PARTICULARIZING PATENT PLEADING: PLEADING PATENT INFRINGEMENT IN A POST-TWOMBLY WORLD

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I. Introduction 452

II. The Current Patent Litigation Predicament 455
   A. What is Patent Infringement? 455
   B. The Costs of Patent Infringement Litigation 458
      1. Legal Costs 459
      2. Innovation Costs 461
      3. Business Costs 462
   C. Resulting Behavioral Effects 463

III. Pleading Patent Infringement 469
   A. Pleading Practice Generally 469
   B. Pleading in Patent Infringement Actions 476
      C. How Notice Pleading Enables Patent Litigation Abuse 484
         1. Lowers Costs for Plaintiffs 484
         2. Increases Costs for Defendants 486
         3. Prevents Early Dismissal 488

IV. The Use of Heightened Pleading for Patent Infringement Actions 489
   A. Heightened Pleading and Its Use in Other Areas 489
      1. Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 9(b) 489
      2. Securities Fraud 490
B. Applying a Heightened Pleading Standard to Patent Infringement Actions

1. Heightened Patent Pleading Generally

2. Interaction with Form 18 and the Need for Revision

C. Counter-Arguments to Heightened Pleading

1. Increased Patent Enforcement Costs

2. Alternate Mechanisms to Potentially Curb Abuse

V. Conclusion

*452 The Supreme Court’s recent jurisprudence has reinvigorated the role of pleading in civil litigation. As a result, in order to survive a motion to dismiss, plaintiffs must now include more detailed allegations that demonstrate a plausible entitlement to relief.

This article examines how these changes interact with the pleading requirements for patent infringement litigation. In recent years, the number of patent infringement lawsuits has increased dramatically, in part because of lax notice pleading requirements. This patent litigation explosion imposes exorbitant costs on defendants and has a detrimental effect on innovation.

As courts begin to apply the new plausibility pleading regime, this article argues that they should seize the opportunity to rein in abusive patent litigation by requiring particularized allegations of infringement. Adopting this regime effectuates Twombly and Iqbal, reduces the number of nuisance-value patent infringement suits, and begins to address the problems that cause the patent system to inhibit, rather than promote, progress in science and the useful arts.

I. Introduction

The theory behind the patent system in the United States is simple. In exchange for disclosing a novel, non-obvious, and useful invention to the public, an inventor receives the ability to exclude others from using that invention for twenty years. This “carefully crafted bargain” is supposed to stimulate innovation and “promote the [p]rogress of [s]cience and useful [a]rts.”

The operation of the patent system, however, is anything but simple. For a patent to issue, an application must endure a lengthy and complicated examination process by the Patent and Trademark Office. If a patent is eventually obtained, it does not guarantee its holder the right to practice the patented invention. Instead, a patent’s economic value is derived solely from the right to exclude others. The only way for a patent holder to prevent others from violating, or “infringing,” a patent is to assert it in litigation.

Patent infringement litigation, however, is out of control. Not only has the number of filed patent infringement cases increased dramatically in recent years, but each case requires a tremendous amount of time and money to resolve. High costs, lengthy time commitments, and uncertainty combine to create incentives for defendants to settle patent infringement cases early, even if a case is meritless. As a result, instead of incentivizing innovation, the current system encourages rent-seeking behavior from patent holders.

While countless articles have outlined this problem, the proposed solutions vary significantly. Some commentators propose structural solutions, such as creating specialized trial courts to hear patent cases. Others propose doctrinal reforms, such as altering the Federal Circuit’s approach to claim construction. Scarcely attention has been paid, however, to the role that changes in civil procedure could play in mitigating the challenges of modern patent litigation in the United States.

This article will explore changes to the pleading requirements for patent infringement actions. In theory, the Federal Rules of
Civil Procedure establish a minimal pleading requirement for all civil actions. Indeed, the appendix of official forms following the rules demonstrate that a patent infringement complaint only needs to include brief conclusory allegations, such as cursory statements about the ownership of the patent, manner of infringement, and that the patentee provided notice to the alleged infringer.

In a series of recent decisions, however, the Supreme Court revised this traditional pleading standard. These decisions require plaintiffs to plead facts that “nudge[] their claims across the line from conceivable to plausible.” It remains unclear how this new pleading regime will apply to patent infringement actions or interact with the appendix of forms, which, by rule, sufficiently plead a cause of action.

This article’s thesis is that in light of the current patent litigation predicament, patent infringement actions should be held to a heightened pleading requirement, beyond that espoused by the Supreme Court in Twombly and Iqbal and approaching the particularity required by Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 9(b). Practically, this change would require a patent holder to plead particularized facts to support an infringement claim, such as the specific act of infringement or infringing product, how it infringes the patent, and what claims of the patent those actions infringe.

Part I provides an overview of patent infringement litigation in the United States and its substantial costs. Part II outlines modern pleading practice in civil litigation, how this translates to patent cases, and how notice pleading facilitates nuisance-value infringement claims. Finally, Part III discusses heightened pleading and how its application in the infringement context can address the unique challenges presented by patent litigation.

II. The Current Patent Litigation Predicament

A. What is Patent Infringement?

Patents give their holders the right to exclude others for a twenty-year period. The rights bestowed by a patent are defined by a patent’s “claims”-- densely worded single sentences at the end of the patent document. These rights can be infringed in two ways: directly and indirectly.

An alleged infringer is directly liable for infringement when, during the patent’s term, the patented invention is made, used, offered to be sold, or sold without authority in the United States. Direct liability also arises under the doctrine of equivalents. According to this doctrine, if a product or process does not literally infringe the patent, the alleged infringer will nonetheless be liable “if there is ‘equivalence’ between the elements of the accused product or process and the claimed elements of the patented invention.”

Individuals can also be subject to indirect, or secondary, liability for the infringement of others. Secondary infringement occurs when someone induces infringement of a patent, which requires that “an alleged infringer knowingly induce[] another to commit an infringing act.” In the case of process patents, liability can arise from contributing to the infringement of a patent. Both of these forms of secondary liability require proof of direct infringement by others.

The primary method of holding an infringer accountable, and enforcing a patentee’s rights, is through litigation. The patent system is designed to deter infringement by ensuring that infringers have a lot to lose-- they can be subject to potentially broad remedies including treble damages, injunctive relief, and attorney’s fees. Patentees are encouraged to file suit soon after they become aware of infringing activity because failure to bring a timely action can often preclude enforcement of the patent altogether. These characteristics ensure that the patent system is self-regulating.

*458 B. The Costs of Patent Infringement Litigation

In recent years, there has been a marked influx in the number of patents issued by the Patent and Trademark Office. In 2008 alone, 182,556 patents were issued. These patents were issued from the almost five hundred thousand patent applications that were filed in 2008--the most applications ever filed with the PTO in a year. Both the number of patent applications and patents issued is significantly higher than at any time in the history of the U.S. patent system.

In light of the increase in the number of issued patents, it should come as no surprise that the number of patent infringement
actions filed to enforce these rights has also dramatically increased. For example, the probability that a patent will be involved in litigation within four years of its issuance is surging—more than double what it was in 1984. Overall, since the 1980s, patent litigation has undergone steady and unparalleled growth.

More specifically, according to recent data from the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts, from September 2008 to September 2009, almost 3,000 patent infringement suits were filed. At the end of this period, almost 3,500 suits remained pending. The number of suits filed represents a four percent decrease from 2008, but is less than the thirteen percent drop in intellectual property suits generally.

This growing body of cases is different from other civil actions. Most relevant for purposes of this article are the unique costs associated with patent litigation. Specifically, these costs come in three varieties: legal costs, innovation costs, and business costs.

1. Legal Costs

Patent litigation is expensive. According to the American Intellectual Property Law Association, the legal costs of a patent infringement action range from $600,000 to $5 million, depending on the patentee’s potential recovery. In light of these significant legal costs, it is no surprise that one survey found that litigation costs are the number one concern for a company faced with a patent infringement suit.

Several factors contribute to these high legal fees. First, patent cases are extremely complex. They involve two layers of complexity: highly technical legal doctrines and procedures, plus the application of these substantive principles to complex technologies. For example, as part of every infringement suit, a court must interpret the scope of a patent’s claims. This hearing, called a Markman hearing, typically occurs prior to trial, and requires a judge to analyze the patent itself and the underlying technology to define what specific words or phrases in the patent’s claims mean. Such underlying complexity, both procedurally and substantively, is pervasive throughout patent litigation.

An additional factor driving up litigation costs is the length of time it takes to resolve patent cases. Pretrial discovery and motions practice frequently take months, if not years, to complete. Discovery drags out, in part because the highly confidential proprietary information typically requested in infringement cases generates highly contentious relations between the parties, often resulting in numerous discovery-related motions. The volume of discovery also contributes to these delays, as patent cases usually necessitate at least ten depositions and well over a hundred document requests reaching into the entirety of a party’s business. As a result, discovery and pretrial proceedings alone entail substantial legal fees.

Of the infringement cases that go to trial, in one-third of them, the trial occurs over three years from the date that the plaintiff filed the complaint. Twelve percent take over five years to reach trial. Further, at the end of September 2009, almost 400 patent cases had been pending for three years or more. Overall, this complexity and duration makes defending against patent infringement litigation an expensive endeavor.

2. Innovation Costs

Patent infringement suits have additional costs beyond the legal fees that an alleged infringer must incur to defend them. First, when faced with an infringement claim, inventors may choose to alter their research or products to simply avoid the scope of the asserted patent. If inventors cannot easily design around a patent that has been asserted against them, the threat of a lengthy lawsuit may be enough to cause them to cease research or the manufacture of a product or technology entirely.

Further, if an infringement suit is filed, the disruption may force a company to put research on hold until the litigation has been resolved, delaying potentially important development. Litigation costs may also eat up resources that could have gone to research and development. For these reasons, an infringement suit has the potential to negatively effect innovation generally. These innovation costs are significant in light of the patent system’s purpose of incentivizing innovation.

