

Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act 2014–15

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

July 7, 2015

During the past year, the USITC has continued to make progress toward the goal of making its public communications clearer. The editing staff applies plain writing principles in its work, and a dozen members of the USITC staff who prepare research reports for the public underwent training in the principles of plain, effective writing in the fall of 2014.

James Kennedy, the head of the Office of Analysis and Research Services, continues as the USITC senior official for plain writing; Peg Hausman, Writer-Editor, continues as the USITC contact for plain writing. As part of Plain Writing Act (PWA)-related activities, the Writer-Editor:

- Gave presentations on plain technical writing to new USITC research assistants and others (about 12 attendees) in November 2014. She also worked with many analysts one-on-one to explain and apply plain writing principles.
- Regularly participated in meetings of the Washington, DC, Plain Language Action and Information Network, in which plain language principles, methods and strategies are discussed; spent many hours giving feedback on an update of the PLAIN training module.
- Under PLAIN auspices, gave a half-day training in plain writing to 18 employees of the Veterans Administration's Privacy Service.
- With the Commissioners' support, applied plain writing principles to nearly 2,000 pages of USITC public reports, even those that are not considered "covered documents" under the Plain Writing Act. These included 8 complete and 6 partial investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative; 2 other statutory reports for the President and Congress; 1 set of conference proceedings; 1 long staff paper; 3 articles for the *Journal of International Commerce and Economics*; and 13 Executive Briefings on Trade. She also edited 8 administrative reports or manuals. Notable among the latter were the *Congressional Budget Justification* and the *Statement of Assurance Guidance*. Both of these were for offices she hadn't worked with before—the Office of Budget and the Internal Control and Risk Management Division. The budget justification in particular involved wide-ranging plain writing revisions.
- Also edited several sections of the new collective bargaining agreement for the USITC, and collected and distributed materials on plain legal English for the drafting and revision team.
- For the first time in two years, finalized an updated wordlist promoting many "plain" word choices for distribution Commission-wide, with special attention to the needs of the analysts and economists who write the Commission's research studies. The new wordlist is 14 single-spaced pages, up from 9.5 in the previous version.

Particular focuses in the next year will be:

- Resuming extensive training in plain language with analysts and economists and developing training for legal, procurement, and human resources staff.
- Making sure that the instructions to the public for working with EDIS and the USITC DataWeb are clear. EDIS offers the public a way to download and upload documents for USITC investigations. The DataWeb is a source of trade statistics that benefits many members of the public.
- Checking the readability of other online USITC documents, such as the USITC calendar, instructions for *Federal Register* notices, delivery instructions, general information, and documents connected with the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act.
- Integrating plain language guidelines into USITC style preferences.