

Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

May 12, 2021

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its information and communications clearer during the period April 14, 2020–April 13, 2021. The editorial staff consistently applies plain writing principles in its work by editing research and investigative reports and advises authors on plain writing principals. The editors worked with several USITC offices to ensure clarity Commission reports and guidance, as well as in outreach efforts with the Washington, DC-based Plain Language Action and Information Network.

Because of unusually heavy workload and a virtual work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the editors did not conduct formal training sessions in plain writing during this period. They, did however, attend several training sessions on how to effectively teach this content in a virtual environment and hope to resume these trainings later this year.

Jeremy Wise, the director of the Office of Analysis and Research Services, continued as the USITC senior official for plain writing. Peg Hausman, writer-editor, remained the USITC contact for plain writing, working with fellow writer-editor Judy Edelhoff. This role passed to Judy Edelhoff May 1, 2021.

As part of Plain Writing Act (PWA) compliance activities, the writer-editors:

- Applied plain writing principles to thousands of pages of USITC public reports, including some documents not considered “covered documents” under the PWA. These documents included 17 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative and 8 articles for the USITC’s *Journal of International Commerce and Economics*.
- Edited USITC’s annual Congressional Budget Justification; edited two public help documents explaining the complex Miscellaneous Tariff Bills procedure to the public; and helped the Office of Operations on several short documents, including a 28-page analysis of processes for factfinding reports.
- Updated and expanded the “quick tips” document for writers of investigative reports, which stresses plain writing principles.
- Issued new guidance for tables that comply with rules for making documents accessible to users with vision problems (“508 rules”). These rules tend to make tables better exemplars of “plain writing” as well and to ensure that unfamiliar terms and abbreviations are defined.
- Took part in meetings of the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) on plain language principles, methods, and strategies, as well as PLAIN’s one-day “summit” conference on plain writing. Of particular interest were PLAIN trainings in teaching plain language virtually, which may be put to use next year. One editor also prepared and posted dozens of informational short pieces on plain writing for the PLAIN social media and listserv.
- Participated in the first virtual international plain language conference, Access for All: Plain Language is a Civil Right—Part 1, which was cohosted by PLAIN, Clarity (the largest international plain language organization), and the Center for Plain Language.

- Worked with the Center for Plain Language to review and judge submissions for the 2021 ClearMark Awards, which annually recognize government agencies and organizations for their use of plain language in communications.
- Continued work on a Wordlist for the agency, which will be updated in summer 2021.

A particular focus in the next year will be expanding the editor's plain writing efforts to encompass other areas of the agency, including human resources, procurement, and the templates and questionnaires used in Commission investigative activities.