3. Business Costs

Patent infringement suits also impose a variety of business costs on an alleged infringer. Initially, like any lawsuit, patent litigation disrupts a business’s operations. Employees will be called to give depositions, personnel will need to be allocated
to gather and provide documents, and time will have to be set aside to discuss *463 the matter with an attorney. Unlike other types of litigation, however, the expansive nature of discovery in patent cases exacerbates these disruptive effects.64

The financial costs of patent litigation have additional consequences for an alleged infringer. A pending infringement suit may affect a company’s ability to obtain credit or, at a minimum, increase its credit costs.65 Investors may be hesitant to purchase a particular product or a company’s stock if an infringement suit threatens to either shut the company down or prevent it from using a specific process or product.66 For example, empirical data shows that the stock market negatively reacts to the announcement of a patent infringement suit.67 Even if the alleged infringement pertains only to a component, if the overall product is a technology that requires significant investment, customers will be wary of making that investment because of the pending suit.68 Thus, a company faces a variety of costs when confronted with allegations of patent infringement.69

C. Resulting Behavioral Effects

The significant costs associated with patent infringement litigation have several real-world effects on the behavior of both patentees and alleged infringers. Because of these costs, an alleged infringer has an incentive to quickly settle an infringement claim, typically by purchasing a license to use the patented technology, *464 rather than take the case to trial.70 For patentees, these costs create incentives to engage in rent-seeking behavior.71

Specifically, high litigation costs create incentives for patentees to file nuisance-value infringement claims.72 In recent years, nuisance-value patent suits have become a “daily fact of life for most corporate legal departments.”73 In fact, the increasing prevalence of these suits has led to some commentators describing them as the newest form of the “slip and fall,”74 an “innovation tax,”75 and as “the business model of the new millennium.”76 When faced with these suits, companies often quickly settle, even if meritorious defenses exist.77 As a result, patentees begin to more aggressively assert their patents, and this cycle becomes self-perpetuating.78

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One highly publicized group of patentees that engage in such rent-seeking behavior is the so-called “patent troll.”79 The definition of this group varies tremendously. *465 Generally, however, the term refers to companies or individuals, usually non-practicing entities, who use a patent to extract rents from producers in a given field.80 This rent-seeking behavior is enabled, in part, by the proliferation of patents with dubious validity.82

Regardless of how a patentee who brings a nuisance-value suit is described, several factors provide incentives for an alleged infringer to quickly settle. First, an alleged infringer has a lot on the line—the remedies available for patent infringement are substantial and far-reaching.83 If a patentee prevails, defendants can be subject to high damage awards or even an injunction shutting down their business.84 An injunction, in particular, has a high “negotiation value” because it would require an alleged infringer to stop selling and producing the infringing product immediately.85 As one commentary noted, these potential remedies “encourage[] patent owners to roll the dice of litigation in hopes of reaping a large reward.”86

If a “patent thicket” exists, a single product may give rise to several potential suits that could subject a company to these severe consequences.87 Additionally, *466 once a company has developed and marketed a successful product, it has considerable sunk costs invested in that particular technology.88 Thus, when faced with infringement suits, it makes more economic sense for that company to pay a royalty to patentees rather than investing in different technology.89

Besides these potential consequences, the significant costs associated with infringement actions are another key factor that incentivizes early settlement.90 Notably, a patentee and an alleged infringer do not share these costs equally—the alleged infringer bears a much heavier burden.91 Initially, patentees have the ability to retain counsel on a contingency fee basis.92 This minimizes a patentee’s risk in filing suit and facilitates the growth of nuisance-value claims.93

One area in which this disparity is particularly pronounced is the cost of discovery. Like all lawsuits, broad discovery requests in patent cases are burdensome in terms of production costs and business disruption.94 In nuisance-value infringement suits, however, if the patentee is a troll or other non-practicing entity, these burdens will not be reciprocal because the patentee will have few, if any, documents *467 in existence or business to disrupt.95 Therefore, an alleged infringer normally bears a disproportionate share of discovery costs.96

More significantly, however, a typical defense to infringement is invalidity.97 To establish this defense, an alleged infringer
must incur substantial costs, as it requires exhaustive prior art searches and significant analysis.\textsuperscript{98} Further, a defendant has the burden of overcoming the statutory presumption that an issued patent is valid.\textsuperscript{99}

Another contributing factor is that non-practicing entities, such as patent trolls, are immune from many of the defensive litigation strategies that a defendant typically employs.\textsuperscript{100} For example, one typical defense, a counterclaim for infringement of a patent owned by the defendant, is unavailable when the patentee is not producing anything.\textsuperscript{101} Many companies assemble vast patent portfolios to deter business competitors from filing patent infringement claims, since, if a suit is \textsuperscript{468} filed, the business could then counterclaim for infringement of one of the patents in its portfolio.\textsuperscript{102} As a result, disputes are often resolved through cross-licensing agreements rather than litigation.\textsuperscript{103} With trolls or non-practicing entities, however, this deterrent function is ineffective, since the patentee is not producing any products that could infringe any patents in the defendant’s patent portfolio.\textsuperscript{104}

The significant amount of uncertainty surrounding patent litigation also encourages early settlement.\textsuperscript{105} One key area of uncertainty is with regard to the scope of a patent’s claims.\textsuperscript{106} Because it is difficult to determine this scope when the case is initially filed, an alleged infringer cannot reliably predict the probability of success, and is therefore unwilling to risk going to trial.\textsuperscript{107} Additionally, even if an alleged infringer prevails at trial, the patentee can appeal to the Federal Circuit, which has a well-documented reversal rate, particularly on the issue of claim construction.\textsuperscript{108} Thus, this uncertainty, combined with the other factors mentioned, \textsuperscript{469} creates incentives for patentees to file nuisance-value infringement suits and for alleged infringers to quickly settle them.

III. Pleading Patent Infringement

A. Pleading Practice Generally

Every civil action begins with the filing of a complaint.\textsuperscript{109} Over time, scholars have debated the level of detail that all pleadings,\textsuperscript{110} including a complaint, should include.\textsuperscript{111} These pleading requirements vary based on the court system in which the action is taking place.

Before the adoption of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, federal courts were required to follow the civil procedure of the state in which they were located.\textsuperscript{112} At that time, most states followed a system of pleading modeled after the code pleading statute of New York.\textsuperscript{113} New York adopted this statute, known as \textsuperscript{470} the Field Code, in 1848,\textsuperscript{114} which acted as “a kind of catalytic agent for procedural reform elsewhere in the United States.”\textsuperscript{115} Under this code, a complaint needed to include “[a] statement of the facts constituting the cause of action, in ordinary and concise language, without repetition, and in such a manner as to enable a person of common understanding to know what is intended.”\textsuperscript{116} As a result, the code prevented parties from pleading legal conclusions or evidence in a complaint.\textsuperscript{117} Instead, a plaintiff was required to plead the “ultimate facts” that demonstrated that a cause of action existed.\textsuperscript{118}

One example of how this pleading system operated is Gillispie v. Goodyear Service Stores.\textsuperscript{119} In Gillispie, the plaintiff alleged that the defendants, “‘without cause or just excuse and maliciously,’ trespassed upon premises occupied by her as \textsuperscript{471} a residence, assaulted her[,] and caused her to be seized and confined as a prisoner.”\textsuperscript{120} According to the court, these statements were mere “legal conclusions” and not adequately supported by facts.\textsuperscript{121} Specifically, the court stated that these allegations “do not disclose what occurred, when it occurred, where it occurred, who did what, the relationships between defendants and plaintiff or of defendants inter se, or any other factual data that might identify the occasion or describe the circumstances of the alleged wrongful conduct of defendants.”\textsuperscript{122} Accordingly, the court affirmed the trial court’s dismissal of the complaint for failing to state sufficient facts to establish a cause of action.\textsuperscript{123}

As this example illustrates, code pleading was problematic. Enforcing the distinction between facts and legal conclusions opened the door for unresolvable disputes.\textsuperscript{124} Judicial decisions were inconsistent--what one judge viewed as pleading facts constituted pleading legal conclusions to others.\textsuperscript{125} As a result, cases were increasingly resolved based on pleading decisions rather than the merits of a case.\textsuperscript{126}

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure were adopted in 1938 as a response to the pitfalls of code pleading.\textsuperscript{127} The drafters intended to abolish code pleading in \textsuperscript{472} the federal system and provide a new standard for the level of detail needed in a complaint.\textsuperscript{128} The “keystone” of this new pleading system was Rule 8.\textsuperscript{129} Specifically, Rule 8(a)(2) states that a complaint
must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.”110 Additionally, the rules contain an appendix of forms that illustrate sufficient pleadings under the rules.111 As Charles Clark, one of the drafters of the Federal Rules stated, these forms were “probably the most important part of the rules,” because “when you can’t define you can at least draw pictures to show your meaning.”112

Overall, the federal rules adopted a “notice pleading” standard.113 The goal of the framers was that pleadings would merely put a party on notice and that facts, as well as the specifics of claims, would be fleshed out through the discovery process.114 Instead of parties fighting over procedural technicalities, once discovery occurred, meritless claims could be disposed of through summary judgment.115

*473 The classic example of notice pleading in action is Dioguardi v. Durning.116 The plaintiff brought suit against the Collector of Customs at the Port of New York because he held the plaintiff’s “tonics” from Italy for a year and then sold them at a public auction because of unpaid fees.117 The plaintiff filed an “obviously home drawn” complaint alleging “that his ‘medical extracts’ were given to the Springdale Distilling Company ‘with my betting (bidding?) price of $110; and not their price of $120,’” and “that three weeks before the sale, two cases, of [nineteen] bottles each case, disappeared.”118 The trial court dismissed the plaintiff’s complaint for failing “to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action.”119

The Second Circuit, in an opinion by Judge Charles Clark, reversed.120 The court concluded that “however inartistically they may be stated, the plaintiff has disclosed his claims that the collector has converted or otherwise done away with two of his cases of medicinal tonics and has sold the rest in a manner incompatible with the public auction he had announced.”121 As a result, the court concluded that the plaintiff should not be deprived of his day in court and that dismissal of the complaint was inappropriate.122

Notice pleading has several potential benefits. First, unlike the code pleading regime, it allows courts to resolve cases on the merits rather than relying upon procedural technicalities.123 In theory, notice pleading also minimizes complexity.124 *474 This rationale focuses on an individual’s access to justice and the court system as a method of obtaining relief for wrongs.125

If a party fails to satisfy these pleading requirements, it can result in the dismissal of the cause of action for “failure to state a claim.”126 Alternatively, a party has the ability to move the court for “a more definite statement of a pleading . . . which is so vague or ambiguous that the party cannot reasonably prepare a response.”127 In line with the goals of notice pleading, however, the Supreme Court historically interpreted Rule 8 as imposing only a minimal burden on plaintiffs.128 For example, in Conley v. Gibson, the Court stated the “accepted rule that a complaint should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim unless it appears beyond doubt that a plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.”129 The Court later explicitly rejected heightened pleading in any area other than those specifically enumerated in the rules.130

*475 In 2007, this jurisprudence took a distinct turn with the Court’s decision in Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly.131 In Twombly, an antitrust case, the court concluded that the “no set of facts” language from Conley had “after puzzling the profession for [fifty] years . . . earned its retirement.”132 In its place, the Court adopted a standard requiring a plaintiff to plead “a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.”133

The Twombly decision created uncertainty among circuit courts, which split over how broadly to read the decision.134 One source of this confusion was that shortly after Twombly was decided, another Supreme Court decision reversed the dismissal of a civil rights complaint for failure to state a claim, without mentioning “plausibility pleading.”135 As a result, some courts read Twombly narrowly, confining the new “plausibility” standard solely to the antitrust context.136 The majority of courts, however, viewed Twombly more broadly and applied the new pleading standard to other contexts.137

*476 The Supreme Court clarified the scope of Twombly two years later in Ashcroft v. Iqbal.138 In Iqbal, a Pakistani national filed suit against several federal officials for allegedly subjecting him to unconstitutionally harsh conditions of confinement because of his race, religion, or national origin following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.139

The Court began its analysis by noting that Rule 8 “demands more than an unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.”140 Accordingly, “[a] claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.”141 This determination is “a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.”142 Further, the Court rejected the plaintiff’s argument that Twombly applied only in the limited context of antitrust disputes, stating that
“Twombly expounded the pleading standard for ‘all civil actions.’”165 Thus, following Iqbal, civil litigation shifted to a plausibility pleading paradigm.

