

## Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

May 18, 2023

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its information and communications clearer during the period April 14, 2022–April 13, 2023. The editorial services staff consistently applies plain writing principles in its work by editing research and investigative reports and advises authors on plain writing principles. The lead editor worked with several USITC offices to ensure clarity of Commission reports and guidance and engaged in outreach efforts with the Washington, DC-based Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN).

In August 2022 a second editor was hired. After this editor learned Commission style and how it applies plain language, the Commission now has two editors applying plain writing principles in Commission reports. Recruitment for a third editor is currently underway.

Nancy Snyder, 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-editors:

- Applied plain writing principles to over 2,600 pages of USITC public reports. These documents included 12 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative.
- Assisted authors and project leaders to comply with guidance for tables to make 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 outreach to other agencies through posts on plain writing.
- Updated editorial standards to ensure clarity in communication across agency reports.
- In July 2022, reorganized and expanded staff guidance on plain language and accessibility.
- In December 2022, taught a formal two-hour plain writing training class for Office of Industry and Competitive Analysis for researchers, authors, and team leaders. This class was our first online plain language course for staff and our first course after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pilot was successful and we plan to offer more training in the year ahead. The aim is to help staff get ideas across more effectively and comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010. Topics include word choice, brevity, logical organization, active voice, personal pronouns, and using headings, lists and tables, with a quick look at legal English.
- 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 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 in reviewing citation management software for compliance with agency style and ease of use for authors. The working group also worked to incorporate

legal citations item types and subject fields. Developed and drafted guidance, which is in review.

- Collaborated with plain language experts in the federal government and the Center for Plain Language to review and judge submissions for the 2023 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.

This coming year, the editors will work on expanding their plain writing efforts to encompass other areas of the agency, including questionnaires and surveys used in Commission investigative activities.