

## Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

May 27, 2025

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its information and communications clearer during the period April 2024–April 2025. 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 editors 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).

The Commission has three editors applying plain writing principles in Commission reports.

Maureen Letostak, Acting 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 2,300 pages of USITC public reports. These documents included 9 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative.
- Assisted authors and project leaders to comply with guidance for tables to use plain language and make documents accessible to users with vision problems (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 *USMCA Automotive Rules of Origin: Economic Impact and Operations, 2025* (Investigation No. 332-600).
- In April 2025, published two guidance documents : one was updated guidance, *Making Tables*, to assist with using plain language the other for new guidance, *Making Figures*, to ensure that figures and illustrations contain useful and descriptive titles, notes, labels, and alternative text.
- 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.
- 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.
- Gave plain language presentations to economists and industry analysts who were authors and staff for factfinding reports. More training will be offered in the year ahead.
- Researched and updated two manuals on citations guidance to ensure that readers clearly understand the references. The first manual, *Bibliography and Footnote Citations Guidance* (114 pages), was updated and published in spring. A companion volume (144 pages) gave

staff explicit instructions and examples on using reference management software for bibliography and footnote citations and was published in spring.

- In consultation with the Office of Tariff Affairs and Trade Agreements, the editors worked 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) text is written in plain language so the public can understand and easily find the references. This guidance was incorporated into citations guidance documents, too, to address the correct use of both the article number and description of each item. The instructions and corresponding examples 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. Provided staff instructions and examples on adapting the reference management software tools for legal citations.
- Assisted the reference management software working group in reviewing reference and citation management software for compliance with agency style and ease of use for authors. The working group also incorporated 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 attended presentations by the Center for Plain Language for the 2025 ClearMark Awards; the awards annually recognize North American 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.