

## Progress and Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC)

April 13, 2018

The USITC made continued progress toward the goal of making its public (and some internal) communications clearer during the period April 14, 2017–April 13, 2018. The editing staff applies plain writing principles in its work, and about 35 members of the USITC staff who prepare research reports for the public underwent training in the principles of plain, effective writing during the year, as did 62 professionals in two local federal departments. The editors worked with the Office of Industries on a survey of the aluminum industry and with several other USITC offices to ensure clarity in major reports and guidance documents.

James Kennedy, the head of the Office of Analysis and Research Services, continued as the USITC senior official for plain writing until his retirement November 26, 2017; since then, Jeremy Wise has served as interim director of the office and as the USITC senior official for plain writing. Peg Hausman, writer-editor, continues as the USITC contact for plain writing, working with fellow writer-editor Judy Edelhoff.

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

- 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 11 investigative reports for the Congress or the U.S. Trade Representative; 1 long staff paper; 10 articles for the *Journal of International Commerce and Economics*; and 10 Executive Briefings on Trade. In addition, reviewed a lengthy questionnaire sent to thousands of firms for the Commission's Global Digital Trade 2 investigation. Since participating in the survey was mandatory, it was covered under the PWA.
- Taught four half-day classes in plain writing to 35 USITC employees. Many attendees came from other offices besides those of Industries and Economics, including the offices of Investigations, the Secretary, Administrative Services, External Relations, Human Relations, Operations, and the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). The editors also gave four half-day classes in plain writing to about 62 professionals in the departments of Labor (Office of Inspector General) and of Health and Human Services (Office of Child Support Enforcement).
- Again worked with the Budget Office on the Congressional Budget Justification and with the Office of Operations on standardized letters to hearing witnesses, in both cases with a focus on plain language principles.
- Regularly participated in meetings of the Washington, DC, Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN), in which plain language principles, methods, and strategies are discussed. One editor took PLAIN's instructor training class and also began assisting PLAIN with its social media program.

Particular focuses in the next several year will be:

- Helping the OCIO apply plain language principles to the Commission's updated public website.
- Updating and expanding the USITC Wordlist, many of whose entries suggest plain language alternatives to less-than-plain writing.
- Expanding the editors' plain writing efforts to encompass other areas of the agency, including human resources, procurement, and questionnaires used in legal investigations.