B. Pleading in Patent Infringement Actions

A patent infringement suit is merely a specific type of civil action.164 Accordingly, courts have traditionally applied the general notice pleading standard to *477 patent infringement cases the same way that it applies in other cases.165 As a result, “[i]nfringement complaints are usually sparse and conclusory.”166 One of the key contributing factors to the sparse nature of complaints in patent infringement actions is Form 18 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.167 This form provides a sample complaint for patent infringement.168 Its content is significant because the forms, by rule, are deemed to be sufficient pleadings.169 Specifically, the sample patent infringement complaint includes only five brief elements: a statement of jurisdiction, a cursory statement about the ownership of the patent, the allegedly infringing product, that the patentee provided notice to the alleged infringer, and the relief demanded by the plaintiff.170

*478 The Federal Circuit has required a complaint for patent infringement to satisfy a similarly minimal threshold.171 For example, in Phonometrics, Inc. v. Hospitality Franchise Systems, Inc., a pre-Twombly decision, the court applied “the liberal pleading standards” to a patent infringement complaint.172 Specifically, the court concluded that “[t]he Rule 12(b)(6) pleading requirements for a complaint of infringement cannot be extended to require a plaintiff to specifically include each element of the claims of the asserted patent.”173 According to the court, “[t]o impose such requirements would contravene the notice pleading standard, and would add needless steps to the already complex process of patent litigation.”174 Thus, a patent holder only needs to allege “facts sufficient to put the alleged infringer on notice.”175

*479 The Federal Circuit maintained this liberal approach to pleading following Twombly in McZeal v. Sprint Nextel Corp.176 After reaffirming the Phonometrics court’s statement that a plaintiff did not need to allege each element of the claims of the asserted patent, the court noted its belief that Twombly did not alter the pleading requirements of Rule 8.177 Accordingly, any details regarding how the defendant’s product infringed the patent were unnecessary, as these details were “something to be determined through discovery.”178 Notably, McZeal has been criticized and distinguished after the Iqbal decision.179

However, district courts are still divided over what the rules require a patentee to plead, especially post-Twombly.180 Initially, similar to the pre-Iqbal circuit split, the Twombly decision itself generated confusion.181 Some courts concluded that the Supreme Court’s decision had no effect on patent cases.182 The majority of courts, however, recognized that Twombly applied to patent infringement actions. *480 183 This split was resolved by the Supreme Court’s conclusive statement in Iqbal that the Twombly standard applied to all civil actions.184

Iqbal did not, however, address the substantive pleading requirements for patent infringement actions. Over time, courts have split over two issues— and Twombly only reignited this debate. First, courts often divide over the question of whether the plaintiff must specify the claims in the patent that it believes the defendant is infringing.185 Prior to Twombly, most courts did not require a plaintiff to specify the infringed claims.186 These courts relied upon the notice function of pleadings and stressed that this notice function was satisfied without specifying the patent claims that were being infringed.187 Historically, however, a plaintiff was required to plead with such specificity.188

*481 This trend has persisted following Twombly and Iqbal. Most courts continue to hold that a plaintiff does not need to identify which claims it believes are being infringed.189 Notably, however, one court has concluded that the plaintiff must specifically plead the allegedly infringed claims.190 As this court noted, “a plaintiff’s failure to specify which claims it believes are infringed by a defendant’s products places an undue burden on the defendant, who must wade through all the claims in a patent and determine which claims might apply to its products to give a complete response.”191

The second area that has generated dispute is whether a plaintiff must specifically plead how the defendant is infringing the patent.192 On this issue, the division among courts is considerably more pronounced. Numerous courts, both before and after Twombly, have concluded that some identification of the method of infringement is required.193 Similar to the rationale behind requiring a plaintiff to allege *482 specific claims, these courts stress how failing to identify the specific infringing product or service imposes an undue burden on the defendant.194
For example, in one recent case, the plaintiff alleged that the defendant was infringing its patent by “making, using, offering to sell and/or selling infringing software and hardware products.” However, the defendant produced at least 150 different types of products that had over 4000 possible end-user applications. As the court noted, “Form [18] simply does not address a factual scenario of this sort.” Accordingly, the court held that the plaintiff’s allegations did not provide fair notice to the defendant and therefore failed to satisfy Rule 8(a).

Another line of cases has reached the opposite conclusion and held that no such identification is necessary, even post-Twombly. Again, these courts stress the low bar posed by the notice function of pleadings and state that discovery will allow a defendant to clarify the manner of infringement. For example, one court approved a complaint where the plaintiff alleged that its patent was infringed by the defendant “making, importing, offering for sale, selling, and/or using devices that embody the patented methods, including [four] megabit and higher density DRAMs.” The court concluded that even though this allegation referred to “nearly all of [d]efendants’ product line,” it was sufficient because it followed Form 18 and the defendant would receive more specific notice as discovery progressed. Thus, in patent infringement actions, courts continue to dispute the contours of Twombly, Iqbal, and notice pleading generally.

Another issue is the inconsistency between Form 18, which, by rule, is a model of a sufficient pleading, and the modern plausibility pleading standard. Indeed, post-Iqbal, some courts have reaffirmed that a complaint modeled after Form 18 sufficiently states a claim. In a recent unpublished decision, the Federal Circuit also implied the continued vitality of Form 18 following Iqbal. The sparse allegations in this form appear to be the prototypical “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements,” that the Supreme Court in Iqbal rejected as insufficient. The difficulties inherent in this disparity are an issue that courts will be faced with in the post-Twombly era.

C. How Notice Pleading Enables Patent Litigation Abuse

As previously outlined, the patent litigation landscape is marred by an over-abundance of nuisance-value suits. Notice pleading facilitates the proliferation of these suits in several ways.

1. Lowers Costs for Plaintiffs

First, notice pleading drastically lowers costs for plaintiffs. A patent infringement complaint, as discussed earlier, is simple and typically only a few pages in length. Thus, a plaintiff does not incur substantial costs to prepare and file it. These factors incentivize the filing of nuisance-value infringement suits because a plaintiff does not stand to lose a significant amount of money by filing a complaint. Instead, the plaintiff stands to profit from a likely quick settlement.

In theory, a plaintiff in a patent infringement action, like all plaintiffs, would still incur costs based on the presuit investigation requirement contained in Rule *485. Specifically, as outlined by the Federal Circuit, “Rule 11 requires an attorney who files a patent infringement action to compare the accused device with the construed patent claims.” This necessarily requires that the “attorney interpret the pertinent claims of the patent in issue before filing a complaint alleging patent infringement.” In other words, an attorney must, “at a bare minimum, apply the claims of each and every patent that is being brought into the lawsuit to an accused device and conclude that there is a reasonable basis for a finding of infringement of at least one claim of each patent so asserted.” Thus, theoretically, an attorney will conduct a pre-filing investigation that will include construing the patent’s claims and applying that construction to a specific product manufactured by the defendant.

Under the current notice pleading regime, however, this presuit investigation requirement imposes few real costs on a plaintiff in an infringement case. Despite the Federal Circuit’s broad statements, often the actual presuit investigation required by courts is minimal. The safe harbor provision in Rule 11 also allows unscrupulous parties to easily get away with failing to conduct an investigation prior to filing suit. A plaintiff does not need to disclose this Rule 11 determination, either, making it difficult for a defendant to value the suit for settlement purposes. Further, the scope of a patent’s claim is typically ambiguous and it is difficult to know with any certainty how a court will construe it. This fact benefits nuisance-value plaintiffs, as it allows them to bring actions that lack merit but satisfy the minimal requirements of Rule 11. Thus, notice pleading undermines the Rule 11 deterrent and further lowers the costs a plaintiff must incur prior to filing an infringement complaint.
For example, in a recent case, the Federal Circuit considered whether a plaintiff’s counsel had sufficiently investigated whether the defendant’s website infringed a patent for an interface between electronic and hard copies of documents. The plaintiff was a patent holding company that asserted numerous identical infringement actions against a variety of companies. The court concluded that the investigation was adequate because the plaintiff’s counsel “examined portions of the defendant’s website and, based on his experience, concluded that it worked in a manner that infringed the plaintiff’s patent.” As this case illustrates, a cursory pre-filing inquiry can suffice in infringement cases—demonstrating that this mechanism is not suitable for deterring the filing of nuisance-value suits.

2. Increases Costs for Defendants

Notice pleading also facilitates the filing of patent infringement suits, and therefore nuisance-value settlements, by increasing an alleged infringer’s costs, particularly the costs of responding to a complaint. As a general matter, notice pleading is problematic when applied to technologically complex areas of the law because it increases a defendant’s response costs. More specifically, the cases previously mentioned, both before and after Twombly, typically do not require a plaintiff to specify the claim being infringed, nor the allegedly infringing product or process. Thus, an infringement complaint does not inform a defendant of what the case is truly about, requiring a defendant to expend substantial resources in order to effectively respond.

These expenses generally result from the lack of two details in a complaint. First, most patent infringement suits allege infringement of patents with numerous claims, or assert infringement of several patents. As a result, a defendant must expend time and effort interpreting each potentially applicable claim, performing prior art searches for potential invalidity defenses, and preparing non-infringement defenses, which typically require hiring experts. This process often occurs during the period before an answer is served, or sixty days if a defendant waives service of process. Responding in this short period of time, therefore, entails significant costs and may preclude a defendant from mounting an effective defense. Further, unlike nuisance-value plaintiffs, courts typically require defendants to plead additional detail for affirmative defenses such as invalidity and inequitable conduct. Accordingly, even without an effective Rule 11 limitation, defendants need to conduct additional investigation and incur unique costs in responding to an infringement complaint.

Additionally, large companies are the most common target of nuisance-value suits. Since a plaintiff does not need to plead the specific method of infringement by a defendant, a large company will need to investigate which of its products may be infringing—an expensive undertaking. Thus, overall, notice pleading imposes significant costs on alleged infringers, which only further encourages nuisance-value settlements and, therefore, the filing of nuisance-value claims.

3. Prevents Early Dismissal

As previously discussed, the overall paradigm of the Federal Rules is that discovery will expose meritless claims and that such claims can then be disposed of through motions for summary judgment. Accordingly, the minimal pleading requirements of Rule 8(a) were intended to prevent the dismissal of cases until after discovery occurs.

In the patent context, however, this minimal pleading threshold prevents dismissal until after costly, and typically lengthy, discovery has occurred. As a result, accused infringers are forced to decide between settlement and incurring the substantial expenses associated with discovery. Further, these costs are disproportionately allocated to defendants. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that a large percentage of infringement cases settle before discovery fully begins. For these reasons, notice pleading facilitates the proliferation of nuisance-value patent infringement claims.

IV. The Use of Heightened Pleading for Patent Infringement Actions

As the above analysis demonstrates, notice pleading is problematic in patent infringement actions. But are there any alternatives? This section explores the use of heightened, or particularized, pleading. Essentially, this alternative requires a plaintiff to plead more detail in support of a claim. Implementing this approach in patent cases presents an opportunity to remedy the ills caused by notice pleading and to begin addressing the current patent litigation predicament.

