

Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

April 13, 2019

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its public (and some internal) communications clearer during the period April 14, 2018–April 13, 2019. The editing staff consistently applies plain writing principles in its work correcting research reports for the public. Additionally, nearly 60 members of the USITC staff who prepare those reports underwent training in the principles of plain, effective writing during the year, as did about 80 professionals in another federal department. The editors worked with several USITC offices to ensure clarity in major reports and guidance, as well as with the Washington, DC-based Plain Language Action and Information Network on outreach efforts.

Jeremy Wise, the interim head of the Office of Analysis and Research Services since November 2017, continued as the USITC senior official for plain writing. Peg Hausman, writer-editor, remains the USITC contact for plain writing, working with fellow writer-editor Judy Edelhoff.

As part of Plain Writing Act (PWA) compliance activities, the writer-editors:

- Applied plain writing principles to nearly 3,000 pages of USITC public reports, including some documents not considered “covered documents” under the PWA. These included 13 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative; 1 staff paper; and 8 articles for the *Journal of International Commerce and Economics*.
- Taught seven half-day classes in plain writing to 47 USITC employees, as well as a one-hour introduction to plain writing and USITC style for 11 new analysts. Many attendees came from other offices besides those of Industries and Economics (our principal clients), including the offices of Investigations, the Secretary, Administrative Services, External Relations, Tariff Affairs, Administrative Law Judges, General Counsel, Inspector General, Analysis and Research Services, and the Chief Information Officer. One editor also gave a half-day class in plain writing to about 80 Department of Labor professionals at a conference in Louisville, Kentucky.
- Began helping the Office of the Chief Information Officer apply plain language principles to the USITC’s updated public website, which will debut in summer 2019; edited the annual Congressional Budget Justification for the Office of Budget; assisted the Office of Operations on several short documents; and reviewed an internal survey and a library resource guide for the Office of Analysis and Research Services.
- Updated and expanded the USITC Wordlist and prepared a “quick tips” document for writers of investigative reports, both stressing plain writing principles.
- Took part in meetings of the Plain Language Action and Information Network to discuss plain language principles, methods, and strategies. One editor also attended the international plain legal writing conference in Montreal in October 2018.

A particular focus in the next year will be expanding the editors’ plain writing efforts to encompass other areas of the agency, including human resources, procurement, and the templates and questionnaires used in legal investigations.