with minor changes as may be suggested by the Conference Committee on Literature or the Conference floor
- Sending the draft back for more work, indicating the issues to be addressed
- Halting the project





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This Month in AA History....

1939 - April, 4,730 (some assert 4,650) copies of the first edition of “Alcoholics Anonymous” were published at a selling price of \$3.50 (\$57 today). It was a very expensive book for its time. Edward Blackwell, president of Cornwall Press, was told to use the thickest paper in his shop. The large, bulky volume became known as the “Big Book” and the name has stuck ever since. Bill W later wrote that the idea behind the thick, large paper was to convince the alcoholic he was getting his money’s worth. The book had eight roman and 400 Arabic numbered pages. “The Doctor’s Opinion” started as page 1. The basic text ended at page 179 (not 164). Twenty-nine personal stories were included: ten from the east coast, 18 from the mid-west and one last-minute story from the west coast (ghost written by Ruth Hock and removed in the second printing). The manuscript story “Ace Full-Seven Eleven” of Akron member Del T was dropped because he “thought the book was a racket.”- [“A Narrative Timeline of AA History”](#)