A. Heightened Pleading and Its Use in Other Areas
Other areas of the law use heightened pleading as a mechanism to reduce the amount of costly, time-consuming, and often frivolous litigation. Examining some of these areas, along with the rationales for why heightened pleading was implemented, provides a useful background for why adopting a similar approach is appropriate for patent infringement actions.

1. Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 9(b)

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure contain one prominent example of heightened pleading requirements. Rule 9 states that “a party must state with particularity the circumstances constituting fraud or mistake.” Generally, courts have interpreted this language to require a plaintiff to plead facts regarding who made a false statement, when and where it was made, as well as the content of the statement. Depending on the specific subject matter, some courts require even more detail.

*490 The requirement of particularized facts has several rationales. First, it discourages meritless claims of fraud or mistake, which are frequently advanced solely for their settlement value and which impose substantial costs on courts and parties. Second, these claims cover such a wide variety of potential conduct that a defendant needs more information about the plaintiff’s claim in order to prepare a responsive pleading. Particularity is also premised on the fact that fraud and mistake claims involve alleged conduct that incorporates some degree of moral turpitude, so particularity is needed to protect defendants from lightly made claims. These considerations resulted in the particularity requirement in cases of fraud and mistake.

2. Securities Fraud

Securities fraud is one area where heightened pleading has been adopted by statute. Pursuant to federal securities statutes and their accompanying implementing regulations, private individuals can bring a civil action for securities fraud. The federal securities statutes forbid publicly traded companies from using “any manipulative or deceptive device” in connection with the purchase or sale of securities. Further, Securities and Exchange Commission Rule 10b-5 prohibits, in part, making “any untrue statement of a material fact,” or failing “to state a material fact necessary in order to make the statements made . . . not misleading.” Courts have implied the right to a private damages action from these sources.

In 1995, Congress passed the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act, over the President’s veto, to address alleged abuses in securities litigation. A key section of this legislation involved heightening the pleading requirements for private securities fraud actions. Specifically, the Act required a complaint for securities fraud, for each alleged violation, to “state with particularity facts giving rise to a strong inference that the defendant acted with the required state of mind.”

These heightened pleading standards were designed to “curb perceived abuses of the [section] 10(b) private action.” Specifically, Congress noted the practice of routinely filing costly and burdensome lawsuits for the purpose of extracting exorbitant settlements. The high costs of these suits created incentives for parties to quickly settle, which only further encouraged the filing of additional claims. In other words, heightened pleading addressed the problems of nuisance filings, targeting of deep-pocket defendants, vexatious discovery requests, and manipulation by class action lawyers. Thus, a more robust pleading requirement was implemented in securities fraud cases to limit such nuisance-value suits.

B. Applying a Heightened Pleading Standard to Patent Infringement Actions

Similar to these other types of cases, patent infringement litigation, as previously outlined, is expensive, time-intensive, and increasingly brought by nuisance-value plaintiffs. As a result, like these other substantive areas, the pleading requirements for patent cases should be raised to curb litigation abuse.

Initially, it is important to note that the pleading with particularity required by Rule 9(b) currently has limited application in patent cases. The sole area where courts apply the rule is to the affirmative defense of inequitable conduct. This defense alleges that the patentee, when applying for the patent, intended to mislead or deceive the patent examiner and “fail[ed] to disclose material information or materially false information to the PTO during prosecution.” If proven, it renders the patent unenforceable. Because this defense is essentially a “fraud on the Patent Office,” courts apply Rule 9(b) and require that it be plead with particularity. However, courts have resisted expanding the particularity requirement to other areas of patent law.
1. Heightened Patent Pleading Generally

In light of the Supreme Court’s decisions in Twombly and Iqbal, and given the current patent litigation predicament, it is time to revisit the application of heightened pleading requirements to infringement actions. But what would a particularized patent pleading regime look like?

Generally, heightened pleading would require the pleading of additional detail to support an infringement claim. More specifically, adopting a heightened pleading standard would require a plaintiff, similar to the approach currently adopted by some courts, to specifically identify the claims of the patent that a defendant is allegedly infringing. It would also require a plaintiff to specifically allege how the defendant is infringing. Thus, a plaintiff would need to identify how the defendant’s products, processes, or acts infringe specific patent claims.

This modification could also have implications for the pleading of patent claim construction. As previously outlined, ambiguity in the current claim construction jurisprudence allows nuisance-value patentees to undermine the efficacy of the Rule 11 pre-suit investigation requirement. A particularity requirement, however, could incorporate requiring a patentee to include in the complaint how it is construing the patent’s claims to come to the conclusion that the defendant is infringing. After all, the plaintiff, in theory, should be conducting a claim construction analysis prior to filing suit anyway. Although plaintiffs could amend their complaint as discovery progressed, they would still be required to make an initial showing of sufficient facts before discovery could begin. By requiring plaintiffs to initially plead this claim construction, defendants would receive additional notice and the purposes of Rule 11 would be more effectively vindicated.

A heightened pleading standard in infringement suits would also address the perverse incentives created by the current use of notice pleading. First, it would increase a nuisance-value plaintiff’s costs of filing an infringement suit because the complaint would take more time and effort to prepare, and plaintiffs would be forced to incur presuit investigatory costs. These additional costs would make obtaining a nuisance-value settlement more difficult, thereby reducing the incentive to file a nuisance-value action.

Second, a heightened pleading standard would provide an opportunity for defendants to avoid some of the costs associated with responding to nuisance-value suits. Insufficient pleading is addressed through a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim. A defendant makes this motion prior to filing an answer. Because affirmative defenses, such as patent invalidity, are not raised until an answer is filed, this means that a defendant would not have to incur the significant costs of preparing an invalidity defense until the court rules on the motion. Thus, heightened pleading allows a defendant to put off many of the costs associated with responding to an infringement claim and reduces the incentive to immediately agree to nuisance-value settlements.

Additionally, heightened pleading would theoretically limit the costs a defendant would need to incur in order to prepare an answer in response to a nuisance-value infringement claim. A defendant would no longer be forced to determine which patent claims were at issue or how those claims were being infringed when preparing its answer. Although a plaintiff could seek to amend these claims, a defendant could then move to amend its answer in response or argue that permitting the plaintiff’s amendment would not be in the interests of justice. By shifting this burden to the plaintiff, it would also provide another disincentive for plaintiffs contemplating filing a nuisance-value suit.

Similarly, more stringent pleading requirements would also facilitate the early dismissal of dubious infringement claims. Heightened pleading would allow for early dismissal of these claims before the discovery process begins. This is obviously related to lowering a defendant’s costs, because the earlier a patent case is resolved, the fewer costs a defendant must incur. Thus, overall, particularized pleading in patent infringement cases would impose additional costs on plaintiffs and lower the burden on defendants, reducing the incentives that currently foster the filing of nuisance-value infringement claims.

Moreover, adopting more stringent pleading requirements would effectuate the Supreme Court’s decisions in Twombly and Iqbal. In Twombly, the Court sent a clear signal that the particularity required in pleading a substantive cause of action should be linked to the practical realities associated with that cause of action, and recognized how pleading standards can serve as a critical tool in streamlining litigation and its costs. Essentially, the Court recognized that in certain types of cases, practical realities interfere with the notice function of complaints. Similar concerns were raised in Iqbal. The potential benefits of heightening these requirements indicate that courts should seize this opportunity to address the current patent litigation predicament.
2. Interaction with Form 18 and the Need for Revision

A significant related issue is how a heightened pleading requirement would interact with Form 18, which requires only a few cursory statements in order for a complaint to survive a motion to dismiss. These minimal requirements conflict with Twombly and Iqbal, which require a plaintiff to provide a more “plausible” pleading.

This inconsistency dictates the revision of Form 18. These revisions could incorporate a heightened pleading standard. The form was originally drafted when the rules were first promulgated in 1938. Since that time, it has not undergone any substantive revisions.

Patent law, however, has undergone significant changes since 1938, which have not been accounted for in the form. During the early twentieth century, through a series of decisions, the Supreme Court established a clear anti-patent framework, which one commentator described as its “most virulent anti-patent era.” Thus, the federal rules were drafted in an era of limited patent rights.

However, since that time, two significant changes occurred. First, the passage of the 1952 Patent Act represented a doctrinal shift in patent law. Generally, the Act overturned the Supreme Court’s prior anti-patent jurisprudence. For example, changes in the joint inventorship doctrine made patent invalidation less likely. The Act also clarified what rights a patent conferred and approved of the corporate patent strategy of acquiring “blocking patents.”

Second, the Federal Circuit’s creation in 1982 effected significant changes in patent law. In addition to making it easier to obtain a patent, the Federal Circuit has made patents easier to enforce. The court also made a substantial impact on the remedies available for infringement. In short, the creation of the Federal Circuit served to expand patent rights well beyond their scope when the federal rules, and thus Form 18, were drafted. Overall, these changes in patent law since the 1930s are in stark contrast to the relative stability of other substantive legal theories, such as negligence, which are also illustrated in the official forms.

Additionally, patents themselves are significantly more complex today than they were when Form 18 was originally drafted. As the twentieth century progressed, there was a drastic increase in the number of claims per patent. The underlying technology also became significantly more complicated during this period. Further, as previously mentioned, patents play a much larger role in modern society. For example, in 1938, 43,130 patents were issued, out of 75,006 applications. In contrast, in 2008, over four times as many patents were issued out of almost seven times as many applications. These changes only provide additional reasons to re-evaluate the content of Form 18 and the pleading requirements in patent infringement actions.

Alternatively, courts should interpret Form 18 in light of Twombly and Iqbal. For example, the sample infringement allegation in Form 18 is that “[t]he defendant has infringed and is still infringing . . . by making, selling, and using electric motors.” Several post-Twombly decisions have interpreted the use of the term “electric motors” as requiring a plaintiff to plead the specific product or method of infringement. Another court narrowly interpreted the form as only applying when the plaintiff alleged solely direct infringement. Accordingly, the claim that an alleged infringer “directly and/or indirectly” infringed the patents at issue precluded the patentee from relying on Form 18.

These decisions, however, are not uniform and, indeed, may not go far enough in the amount of information they require a patentee to plead. As a result, revising the form to require more detailed allegations is a preferable mechanism for addressing the problems created by notice pleading in patent infringement actions, and best effectuates Twombly and Iqbal.

*501 C. Counter-Arguments to Heightened Pleading

Twombly and Iqbal are not without their critics. Indeed, legislation has already been introduced in Congress to overrule them. Many of these criticisms equally apply in the patent infringement context. In the end, however, the unique aspects of patent litigation indicate that the potential disadvantages of adopting heightened pleading for patent infringement are minimal.

1. Increased Patent Enforcement Costs
Heightened pleading reduces the incentive to file a nuisance-value suit, in part, by imposing additional costs on a plaintiff. These additional costs, however, would not fall solely on nuisance-value plaintiffs. Instead, they would apply to all patent holders and potentially make enforcement of patent rights more difficult, particularly because it would lead to the dismissal of at least some meritorious claims. Because the primary justification of patents is their ability to incentivize innovation, making enforcement more difficult could have a detrimental impact on the incentive function of patents.

