

2020 Comments On The Response To The Final OA

I. General

- A. Remember that it is difficult to convince an Examiner to allow your claims – it is so easy for them to just check the box “would require further consideration.” Anything that is not absolutely clear will not result in allowance. Anything that is open to a difference in opinion between you and the Examiner will not result in allowance.
- B. Recognize that all is not lost if you don’t get claims allowed. You can file a RCE/continuation application and keep prosecuting. Also, hopefully you learned something about the prior art, the claim structure, and the Examiner’s preferences in the first application and can use that to your advantage in the continuation.
- C. Prepare your client for the possibility of a final rejection and an RCE/continuation early in the prosecution process. It is probably going to happen. If it does and you informed them beforehand, then you look knowledgeable because you were able to predict the PTO – it boosts your credibility. Remember that on average there are currently 3.4 Office Actions before allowance – and the numbers are higher in higher tech areas.
- D. It’s hard to be “brutally honest” and “ruthless” with your claims, isn’t it? Many people just want to hang on and only give up a little, but that’s not going to work here. It helps to see the final office action in context – it is not a one-time-only negotiation and if you can get any claims allowed – any claim at all – it is going to help you the next time around.
- E. Three students were Non-Compliant. Just a reminder to be careful, the PTO will refuse to accept your response if it is non-compliant – and the 6 month date for abandonment is still ticking.
- F. Several students thanked the Examiner for the courtesy of the interview. That was very conscientious. However, be careful how you characterize the interview. My recollection is that while the interview was informative, no specific claim limitations that were discussed were appealing to the Examiner. Consequently, it would not be appropriate to use language that

implied that the Examiner approved claim language during the interview.

II. Front Page

- A. Remember - Mail stop AF for Amendments after final.
- B. It is recommended to write out the dates. You don't know if the person at the PTO is going to expect DMY or MDY format.

III. Claims

- A. Many people might have been better off canceling some claims and just trying to argue their best claim. It is usually a one-shot deal for the Examiner. If everything looks acceptable as it is, then you might get allowed. However, if one claim looks good but another looks bad, then your rejection for both will likely be maintained.
- B. Still a lot of 112 issues in many of the claims.
- C. "Baseline" is not a good term to have in your claim. It is actually really vague. This is an instance of where the inventor used a term, but it does not serve our purposes well.

IV. Remarks section

Overall, the current arguments are an improvement from last time, but there is still plenty of work that can be done to improve.

- A. This one applies to several people – We need to work on advocacy.
 - 1. We need clarity and a step-by-step argument that leads the Examiner inescapably to our conclusion. You have to do all of the mental work for them in your writing.
 - 2. In several instances, the arguments about the prior art were not very clear. Part of this was likely due to claim limitations that were not very clear – which made it difficult to present a clear claim differentiation to the Examiner. In other instances, the argument about the contents of the prior art was not clear. In still other instances, arguments about the prior art were not linked directly to limitations in the claim.

3. In several instances, the Arguments were “bullet-pointy” in that they present a first fact bullet point, a second fact bullet point, and a third conclusion bullet point – but did not explicitly recite the connections between them or the conclusion that the writer wanted the Examiner to adopt. That can only work when a reader of the bullet points a) understands the bullet points in exactly the same way that you understand the bullet points, and b) is willing to make the same logical conclusions that you are from the same bullet points. Unfortunately, you have NEITHER of those when it comes to an Examiner. The Examiner is not trying to work with you. Simply asserting bullet points gives the Examiner plenty of room to assert that the matter will require further consideration and then maintain his rejection. You need to block the Examiner’s ability to do that by being clear and tighter with your writing and not allowing him to have the logical “gaps” between the bullet points. Instead, constrain the Examiner by explicitly reciting the logical steps that must be made.
4. For example, instead of just saying what the prior art does not do X, describe what it does instead of X and point out the differences. That gives you valuable facts to back up your assertion.
5. Just baldly asserting that something is not taught by a reference is not likely to be enough. The Examiner will just say “I disagree” and maintain the rejection. Instead, you need to clearly point out HOW the Examiner is wrong. It seems like people might think that if they just “alert” the Examiner that the prior art reference does not show X, then the Examiner will very conscientiously go and look through the entire reference for it – or would just take their word. Neither will happen, the rejection will simply be maintained. Cite to the spec to bolster your claim. Discuss what the PA teaches (and cite to where) to illustrate that it can’t possibly teach what the Examiner is asserting.
6. Also – you must then link your statement to a specific limitation in your claim that you want to assert to the Examiner.

