

# Clear Writing at the German Bundestag: Challenges and Opportunities

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Organised in partnership with:

European Commission, European Parliament, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, Joint Services of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions & Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union.

Clear writing  
for **Europe**  
2021



# GfdS Editorial Team at the German Bundestag

Editorial Team

[GfdS]

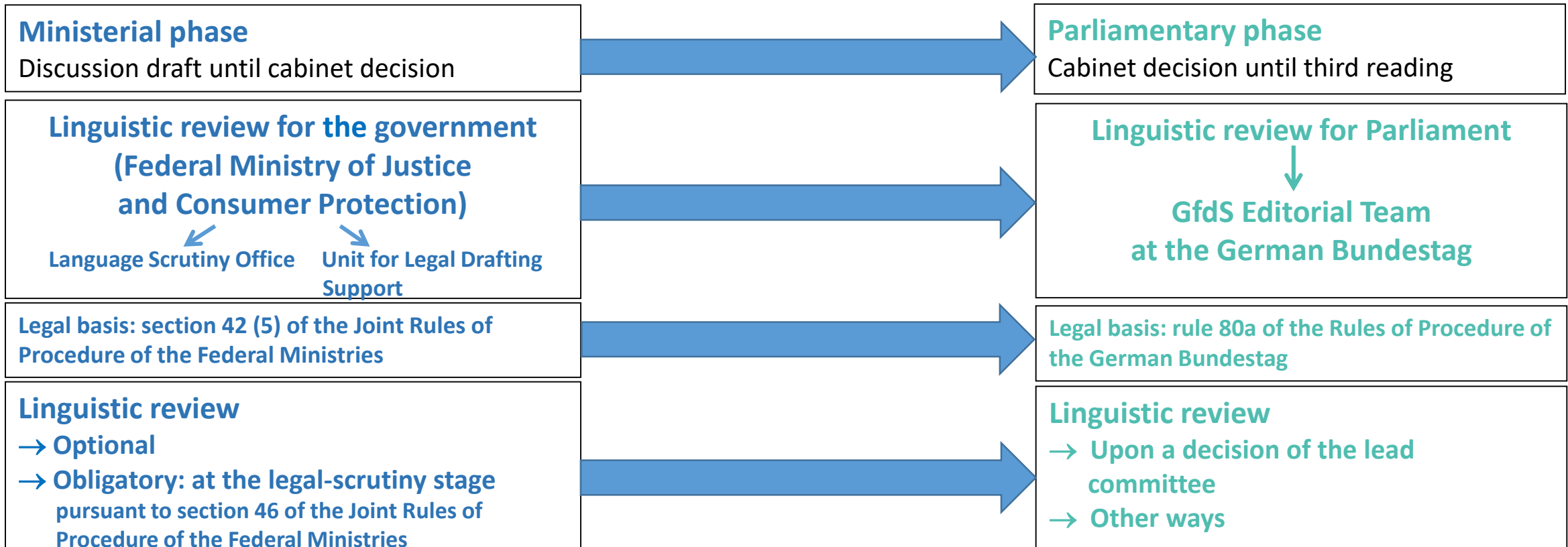
at the German Bundestag

- Not part of the Bundestag Administration
- Linguistic advisory service run by the Society for the German Language (Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache – GfdS)
  - Politically independent organisation
  - Funded by the federal and state governments
  - Aim: cultivation and study of the German language
- Established in 1966 to ensure that bills are linguistically accurate and as clear and comprehensible as possible

# Survey: Linguistic Review in the Legislative Process (since 2009)

Editorial Team  
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at the German Bundestag

## L I N G U I S T I C   A D V I C E   I N   T H E   G E R M A N   L E G I S L A T I V E   P R O C E S S



# GfdS Editorial Team: Responsibilities

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1. Linguistic reviews of bills in the parliamentary phase of the legislative process
  - Not obligatory (“Upon a decision of the lead committee ...”, “The lead committee *may* consult the editorial team ...”)
  - Accuracy and clarity/comprehensibility
  - Recommendations
2. Additional linguistic advice

(Rule 80a of the Rules of Procedure of the German Bundestag)

# Linguistic Review of Bills: Customers

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- (Lead) committees (rule 80a (1) of the Rules of Procedure of the German Bundestag)
- Members of working groups/teams from different parliamentary groups
  - on their own initiative
  - on the initiative of a Member of Parliament
  - in consultation with a Federal Ministry
- Committee secretariats
- Research Services of the German Bundestag (when checking certain aspects of a bill for rapporteurs)

In addition: review on our own initiative

# Linguistic Review of Bills: Types of Bills

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- Government bills
- Parliamentary-group bills
- Bundesrat bills
- Draft recommendations
- Motions for amendments
- Drafting assistance