In reality, however, this fear is unfounded. While some costs may be new, the particularized allegations that heightened pleading would entail are not imposing any costs that are not theoretically already required. Indeed, according to Rule 11, plaintiffs should be performing a pre-suit investigation anyway, at least to the extent possible, but notice pleading currently allows some of them to effectively shirk this responsibility. A heightened pleading requirement would therefore only impose additional costs on those unscrupulous plaintiffs that currently take advantage of this disparity. Thus, instead of requiring plaintiffs to discover more facts, heightened pleading merely requires that they put them into the complaint.

Certainly, the new pleading regime would have some effect at the margins on the ability to enforce some patents. Infringement of some types of patents may be impossible to discover without the benefit of the broad discovery rules included in the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. For example, process patents may become more difficult to enforce, especially if infringement occurs behind closed doors. These cases, however, would likely be few and far between, and other methods exist to ensure the viability of enforcing these patents. Thus, the overall benefits of adopting heightened pleading would justify any minimal costs that are created for this small subset of claims.

2. Alternate Mechanisms to Potentially Curb Abuse

Another potential counterargument is that other mechanisms currently in place can be used to more effectively deter frivolous claims. One such mechanism is the possibility of sanctions. Sanctions, however, have proven to be ineffective at addressing the problem. As previously noted, the ambiguous nature of claim scope allows plaintiffs to file suits that will be unsuccessful at trial but are sufficient to comply with Rule 11.

Antitrust claims based on the patentee’s filing of infringement claims are another potential mechanism for curbing patent litigation abuse. Generally, a patent does not implicate antitrust laws, even though a patent grants its holder a monopoly over the patented invention. However, if a patentee abuses this right and brings “sham” litigation, antitrust liability may arise. This liability requires both that the litigation be baseless and that it be brought in bad faith.

Standing alone, these claims are ineffective at curbing infringement litigation abuse. Initially, alleged infringers typically raise antitrust violations as counterclaims. Thus, they do not affect the initial costs a defendant must incur—in fact, adding an antitrust counterclaim significantly increases the overall cost of the litigation. Second, these claims are difficult, if not impossible, to win. This is because of legal doctrines that present difficult hurdles, such as the fact that courts presume that an infringement suit has been brought in good faith. Thus, antitrust claims are ineffective at reining in nuisance-value infringement suits.

An additional alternate mechanism is the use of local patent rules. Currently, many district courts adopt local procedural rules specifically for patent cases. These rules may require a patentee to disclose the specific patent claims at issue and the manner of infringement early in litigation. Indeed, the Federal Circuit has held that “local rules requiring the early disclosure of infringement and invalidity contentions and requiring amendments to contentions to be filed with diligence” are consistent with the notice pleading regime in the Federal Rules.

Local rules facilitate the efficient resolution of patent cases. The problem, however, is that by definition, these rules are not uniform. Further, these rules still do not provide needed specificity until after a defendant has incurred significant costs responding to the complaint. In fact, many of these rules do not require specific disclosure until after the discovery process has begun. Finally, even though the rules facilitate efficient resolution of cases, they do not necessarily facilitate expedient resolution. Even with these rules, infringement cases can still take well over a year to resolve. Thus, although the use of local rules, like other potential mechanisms, is beneficial, standing alone, it will not address many of the core issues that foster the growth of nuisance-value infringement claims.

V. Conclusion
Pleading is just one of the problematic issues in a patent system that some commentators describe as a “drag on innovation.” In fact, legislation is currently pending in Congress to enact widespread, comprehensive patent reform. In any event, the dramatic increase in costly patent infringement litigation is only contributing to the problem. If anything, this litigation demonstrates that action must be taken to mitigate its drastic and perilous consequences on innovation and the patent system as a whole.

Altering pleading standards will not remedy all that ails the modern patent system, or even all that ails patent infringement litigation. It does, however, present a mechanism for curbing litigation abuse and reining in troll-like behavior. Unlike other potential mechanisms, particularized patent pleading provides a quick, economically efficient method for alleged infringers to contest nuisance-value claims and begin the process of putting the patent system back on track to truly promoting progress in science and the useful arts.

Footnotes

a1 Associate, Bowman and Brooke LLP, Richmond, Virginia. J.D., 2009, University of Richmond School of Law, summa cum laude. The author would like to thank Christopher Cotropia for his helpful comments and suggestions on this article.

1 See 35 U.S.C. § 154(a) (2006); see also id. §§ 101-103 (stating the requirements for patentability); Pfaff v. Wells Elecs., Inc., 525 U.S. 55, 63 (1998).


3 U.S. Const. art. 1, § 8 (“The Congress shall have Power ... To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries ...”); see Graham v. John Deere Co., 383 U.S. 1, 5-6 (1966).

4 See 35 U.S.C. § 131 (2006) (”The Director shall cause an examination to be made of the application and the alleged new invention; and if on such examination it appears that the applicant is entitled to a patent under the law, the Commissioner shall issue a patent therefor[.]”). See generally Michael Risch, The Failure of Public Notice in Patent Prosecution, 21 Harv. J.L. & Tech. 179, 182-84 (2007) (summarizing the patent prosecution process). For a more extensive discussion of this process, see 4 Donald S. Chisum, Chisum on Patents § 11.03 (2008).

5 See 35 U.S.C. § 154(a)(1) (2006); see also Clair v. Kastar, Inc., 138 F.2d 828, 831 (2d Cir. 1943) (Hand, J.) (“[I]t is scarcely necessary at this day once more to expose the fallacy that a patent gives any right to the patentee to practice his disclosure. It merely enables him to stop others from practising it.”); James Bessen & Michael J. Meurer, Patent Failure: How Judges, Bureaucrats, and Lawyers Put Innovators at Risk 4 (2008) (“Patents do not actually provide an affirmative right to market an invention; they provide only a right to exclude others from doing so.”).

6 See 35 U.S.C. § 154(a)(1) (“Every patent shall contain a short title of the invention and a grant to the patentee, his heirs or assigns, of the right to exclude others ...”); see also Smith Int’l, Inc. v. Hughes Tool Co., 718 F.2d 1573, 1577 (Fed. Cir. 1983) (“The grant of a patent is the grant of the right to invoke the state’s power in order to exclude others from utilizing the patentee’s discovery without his consent.”); Little Mule Corp. v. Lug All Co., 254 F.2d 268, 272-73 (5th Cir. 1958) (“[I]t must be remembered that a patent is not the granting of a right to make, use, or sell. It grants only the right to exclude others from making, using or selling the patented device.”); Chicago & Alton Ry. Co. v. Pressed Steel Car Co., 243 F. 883, 890 (7th Cir. 1917) (“[A] patent conveys nothing but a negative right of exclusion. It is the right to exclude others, but not the natural right to make, use, and sell, which the patentee obtains from his general ownership of the materials employed, not from the government.”).


8 See infra Part I.B.


See Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a); see also infra Part II.A.


Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570. Accord Iqbal, 129 S. Ct. at 1950-51 (quoting and applying this language from Twombly).


Warner-Jenkinson Co. v. Hilton Davis Chem. Co., 520 U.S. 17, 21 (1997); see also Festo Corp. v. Shoketsu Kinzoku Kogyo Kabushiki Co., 535 U.S. 722, 733 (2002) (“The doctrine of equivalents allows the patentee to claim those insubstantial alterations that were not captured in drafting the original patent claim but which could be created through trivial changes.”). For a thorough discussion of the doctrine of equivalents, including its historical roots and development over time, see generally 5 Chisum, supra note 4, § 18.02.


E.g., Alloc, Inc. v. Int’l Trade Comm’n, 342 F.3d 1361, 1374 (Fed. Cir. 2003); see also PharmaStem Therapeutics, Inc. v. ViaCell, Inc., 491 F.3d 1342, 1357 (Fed. Cir. 2007) (stating that “a person who provides a service that assists another in committing patent infringement may be subject to liability under section 271(b) for active inducement of infringement”); Minn. Mining & Mfg. Co. v. Chemque, Inc., 303 F.3d 1294, 1304-05 (Fed. Cir. 2002) (“In order to succeed on a claim of inducement, the patentee must show, first that there has been direct infringement ... and second that the alleged infringer knowingly induced infringement and possessed specific intent to encourage another’s infringement.” (citations omitted)).
See 35 U.S.C. § 271(c); see also Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. v. Grokster, Ltd., 545 U.S. 913, 932 (2005) (“The doctrine was devised to identify instances in which it may be presumed from distribution of an article in commerce that the distributor intended the article to be used to infringe another’s patent, and so may justly be held liable for that infringement.”).

See, e.g., Deepsouth Packing Co. v. Laitram Corp., 406 U.S. 518, 526 (1972) (“But it is established that there can be no contributory infringement without the fact or intention of a direct infringement.”); Kinetic Concepts, Inc. v. Blue Sky Med. Group, Inc., 554 F.3d 1010, 1024 (Fed. Cir. 2009).


35 U.S.C. § 284 (2006); see also King Instruments Corp. v. Perego, 65 F.3d 941, 950 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (“Thus, the Patent Act creates an incentive for innovation. The economic rewards during the period of exclusivity are the carrot. The patent owner expends resources in expectation of receiving this reward. Upon grant of the patent, the only limitation on the size of the carrot should be the dictates of the marketplace. Section 284 attempts to ensure this result by deterring infringers and recouping market value lost when deterrence fails.”).

See 35 U.S.C. § 283 (2006) ("The several courts having jurisdiction of cases under this title may grant injunctions in accordance with the principles of equity to prevent the violation of any right secured by patent, on such terms as the court deems reasonable."); see also eBay Inc. v. MercExchange, L.L.C., 547 U.S. 388, 391-92 (2006) (outlining the equitable principles a court should consider when determining whether injunctive relief is appropriate).


See, e.g., A.C. Aukerman Co. v. R.L. Chaides Constr. Co., 960 F.2d 1020, 1032-34 (Fed. Cir. 1992) (en banc) (discussing the application of the equitable doctrine of laches to patent infringement actions); State Contracting & Eng’g Corp. v. Condotte Am., Inc., 346 F.3d 1057, 1065 (Fed. Cir. 2003) (“To successfully invoke laches, a defendant must prove that the plaintiff delayed filing suit an unreasonable and inexcusable length of time after the plaintiff knew or reasonably should have known of its claim against the defendant and that the delay resulted in material prejudice to the defendant.”); see also 35 U.S.C. § 286 (2006) (“Except as otherwise provided by law, no recovery shall be had for any infringement committed more than six years prior to the filing of the complaint or counterclaim for infringement in the action.”). For background on this doctrine, see generally Eric W. Guttag, Laches and Estoppel: The Patentee Who Procrastinates in Filing Suit May Be Lost, 31 AIPLA Q.J. 47 (2003).

See, e.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 68 (noting that “over the last two decades the number of patent rights has proliferated dramatically”); Mark A. Lemley, Ignoring Patents, 2008 Mich. St. L. Rev. 19, 19 (“More than 2.5 million United States patents have been issued in the last twenty years.”).