7. You have to be absolutely clear – so clear that the Examiner can't wiggle away. So how do we do that?
 - You need a “solid” structural or functional claim limitation to convince the Examiner. Seriously clear – inescapably clear.
 - As a thought Experiment, imagine you were the Examiner and all that was standing between you and going home for the weekend was if you could come up with some rejection to bounce back to the Applicant. You just need to find something. Is there anything that you can exploit? Any lack of clarity that you can have any reasonable basis to say requires further consideration? Now switch back to yourself and fix that.
 8. You need to focus your discussion on a clearly explained structural or functional difference in your claim. You want to focus the Examiner's attention in some way on the one specific part of the claim that clearly and inescapably shows that the Examiner is wrong and the claim must be allowed – and if that is not there, then it is time to amend your claim – or cancel it!
 9. Also, presenting multiple arguments actually lowers your odds of success. Consider – if you present two arguments for the Examiner to consider and one is clear, but the other is less so, then the Examiner can easily maintain the rejection by stating that more consideration of the less clear argument is needed.
 10. Also, there is no need to discuss aspects of the prior art that are not directly on point with the focused argument that you are asserting. Keep your discussion very tight and pointed toward the claim limitation that you are targeting.
 11. Only write things in your argument that help you or are neutral. Don't agree in writing that the prior art teaches specific limitations of your claims. You only need to talk about what the prior art DOES NOT teach – not what it does teach.
- B. Canceling claims – Very few people canceled any of their independent claims. Unfortunately, that really lowers the odds that your response after final will be effective in securing an allowance. Recall that we are after

final – we are going to file an RCE, so we just want to see if there is anything at all that we can get issued, even if it is only a very narrow claim. You have to be ruthless in canceling your claims. I know it hurts, it's a terrible "Sophie's choice" after you have put so much work into the claims. However, a final Office Action that only has one independent claim and consequently only has to make **one** convincing/winning argument (as opposed to **three** different convincing/winning arguments – one for each independent claim) is more likely to be allowed. In short, if you make three arguments, you have to win them **ALL** in order for the application to be allowed. If you win two out of three, the examiner will just say that the application "requires further consideration". Conversely, if you only made the one argument that you think is a winner and dropped the other claims, then you might have an allowance.

- C. Watch out for admissions. If the Examiner asserts that the prior art teaches X, it may not be the truth and it is not going to be prosecution history estoppel against you. However, if you phrase your argument sloppily, (for example by merely copying and pasting the Examiner's language, or by taking an expansive reading of the teachings of the prior art) then it becomes an admission and is now prosecution history estoppel against you. Always use something like "The Examiner asserts that ..." or "The Office Action recites that ..." Instead of "Reference X teaches ..." unless you are absolutely sure.
- D. If you state in your Amendment that a Prior Art reference "does not teach" something and you are wrong, then it may very well be used to support an allegation of inequitable conduct and failure to comply with your duty of candor to the PTO. That can expose you to discipline and potentially be used to render unenforceable an issued patent. At the very least you should be doing a text search of the reference to verify your statement. That usually seems obvious to people – but what is less obvious is that you have to be careful with your language in the argument – lest you be making a broader statement than you intended to make.
- E. For 103 rejections, you need to argue both references alone and in combination – or else the Examiner will just claim that you are arguing

against the references individually, which allows her to maintain the rejection. If you are arguing that there is a claim limitation that is not taught by either reference, then at some point in your response you need to say something like “Thus, limitation X is not taught or suggested by Reference A or Reference B, alone or in combination.”

- F. Some were suggesting that a claim term in the independent claim must be interpreted by the Examiner in a specific fashion because of a limitation that appeared in the specification. That is not in accordance with US law. The specification does not control the interpretation of the independent claim.
 - G. There are still some areas where people are arguing “definitional” aspects that are unsupported by limitations in the claim – those are very unlikely to win. For example, if you recite “a baseline” in your claim and you don’t add clear and specific structural or functional limitations, then the breath of that term is really quite broad – and probably broader than you think – or it could be regarded by the Examiner as unclear or undefined/not enabled.
- V. Last page
- A. Date - Please be sure to list the correct filing date. Remember that this is a signed document that you are submitting to the PTO. Inaccuracies may subject you to discipline.
 - B. Signature – always remember to electronically sign with “/name/”
The PTO will refuse the amendment as non-compliant if “unsigned” (not properly electronically signed)
- IV. Congratulations on completing the course! Good luck in your careers! Please consider participating in the IP Clinic next spring!