# Linguistic Review of Bills: Approach

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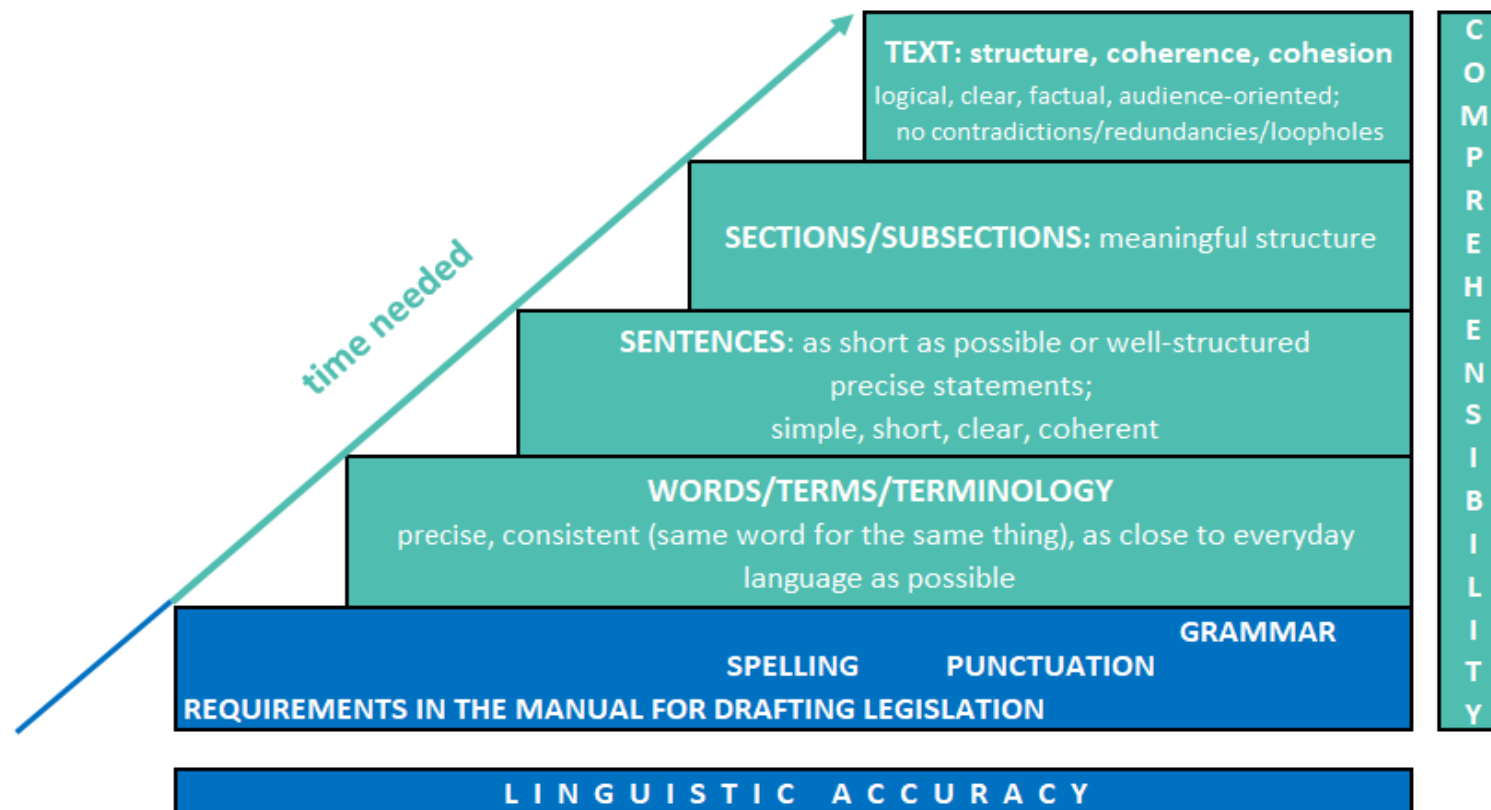
- Lay perspective – neutral non-insider view
- Offer suggestions for better wording
- Two-person principle
- Microsoft Word's revision and comments features
- Recommendations; the customer makes the decision
- Role of assisting (service providers)
- Communication about the text if possible

# Linguistic Review of Bills: Steps Towards Comprehensibility

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# Additional Linguistic Advice

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- Linguistic review of other texts
- Linguistic advice in cases of linguistic doubt
- Seminars
- Easy-to-read texts for people with a mental impairment or those with reading difficulties (easy language; plain language)

# Additional Linguistic Advice: Customers

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- Staff of the Bundestag Administration
- Members of Parliament and their staff
- Staff of the parliamentary groups at the German Bundestag

# Challenges

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- No obligation to consult the GfdS Editorial Team in the parliamentary phase of the legislative process
- Need to promote our service, esp. at the beginning of a new legislative period
- Need to convince politicians and lawyers to consult the Editorial Team
- Raising awareness of linguistic issues
- Fighting bad linguistic habits (“We’ve always done it this way.”)
- Changing attitudes (“Lawyers don’t need linguistic advice.”)
- Finding acceptance

# Challenges

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- Reviewing: a time-consuming process – acceleration of the legislative process
- No linguistic review if:
  - the bill is a political compromise
  - the bill has already been finalised
  - bad wording is due to formulations in existing legislation

# Challenges

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- Different types of texts – different rules, e.g.
  - Legislative provisions: cannot be simplified at will (precision/legal certainty!)
  - Texts in easy language: focus can be on general comprehensibility
- Different topics
- Different language levels / degrees of clarity
- Different target groups
- Limited human resources

# Opportunities

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- Peter Struck: “No bill comes out of Parliament in the form it came into Parliament.”  
linguistic review helps ensure that new (sub)sections are consistent with the rest of the bill
- Easier deliberation processes
- Fewer misunderstandings in the application and interpretation of law
- A more citizen-friendly approach
- Less red tape
- Fewer costs
- Positive impact on the language of public administration

# Opportunities

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- Plain language = part of transparent democracy
  - Growing awareness that plain language is important when communicating with citizens
  - Less voter apathy / disenchantment with politics
  - Growing need for simplified texts
- Due to legislative provisions: increasing demand for easy-to-read texts for people with a mental impairment
  - Meeting the specific linguistic needs of different target groups
  - Enabling special target groups to participate equally in all aspects of society and politics

# Opportunities

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- Advantage of optional linguistic reviews:  
those consulting us are willing to follow linguistic recommendations
- Bridging the gap between experts and laypeople



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Thank you for your kind attention!

# Contact

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