See id.; see also U.S. Patent & Trademark Office, U.S. Patent Activity: Calendar Years 1790 to the Present (2009), available at http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/ac/ido/oeip/taf/h_counts.pdf (providing historical data on the number of patent applications filed with the PTO). The number of patent applications has tripled since 1980. See Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 69.


Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 129 & fig.6.3.

Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 127; Lanjouw & Schankerman, supra note 35, at 46 (noting the “very rapid growth in patent litigation over the past [two] decades, during which the number of patent suits increased almost [ten]-fold”); Gauri Prakash-Canjels, Trends in Patent Cases: 1990-2000, 41 IDEA 283, 284 (2001) (showing that from 1991 to 2000, the total number of filed patent infringement cases increased by 111%).


Id. at 200 tbl.C-11.

Id. at 146 tbl.C-2A.


See, e.g., Peter S. Menell et al., Patent Case Management Judicial Guide xxix (Lexis 2009), available at http://www.fjc.gov/public/pdf.nsf/lookup/patent01.pdf/$file/patent01.pdf (“Patent cases feature complex and dynamic technological facts to a degree rarely encountered in most other areas of litigation.”); Robin Feldman, Plain Language Patents, 17 Tex. Intell. Prop. L.J. 289, 290 (2009) (“Nowhere is this dialogue more challenging than at the intersection where law and science interact in the form of patents. When the subject of the case is wrapped in complex and unfamiliar terms, it is tremendously difficult for legal actors to grapple with the theoretical content of the dispute.”).

See, e.g., Markman v. Westview Instruments, Inc., 517 U.S. 370, 372 (1996) (holding that “the construction of a patent, including terms of art within its claim, is exclusively within the province of the court”). Because judges construe claims, claim construction is reviewed on appeal without deference using a de novo standard. See, e.g., Cybor Corp. v. FAS Techs., Inc., 138 F.3d 1448, 1456 (Fed. Cir. 1998) (en banc).


See, e.g., Hershkowitz & Schiffer, supra note 43, at 3 (“Patent cases ... involve particularly complex issues of law and procedure.”). In fact, Justice Scalia, during oral argument in a case discussing one of the criteria for patentability, non-obviousness,

48 See, e.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 131-32 (discussing how legal costs increase as litigation progresses). Because of the costs associated with patent litigation, a significant number of these cases settle quickly. See infra Part I.C; see also Kesan & Ball, supra note 35, at 272 (stating that “the vast majority of [patent infringement] cases settle”).

49 See, e.g., Holderman & Guren, supra note 12, at 10; Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 109 (“Because of this pre-trial process, it is not unusual for months or even years to pass between the filing of a complaint and a decision at the district court level.”).

50 See Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-2.

51 See Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-3 to 4-5.

52 See, e.g., Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-3 (noting that document production alone “can rapidly escalate into the millions of dollars”); Holderman & Guren, supra note 12, at 10 (“[P]reparing and briefing a motion for summary judgment in a patent case in the district court could cost the parties hundreds of thousands of dollars.”); Kesan & Ball, supra note 35, at 310 (stating that “much of the expense associated with patent litigation occurs long before the parties appear before a jury”).

53 See PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Patent Litigation Trends and the Increasing Impact of Nonpracticing Entities 15 (2009), available at http://www.pwc.com/us/en/forensic-services/publications/assets/2009-patent-litigation-study.pdf. There are “significant variations” among districts. Id. at 17. For example, the Eastern District of Virginia’s median time-to-trial was only 0.88 years from 1995 to 2008. Id. By contrast, the District of Connecticut has a median time-to-trial of 4.66 years. Id. at 18. These figures include both bench and jury trials. Id. at 15.

54 See id. at 15.


57 See Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 76 (noting that “[e]ven the threat of being forced to defend against patent infringement will, in many cases, compel companies to ... abandon particular products”); Ayres & Parchomovsky, supra note 34, at 873; Gerard N. Magliocca, Blackberries and Barnyards: Patent Trolls and the Perils of Innovation, 82 Notre Dame L. Rev. 1809, 1828-29 (2007); Nard, supra note 12, at 40 (noting that inventors will decide to avoid research when “the risks associated with improvement activity are too great”). As one commentator noted, however, “this is an unusual reaction.” Lemley, Rational Ignorance, supra note 56, at 1517.

58 See, e.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 133 (discussing an example of how infringement litigation delayed research and development at a start-up microprocessor firm).


60 Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 141-42.
Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 141-42; see also supra notes 1-2 and accompanying text.

E.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 132.

See, e.g., Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 14 (noting the “substantial indirect costs associated with patent litigation,” including the costs of extensive document production and making employees available for “time-consuming depositions”); John R. Allison et al., Valuable Patents, 92 Geo. L.J. 435, 441 (2004) (noting that litigation costs for patent cases do not take into account “other costs in lost employee productivity and uncertainty”); Lemley, Rational Ignorance, supra note 56, at 1502 (noting the “indirect social costs” of patent litigation, “such as ... the value of the time lost by corporate employees involved in the case”).

See Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-2 to 4-4.

Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 132.

Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 133.

Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 133-37; see also Harkins, supra note 59, at 444 (noting that a company “may lower its stock prices if it takes a chance on trial instead of an early settlement”).

See Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 133; Harkins, supra note 59, at 437.

Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 140.

See, e.g., James Gibson, Risk Aversion and Rights Accretion in Intellectual Property Law, 116 Yale L.J. 882, 929-30 (2007); Kesan & Ball, supra note 35, at 280; Lanjouw & Schankerman, supra note 35, at 56 (“About 95 percent of all patent suits are settled by the parties before the end of trial, and most of those before the trial begins ...”); Lemley, Rational Ignorance, supra note 56, at 1517-18; Jason Rantanen, Slaying the Troll: Litigation as an Effective Strategy Against Patent Threats, 23 Santa Clara Computer & High Tech. L.J. 159, 163 (2006); Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 159-60.

See, e.g., Meurer, supra note 10, at 509.

See, e.g., Harkins, supra note 59, at 437; Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 172 (“Perhaps the greatest factor contributing to the existence of nuisance-value patent suits is the high cost of patent litigation.”).

Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 160.


Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 16.


See, e.g., Harkins, supra note 59, at 437; Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 160.
See, e.g., Gibson, supra note 70, at 928-31; Debra Koker, Fulfilling the “Due Care” Requirement After Knorr-Bremse, 11 B.U. J. Sci. & Tech. L. 154, 158-59 n.50 (2005); Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 171-72.

See, e.g., Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1810 (noting that “patent troll” is “a derogatory term for firms that use their patents to extract settlements rather than license or manufacture technology”); Rantanen, supra note 70, at 165 (noting that the group of rent-seeking patentees “encompasses, but is not limited to, what are typically described as ‘patent trolls,’ ‘non-practicing entities,’ or ‘patent enforcement and holding companies’”).

See, e.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 159 (“‘Patent trolls’ are one of those great rhetorical confections that, unfortunately, mean different things to different people.”); Rantanen, supra note 70, at 163-64. See generally Terrence P. McMahon et al., Who is a Troll? Not a Simple Answer, 7 Sedona Conf. J. 159 (2006).

E.g., Brenda Sandburg, Trolling for Dollars, The Recorder (San Fran.), July 30, 2001, at 1.


See, e.g., Burk & Lemley, supra note 35, at 28-29; Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 110-15 (discussing how the Federal Circuit has vastly expanded the remedies available for patent infringement); Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1814-15; see also supra notes 27-29 and accompanying text.


Burk & Lemley, supra note 35, at 28-29.

Ayres & Parchomovsky, supra note 34, at 871-72. “A patent thicket occurs when a technology or a product is covered by multiple patents that are often held by numerous patentees.” Id. at 869.

See Lemley, Ten Things, supra note 76, at 154 (noting the holdup problems created by “irreversible investments by defendants in the industry”); Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1814-15.

E.g., Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1814-15.

See, e.g., Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 68; Keser & Ball, supra note 35, at 280; Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 160.

See, e.g., Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 152 (discussing how alleged infringers bear a disproportionate share of the legal costs in patent infringement litigation).

See Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 152 (noting that contingency fees allow plaintiffs to bring infringement claims with “no cost”); Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 166.

Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 152; see Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 166 (noting that “contingency fee arrangements are critical to
See Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 173; see also Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-2 (“Thus, patent litigation discovery tends to be broad and demanding, touches highly sensitive information, and is extremely expensive.”); R. David Donoghue, The Uneven Application of Twombly in Patent Cases: An Argument for Leveling the Playing Field, 8 J. Marshall Rev. Intell. Prop. L. 1, 6 (2008) (“Corporate defendants routinely spend hundreds of thousands of dollars collecting and analyzing documents just to respond to document requests in the beginning of a [patent infringement] case.”).

94 See Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 173; see also Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-2 (“Thus, patent litigation discovery tends to be broad and demanding, touches highly sensitive information, and is extremely expensive.”); R. David Donoghue, The Uneven Application of Twombly in Patent Cases: An Argument for Leveling the Playing Field, 8 J. Marshall Rev. Intell. Prop. L. 1, 6 (2008) (“Corporate defendants routinely spend hundreds of thousands of dollars collecting and analyzing documents just to respond to document requests in the beginning of a [patent infringement] case.”).

95 E.g., Harkins, supra note 59, at 443 (“Discovery burdens are unequal and mostly one-sided in favor of the patent troll who commonly has few documents beyond the patent and prosecution history.”); Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 174.

96 E.g., Harkins, supra note 59, at 443-44; Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 173 (stating that “the onus of discovery production, with regard to infringement, is largely on the defendant in nuisance suits”).

97 See 35 U.S.C. § 282 (2006); Paul H. Heller & Michael A. Gollin, Discovery in Patent Cases, in 5 Intellectual Property Counseling & Litigation § 7:0.01 (Matthew Bender 2009) (stating that invalidity is a commonly asserted defense to a patent infringement action); Lemley, Rational Ignorance, supra note 56, at 1502 (“Virtually every patent infringement lawsuit includes a claim that the patent is either invalid or unenforceable due to inequitable conduct (or commonly both.”).

98 See Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 152 (noting that proving invalidity requires significant cost and effort); Kesler & Ball, supra note 35, at 277 (stating that “obtaining a pre-trial ruling--particularly pertaining to invalidity--can be very expensive”); Lemley, Rational Ignorance, supra note 56, at 1502 (noting that, whenestablishing invalidity during patent litigation, “lawyers and technical experts will spend hundreds and perhaps even thousands of hours searching for and reading prior art, poring over the specification and prosecution history, and preparing ... invalidity arguments”).


101 See Harkins, supra note 59, at 442-43; Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 167 (“Nuisance plaintiffs, however, who almost always exist solely for the purpose of enforcing a patent portfolio, have no ongoing business operations which subject them to the risk of a countersuit.”).


104 See, e.g., Harkins, supra note 59, at 442-43; Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1817; Chan & Fawcett, supra note 82, at 4 (“A company’s own patent portfolio, a shield or bargaining chip in a traditional IP dispute, has little value when dealing with a patent troll. And because patent trolls do not make or sell products the target company has no basis for filing a countersuit, and thus has no leverage to create an incentive for a cross-license or any other business resolution.”).

