

# Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

April 13, 2020

The USITC continued to make progress toward the goal of making its public (and some internal) documents clearer during the period April 14, 2019–April 13, 2020. With support from the USITC leadership and senior staff, the editors consistently applied plain writing principles in their work editing public reports and other USITC documents. They also 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. Finally, the editors trained about 45 additional USITC staff in the principles of plain, effective writing, as well as 28 U.S. Air Force personnel and another 60 Department of Labor staff members.

Jeremy Wise, the director of the Office of Analysis and Research Services, continued as the USITC senior official for plain writing. Peg Hausman, writer-editor, remained 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 4,000 pages of USITC public reports, including some documents not considered “covered documents” under the PWA. These included 17 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative and 8 articles for the USITC’s Journal of International Commerce and Economics.
- Taught six half-day classes in plain writing to nearly 40 USITC employees, as well as a short introduction to plain writing for 7 new analysts. Attendees came from the offices of Economics, Industries, Investigations, Tariff Affairs and Trade Agreements, General Counsel, Inspector General, Human Resources, and the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). One editor also gave two half-day classes in plain writing to about 28 U.S. Air Force personnel in Hampton, Virginia. The other editor co-taught two plain language classes to 60 participants at the Department of Labor.
- Continued to help the OCIO apply plain language principles to the USITC’s public website, updated in summer 2019; edited USITC’s annual Congressional Budget Justification; edited two documents explaining the complex Miscellaneous Tariff Bills procedure to the public; and helped the Office of Operations on several shorter documents, including a 28-page analysis of processes for factfinding reports. Updated and expanded the USITC Wordlist and the “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 (PLAIN) on plain language concepts, methods, and strategies, as well as PLAIN’s one-day “summit” conference on plain writing. One editor also prepared and posted dozens of informational short pieces on plain writing for the PLAIN social media and listserv, as well as editing and customizing PLAIN’s presentation on plain language for an international audience in Oslo, Norway.

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