

FY21 Plain Language Report

The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) stood up a plain language “community of practice” in fiscal year 2021 (FY21), dedicated to improving the agency’s compliance with the Plain Writing Act of 2010. As part of this recommitment to federal plain writing guidelines and requirements, the communications division manager in the Office of the Chief Communications Officer (OCCO) became the new plain language POC for the agency, and OCCO updated their USPTO Writing Style Guide to incorporate new and evolving plain language best practices. They also hired a new writer-editor and former writing professor, with extensive plain language experience, as the agency’s new speechwriter, and she became a valuable member of the new plain language team.

The Trademarks business unit emerged as a plain language center of excellence in its hiring strategy and operations in FY21. Their writer-editors became the “go-to” reviewers of all comms projects within Trademarks, with the goal of improving the readability of Trademarks communications. During an organization-wide meeting for management, the Commissioner for Trademarks gave his enthusiastic support to plain language and directed managers and supervisors to embrace it as the standard for communicating.

Some notable plain language products and accomplishments of Trademarks in FY21 included:

- Launching [Trademark Basics](#), a suite of 21 new webpages written in plain language that cover the trademark process from start to finish.
- Providing plain language training for Trademarks administrative and outreach staff
- Overhauling three webpages to align with Trademarks fee adjustments and writing three Trademark alerts to notify customers in advance—all written in plain language.
- Overhauling web content on the Native American tribal insignia database. The updated webpage explains the purpose of the database and provides clear instructions and requirements for tribes to submit their insignia.
- Expanding the [Protect trademarks](#) section of the USPTO website with five new webpages to assist customers in understanding new scams-related initiatives and how those initiatives impact them

- Updating six webpages, creating two new webpages, and revising the user guide to help customers understand the Trademark Modernization Act (TMA) and navigate the new and overhauled TEAS forms related to the TMA's expungement and reexamination proceedings.

While significant "cultural" challenges remained in making agency communications clearer, more precise, and more accessible to a wider range of non-technical audiences, the USPTO was nevertheless in a much better place by the end of FY21 than it had been a year prior, with a newly energized plain language community of practice determined to make even greater strides in FY22.