105 E.g., Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 15; Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1830. According to one patent litigator, “You’re never really more than 80 percent sure you’re going to win.” Qualters, supra note 74.
E.g., Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 175-76 (“Interpretation of the scope of patent claims is a notoriously indeterminate process. Accordingly, whether or not a defendant’s products actually infringe a patent cannot be known with certainty until litigation is underway.”).

E.g., Magliocca, supra note 57, at 1829-30.

See, e.g., Gretchen Ann Bender, Uncertainty and Unpredictability in Patent Litigation: The Time is Ripe for A Consistent Claim Construction Methodology, 8 J. Intell. Prop. L. 175, 207 (2001) (finding a reversal rate of 40% for claim construction); Christian A. Chu, Empirical Analysis of the Federal Circuit’s Claim Construction Trends, 16 Berkeley Tech. L.J. 1075, 1142 (2001) (“[A] litigant whose case only involved an infringement issue had a 34% chance that the Federal Circuit would reverse the case on the basis of erroneous claim constructions.”); Kimberly A. Moore, Markman Eight Years Later: Is Claim Construction More Predictable?, 8 Lewis & Clark L. Rev. 231, 236-39 (2005) (finding a reversal rate of 40.8% when summary affirmances were excluded and 34.5% if summary affirmances are included); see also Cybor Corp. v. FAS Techs., Inc., 138 F.3d 1448, 1476 (Fed. Cir. 1998) (en banc) (Rader, J., dissenting) (“[O]ne study shows that the plenary standard of review has produced reversal, in whole or in part, of almost 40% of all claim constructions since Markman I.... In fact, this reversal rate, hovering near 50%, is the worst possible. Even a rate that was much higher would provide greater certainty.”).

Fed. R. Civ. P. 3 (“A civil action is commenced by filing a complaint with the court.”).

See Black’s Law Dictionary 1191 (8th ed. 2004) (defining “pleading” as “[a] formal document in which a party to a legal proceeding (esp. a civil lawsuit) sets forth or responds to allegations, claims, denials, or defenses. In federal civil procedure, the main pleadings are the plaintiff’s complaint and the defendant’s answer”); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 7 (listing the pleadings available in a civil action).


Act of June 1, 1872, ch. 255, § 5, 17 Stat. 196, 197 (stating that “the practice, pleadings, and forms and modes of proceeding ... in the circuit and district courts of the United States shall conform, as near as may be, to the practice, pleadings and forms and modes of proceeding existing at the time in like causes in the courts within which such circuit or district courts are held”); see also Amy v. City of Watertown, 130 U.S. 301, 304 (1889) (discussing how this statute requires that “whatever belongs to the three categories of practice, pleading, and forms and modes of proceeding, must conform to the state law and the practice of the state courts, except where Congress itself has legislated upon a particular subject”); Nudd v. Burrows, 91 U.S. 426, 441 (1875) (stating that the purpose of this Act was “to bring about uniformity in the law of procedure in the Federal and State courts of the same locality” and that the Act “had its origin in the code-enactments of many of the States”).

See, e.g., Charles M. Hepburn, The Historical Development of Code Pleading in America and England § 84 (1897) (“If the legislation thus begun had gone no further, the result would still have been among the great events in the history of modern law. But the really significant thing here is that the enactment of this New York code opened, as it were, the floodgates of reformatory legislation, and determined the course of its progress.”); Charles E. Clark, History, Systems and Functions of Pleading, 11 Va. L. Rev. 517, 533 (1925) (stating that the Field Code “served as the model of all succeeding codes in this country”).


Act of Apr. 12, 1848, § 120, 1848 N.Y. Laws 497, 521.

fashionable during that era, the facts that were to be pleaded were the ‘ultimate facts’; the inclusion of ‘evidence’ and ‘conclusions of law’ was improper.” (internal footnote omitted)); Richard L. Marcus, The Puzzling Persistence of Pleading Practice, 76 Tex. L. Rev. 1749, 1753 (1998) [hereinafter Marcus, Puzzling Persistence] (noting that, under code pleading, “the pleading was insufficient if limited to conclusions and improper if packed with evidence”).

See, e.g., 5 Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1218 (“The codes required the pleader to set forth the facts underlying and demonstrating the existence of his cause of action.”); David M. Roberts, Fact Pleading, Notice Pleading, and Standing, 65 Cornell L. Rev. 390, 395 (1980) (“Only ultimate facts satisfied the pleading standard; evidentiary facts and conclusions within a pleading could not state a claim.”).

Gillispie v. Goodyear Serv. Stores, 128 S.E.2d 762 (N.C. 1963). Although this case was decided after the federal rules were adopted, North Carolina still used a code pleading system, and this case has been cited as the classic example of code pleading. See, e.g., Jack H. Friedenthal et al., Civil Procedure: Cases and Materials 513-14 (rev. 9th ed. 2005); Martin B. Louis, Intercepting and Discouraging Doubtful Litigation: A Golden Anniversary View of Pleading, Summary Judgment, and Rule 11 Sanctions Under the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, 67 N.C. L. Rev. 1023, 1025 & n.22 (1989).


See Fairman, supra note 124, at 555; Roberts, supra note 118, at 395-96 (“This [code pleading] scheme placed considerable emphasis on hypertechnical artifices of pleading and produced inconsistent interpretations of the adequacy of a complaint’s allegations.”). One scholar of the period attempted to explain this distinction by stating that “to give the facts a legal coloring and aspect, to present them in their legal bearing upon the issues, rather than in their actual naked simplicity, is so far forth an averment of law instead of fact.” John Norton Pomeroy, Code Remedies: Remedies and Remedial Rights by the Civil Action § 423, at 640 (Walter Carrington ed., rev. 5th ed. 1929).

See, e.g., 5 Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1218 (stating that the codes resulted in a “multitude of pleading decisions”); Marcus, Puzzling Persistence, supra note 117, at 1753 (noting that, under code pleading, “pleading decisions continued to multiply”).

E.g., Roberts, supra note 118, at 396. For a complete discussion of the historical background of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, see generally Subrin, supra note 111.

See, e.g., Fleming James, Jr., The Objective and Function of the Complaint: Common Law--Codes--Federal Rules, 14 Vand. L. Rev. 899, 918-19 (1961); Roberts, supra note 118, at 396.

See, e.g., Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 47-48 (1957) (“Such simplified ‘notice pleading’ is made possible by the liberal opportunity for discovery and the other pretrial procedures established by the Rules to disclose more precisely the basis of both claim and defense and to define more narrowly the disputed facts and issues.”), abrogated by Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007); Hickman v. Taylor, 329 U.S. 495, 501 (1947) (“The new rules, however, restrict the pleadings to the task of general notice-giving and invest the deposition-discovery process with a vital role in the preparation for trial. The various instruments of discovery now serve (1) as a device ... to narrow and clarify the basic issues between the parties, and (2) as a device for ascertaining the facts ... relative to those issues.”); see also O2 Micro Int’l Ltd. v. Monolithic Power Sys., Inc., 467 F.3d 1355, 1365 (Fed. Cir. 2006).


Dioguardi v. Durning, 139 F.2d 774 (2d Cir. 1944) (Clark, J.).

Id. at 774.

Id. at 774-75. The court also noted the “plaintiff’s limited ability to write and speak English.” Id. at 775.

Id. at 774.

Id. at 774.

Id. at 776.

Dioguardi v. Durning, 139 F.2d 774, 775 (2d Cir. 1944).

Id.

See, e.g., Charles E. Clark, The Handmaid of Justice, 23 Wash. U. L.Q. 297, 319 (1938) (“In the case of a real dispute, there is no substitute anywhere for a trial. To attempt to make the pleadings serve as such substitute is in very truth to make technical forms the mistress and not the handmaid of justice.”); Hon. H. Church Ford, Federal Rules of Civil Procedure: Pleadings, Motions, Parties, and Pre-trial Procedure, 1 F.R.D. 315, 318 (1940) (“The philosophy which the rules seek to inculcate seems to be that the ends of justice may be attained more surely and more expeditiously by directing principal attention to the realities and by giving less consideration to mere formalities.”); see also Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 48 (1957) (“The Federal Rules reject the approach that pleading is a game of skill in which one misstep by counsel may be decisive to the outcome and accept the principle that the purpose of pleading is to facilitate a proper decision on the merits.”), abrogated by Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007); Marcus, Puzzling Persistence, supra note 117, at 1749 (noting that under the federal rules, “[p]leading decisions, so prominent at common law and under the codes, were to wither and die except in extraordinary circumstances”).
See, e.g., Charles E. Clark, Simplified Pleading, 2 F.R.D. 456, 462 (1943) (“There is little doubt that the great success of the rules has been due to this combination of simplicity of general requirements, requiring little time and attention in their application, with the special devices for speedy disposition of those cases which are easily adjudicated.”). As one commentary notes, “it has been said that ‘a sixteen year old boy could plead’ under these rules.” 5 Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1202, at 94.

See, e.g., Swierkiewicz v. Sorema N.A., 534 U.S. 506, 514 (2002) (“The liberal notice pleading of Rule 8(a) is the starting point of a simplified pleading system, which was adopted to focus litigation on the merits of a claim.”); Surowitz v. Hilton Hotels Corp., 383 U.S. 363, 373 (1966) (“The basic purpose of the Federal Rules is to administer justice through fair trials, not through summary dismissals as necessary as they may be on occasion. These rules were designed in large part to get away from some of the old procedural booby traps which common-law pleaders could set to prevent unsophisticated litigants from ever having their day in court.”); Fairman, supra note 124, at 557.


Id. at 563; see also Boroff v. Alza Corp., ___ F. Supp. 2d ___, 2010 WL 395211, at *2 (N.D. Ohio Jan. 27, 2010) (noting that “the Supreme Court has consigned the Conley standard to the dustbin of history”).

Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570. Thus, plaintiffs must “nudge[] their claims across the line from conceivable to plausible.” Id.

See Robbins v. Oklahoma, 519 F.3d 1242, 1247 (10th Cir. 2008) (noting that the new standard announced in Twombly is “less than pellucid”); Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 234 (3d Cir. 2008) (noting that the Twombly opinion is “confusing” and concluding that “[t]he issues raised by Twombly are not easily resolved, and likely will be a source of controversy for years to come”); Anderson v. Sara Lee Corp., 508 F.3d 181, 188 n.7 (4th Cir. 2007) (“In the wake of Twombly, courts and commentators have been grappling with the decision’s meaning and reach.”); Iqbal v. Hasty, 490 F.3d 143, 155 (2d Cir. 2007), rev’d sub nom. Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 129 S. Ct. 1937 (2009) (“Considerable uncertainty concerning the standard for assessing the adequacy of pleadings has recently been created by the Supreme Court’s decision in [Twombly].”).


See, e.g., Aktieselskabet AF 21. Nov. 2001 v. Fame Jeans Inc., 525 F.3d 8, 15 (D.C. Cir. 2008) (“We conclude that Twombly leaves the long-standing fundamentals of notice pleading intact.”); McZeal v. Sprint Nextel Corp., 501 F.3d 1354, 1356 n.4 (Fed. Cir. 2007) (stating that the Court’s opinion “does not suggest that Bell Atlantic changed the pleading requirement of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8 as articulated in Conley”).

