

Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

May 25, 2022

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its information and communications clearer during the period April 14, 2021–April 13, 2022. The editorial services staff consistently applies plain writing principles in its work by editing research and investigative reports and advises authors on plain writing principals. The editor worked with several USITC offices to ensure clarity of Commission reports and guidance, as well as in outreach efforts with the Washington, DC-based Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN).

Because of unusually heavy workload, a virtual work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a writer-editor position that remained vacant for most of the year, the editor did not conduct formal plain writing training sessions this year.

Jeremy Wise, the director of the Office of Analysis and Research Services, is the USITC's senior official for plain writing and Judy Edelhoff, writer-editor, is the USITC's contact for plain writing.

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

- Applied plain writing principles to over 2,000 pages of USITC public reports. These documents included 13 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative and a staff working paper.
- Assisted authors and project leaders to incorporate the new guidance for tables that comply with rules for making documents accessible to users with vision problems (“section 508 compliance rules”).
- Took part in PLAIN meetings on plain language principles, methods, and strategies, as well as PLAIN's one-day “summit” conference on plain writing.
- Updated editorial standards to ensure clarity in communication across agency reports.
- Worked on updating citations guidance to ensure that readers clearly understand the references.
- In consultation with the Office of Tariff Affairs and Trade Agreements the editor issued guidance that ensures (1) that authors are correctly using the correct nomenclature language for tariff classifications in the *Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States* when writing text, notes, and bibliographic citations for reports, and (2) these notes are written in plain language so the public can understand them.
- Worked with legal staff to revise and standardize legal citations that incorporate guidance from *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation*, *Chicago Manual of Style*, and specific needs of the agency.
- Assisted the Zotero working group to more widely deploy Zotero, a citation management software. The working group also worked to incorporate legal citations item types and subject fields could be used. Work is ongoing.
- Collaborated with plain language experts in the federal government and the Center for Plain Language to review and judge submissions for the 2022 ClearMark Awards, which annually recognize government agencies and organizations for their use of plain language. This task helps us track improvements and trends in plain language, and see how they can be applied across agencies.

A particular focus in the next year will be expanding the editor's plain writing efforts to encompass other areas of the agency, including human resources, procurement, and the templates and questionnaires used in Commission investigative activities.