

## Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

July 10, 2024

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its information and communications clearer during the period April 14, 2023–April 13, 2024. 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 July 2023, a third editor was hired. After this editor learned Commission style and how it applies plain language, the Commission now has three editors applying plain writing principles in Commission reports.

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 about 2,600 pages of USITC public reports. These documents included 9 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative.
- Published a new Wordlist, which provides examples on using plain language and ensures the same spelling in our factfinding (section 332) reports. The new edition of the Wordlist increase in size from 20 pages in the November 2019 edition to 41 pages in the January 2024 edition. Staff, including project leaders and authors found the update very useful. During the coming year, another update is planned.
- Assisted authors and project leaders to comply with guidance for tables to make documents accessible to users with no and low vision (section 508 compliance rules).
- Expanded plain writing efforts to encompass other areas of the agency, including questionnaires and surveys used in Commission investigative activities. One survey was for *Greenhouse Gas Emissions Intensities of the U.S. Steel and Aluminum Industries at the Product Level* (Investigation No. 332-598).
- In January 2024, published updated guidance to assist with using punctuation consistently and correctly in “Dashes Hyphens and Minus Signs.” In the spring, this document was requested by and provided to members of the U.S. government interagency section 508 working group, who found it very useful..
- 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.
- Continued to expand staff guidance on plain language and accessibility in text as well as in figures and tables. Participated in the Section 508 Interagency Working Group and the 2023 Interagency Accessibility Forum, which also promote the use of plain language for accessibility.
- Offered plain writing guidance to staff during project kickoff meetings and other meetings. 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. This will be expanded to classes and more training in the year ahead.
- Researched and wrote two new manuals on citations guidance to ensure that readers clearly

understand the references. The first manual, *Bibliography and Footnote Citations Guidance* (114 pages), was published in spring. Its companion volume (about 150 pages) will give staff explicit instructions and examples on using reference management software for bibliography and footnote citations and is scheduled for publication May 2024.

- In consultation with the Office of Tariff Affairs and Trade Agreements, the editors began work on a new guidance document to (1) ensure 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. This guidance will also address correct use of both the article number and description of each item and will assist authors in using correct style when citing USITC and sources published by others.
- 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 reference management software 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 was reviewed and published.
- Collaborated with plain language experts in the federal government and the Center for Plain Language to review and judge submissions for the 2024 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.

