

Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission

June 29, 2026

The U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC or Commission) made continued progress toward the goal of making its information and communications clearer during the period April 2025–April 2026. 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 Commission offices to ensure clarity of Commission reports in compliance with the Plain Writing Act of 2010 established by Congress. The editors established, revised, and published guidance. They also engaged in outreach efforts with the Washington, DC-based Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN). This year, the editors also provided technical assistance to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative for one of its key reports.

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

Maureen Letostak, Director of the Office of Analysis and Research Services, is the Commission's senior official for plain writing and Judy Edelhoff, writer-editor, is the Commission's contact for plain writing.

As part of Plain Writing Act of 2010 compliance activities, the writer-editors:

- Applied plain writing principles to about 1,650 pages of Commission public reports. These documents included 9 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative. In addition to section 332 factfinding reports, edited reports for *Proposed Recommendations to Modify the Harmonized Tariff Schedule, 2028 (Preliminary Report for Public Comment)* (for the Office of Tariff Affairs and Trade Agreements).
- Provided plain language in technical assistance to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, editing the 550-page report, *2026 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program*.
- In addition to the Commission's statutory reports, edited two internal agency manuals (364 pages), Editorial Services guidance documents (106 pages)
- 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).
- Edited two new internal manuals for staff (364 pages), *Factfinding Survey Manual* and *Behind the Trade*.
- 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).
- Updated two guidance documents (106 pages): one was updated guidance, *Wordlist: USITC Preferred Spelling and Punctuation* for Summer 2026 publication; *Making Tables Commission Style: Table Requirements and Key Points for Factfinding Reports*, published April 2025, to assist with using plain language the other for other Commission 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.
- Launched training sessions for citations guidance and glossaries.
- Researched new additions for forthcoming (2026) updates to 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 to ensure (1) 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 assist authors in using correct style when citing Commission 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 research 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 kept abreast of submission to the Center for Plain Language for the 2026 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.