See, e.g., Davis v. Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consol., 516 F.3d 955, 974 n.43 (11th Cir. 2008) (“We understand Twombly as a further articulation of the standard by which to evaluate the sufficiency of all claims brought pursuant to Rule 8(a).”); Phillips, 515 F.3d at 234 (“[W]e decline at this point to read Twombly so narrowly as to limit its holding on plausibility to the antitrust
context.”); see also Smith v. Duffey, 576 F.3d 336, 339-40 (7th Cir. 2009) (describing Twombly as “fast becoming the citation du jour in Rule 12(b)(6) cases”); Mary J. Hackett & Patricia E. Antezana, All But Two Circuits Interpret Twombly Broadly, Nat’l L.J., Oct. 27, 2008, at S3.


159 Id. at 1942.

160 Id. at 1949; see also id. at 1950 ("Rule 8 marks a notable and generous departure from the hyper-technical, code-pleading regime of a prior era, but it does not unlock the doors of discovery for a plaintiff armed with nothing more than conclusions.").

161 Id. at 1949.

162 Id. at 1950.


164 E.g., 6 R. Carl Moy, Moy’s Walker on Patents, § 17:4 (4th ed. 2007) (“Viewed at a basic level, a suit for patent infringement is simply a specific example of a general civil action.”); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 2 ("There is one form of action--the civil action.").

165 See, e.g., Phonometrics, Inc. v. Hospitality Franchise Sys., Inc., 203 F.3d 790, 794 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (noting that “a patentee need only plead facts sufficient to place the alleged infringer on notice”); 5 Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1251 ("The principles of pleading simplicity and brevity applicable to complaints in other actions also apply in infringement suits."); see also Swierkiewicz v. Sorema N.A., 534 U.S. 506, 513 (2002) ( "Rule 8(a)’s simplified pleading standard applies to all civil actions, with limited exceptions.").

166 Menell et al., supra note 44, at 2-20; see also id. at 2-12 (noting that “[d]etails of the defendants’ allegedly infringing activities are rarely offered” in infringement complaints).

167 See Fed. R. Civ. P. Form 18. When the federal rules were initially enacted, this was Form 16, rather than Form 18. See Fed. R. Civ. P. Form 16 (1938), reprinted at 303 U.S. 775-76.


169 Fed. R. Civ. P. 84 (“The forms in the Appendix suffice under these rules and illustrate the simplicity and brevity that these rules contemplate.”); see also Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957) (stating that the forms contained in the federal rules “plainly demonstrate” the pleading requirement under the rules), abrogated by Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007); McZeal v. Sprint Nextel Corp., 501 F.3d 1354, 1356-57 (Fed. Cir. 2007) (citing and applying Form 18 as sufficient to state a claim for patent infringement). The Twombly Court also approved of the forms as sufficient pleadings. See Twombly, 550 U.S. at 565 n.10.

170 Fed. R. Civ. P. Form 18. The complete form is as follows:
1. (Statement of Jurisdiction—See Form 7)
2. On date, United States Letters Patent No. ______ were issued to the plaintiff for an invention in an electric motor. The plaintiff owned the patent throughout the period of the defendant’s infringing acts and still owns the patent.
3. The defendant has infringed and is still infringing the Letters Patent by making, selling, and using electric motors that embody the patented invention, and the defendant will continue to do so unless enjoined by this court.
4. The plaintiff has complied with the statutory requirement of placing a notice of the Letters Patent on all electric motors it manufactures and sells and has given the defendant written notice of the infringement. Therefore, the plaintiff demands:
(a) a preliminary and final injunction against the continuing infringement;
(b) an accounting for damages; and
(c) interest and costs.
Id. Additionally, a caption is required, and the complaint must be dated and signed. See id.

Notably, the review of a district court’s dismissal pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6) is a procedural question to which the Federal Circuit applies the law of the regional circuit. See, e.g., C&F Packing Co. v. IBP, Inc., 224 F.3d 1296, 1306 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (“The question of whether a Rule 12(b)(6) motion was properly granted is a purely procedural question not pertaining to patent law, to which this court applies the rule of the regional ... circuit.”). However, an interesting dilemma arises, as a regional circuit will never hear a patent case, so it can never provide guidance as to the pleading standard to use for infringement claims. See 28 U.S.C. § 1295(a) (2006) (providing that the Federal Circuit has exclusive jurisdiction over appeals in patent cases). See generally CBT Flint Partners, L.L.C. v. Goodmail Sys., Inc., 529 F. Supp. 2d 1376, 1379 (N.D. Ga. 2007) (pointing out this discrepancy). Indeed, the Federal Circuit has applied its own law, not the law of the regional circuit, when evaluating whether an inequitable conduct claim has been pleaded with the particularity required by Rule 9(b). See Exergen Corp. v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 575 F.3d 1312, 1326 (Fed. Cir. 2009).


Id.

Id.

Id.


Id. at 1357 & n.4.

Id. at 1358. Notably, because the plaintiff was proceeding pro se, the court applied “the low bar for pro se litigants to avoid dismissal on the basis of [Federal Rule of Civil Procedure] 12(b)(6).” Id.

See, e.g., Koninklijke Philips Elecs. N.V. v. ADS Group, __ F. Supp. 2d __, 2010 WL 938216, at *4 n.8 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 12, 2010) (“The decision in McZeal, however, was motivated by a (perhaps) misplaced indulgence of the pleadings of a pro se plaintiff. Of greater relevance, McZeal was decided before the Iqbal decision made clear that Twombly’s heightened pleading standard applied to all cases, not merely those like Twombly that assert antitrust violations.”) (internal citation omitted)); Bender v. LG Elecs. U.S.A., Inc., No. C 09-02114 JF, 2010 WL 889541, at *3 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 11, 2010) (noting that McZeal was “unhelpful” because it was decided after Twombly but before Iqbal and because the plaintiff was proceeding pro se); Bender v. Motorola, Inc., No. C 09-1245 SBA, 2010 WL 726739, at *3 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 26, 2010) (describing a plaintiff’s reliance on McZeal as “misplaced”).


See Donoghue, supra note 94, at 2 (“The courts are split, however, on the precise impact that Twombly has on pleadings in patent cases.”).


See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1953 (2009) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 1); see also Brooks v. Ross, 578 F.3d 574, 581 (7th Cir. 2009) (noting that Iqbal “clarified that Twombly’s plausibility requirement applies across the board, not just to antitrust cases”).

See, e.g., Franklin D. Kang, Pleading Patent Infringement Claims: Does Form 16 Suffice for All Purposes?, Intell. Prop. L. Newsl., Winter 2006, at 25, 29 (“There is ... a split of authority on whether a complaint for patent infringement must specify the claims of the patent-in-suit alleged to have been infringed.”).


See, e.g., Tippmann Pneumatics, L.L.C., 2005 WL 2456908, at *2 (“A claim for patent infringement is sufficient to put the defendant on notice even if it does not state which patent claims were infringed.” (citing Phonometrics, 203 F.3d at 794)).

See, e.g., J.D. Ferry Co. v. Macbeth Eng’g Corp., 11 F.R.D. 75, 76 (M.D. Pa. 1951) (“The general practice in patent infringement suits has been to require the plaintiff to state what claims of a patent he alleges to have been infringed.”); Coyne & Delany Co. v. G.W. Onthank Co., 10 F.R.D. 435, 436 (S.D. Iowa 1950); Marvel Slide Fastener Corp. v. Klozo Fastener Corp., 80 F. Supp. 366, 367 (S.D.N.Y. 1948); Nat’l Nut Co. of Cal. v. Kelling Nut Co., 61 F. Supp. 76, 78-79 (N.D. Ill. 1945); Bonney Supply Co. v. Heltzel, 243 F. 399, 404 (N.D. Ohio 1917) (“The complainant knows, or should know, which of these separate claims are infringed; and it is therefore proper, in the interest of greater certainty and definiteness, that it be required to specify which of the ten claims it intends to rely on--in other words, give further and better particulars of the matter of infringement contained in its pleading.”).


Id.; see also Ardente, Inc., 2010 WL 546485, at *5 n.6 (“[S]pecifying the patent claims allegedly infringed enhances the plausibility of a patent infringement plaintiff’s complaint.”).

See Kang, supra note 185, at 26 (“There currently exists a split of authority on whether a complaint for patent infringement must specify the defendant’s products or services alleged to have infringed the patent-in-suit and, if so, the degree of specificity required.”).


Id.

Id.


Id.

See Bender v. LG Elecs. U.S.A., Inc., No. C 09-02114 JF, 2010 WL 889541, at *5 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 11, 2010) (“As several courts have noted, it is difficult to reconcile the guidelines set forth in Twombly and Iqbal with Form 18.”); Elan Microelectronics Corp. v. Apple, Inc., No. C 09-01531 RS, 2009 WL 2972374, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 14, 2009) (“It is not easy to reconcile Form 18 with the guidance of the Supreme Court in Twombly and Iqbal; while the form undoubtedly provides a ‘short and plain statement,’ it
offers little to ‘show’ that the pleader is entitled to relief.”); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 84 (stating that the appendix of forms are examples of sufficient pleadings).


205 See Colida v. Nokia, Inc., No. 2009-1326, 2009 WL 3172724, at *2 & n.2 (Fed. Cir. Oct. 6, 2009) (concluding that the plaintiff’s infringement claims were “facially implausible,” but noting that he had not argued that the complaint was sufficient under Form 18 and Rule 84 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure).


207 See supra Part I.C.

208 See, e.g., Marcus, Revival of Fact Pleading, supra note 124, at 477 (discussing notice pleading and noting that “[t]he Federal Rules were designed, in part, to open the federal courts to those of lesser means”).

209 See supra Part II.B; see also Tyler, supra note 100 (noting that patent infringement complaints are usually only four or five pages long).

210 See, e.g., Jaffé & Lerner, supra note 35, at 152. Indeed, if a patentee is represented on a contingency fee basis, no costs are incurred.

211 See Tyler, supra note 100 (“A patent complaint requires remarkably little information.... Yet this simple, non-specific complaint has a nuisance value of a few hundred thousand dollars the minute it is filed and served.”).

212 See supra Part I.C.

213 See Fed. R. Civ. P. 11(b); see also Cooter & Gell v. Hartmarx Corp., 496 U.S. 384, 393 (1990) (“Rule 11 imposes a duty on attorneys to certify that they have conducted a reasonable inquiry and have determined that any papers filed with the court are well grounded in fact, legally tenable, and ‘not interposed for any improper purpose.”’); Christian v. Mattel, Inc., 286 F.3d 1118, 1127 (9th Cir. 2002) (“The attorney has a duty prior to filing a complaint not only to conduct a reasonable factual investigation, but also to perform adequate legal research ....”).

214 Antonious v. Spalding & Evenflo Cos., 275 F.3d 1066, 1073 (Fed. Cir. 2002); see also Q-Pharma, Inc. v. Andrew Jergens Co., 360 F.3d 1295, 1300-01 (Fed. Cir. 2004); View Eng’g, Inc. v. Robotic Vision Sys., Inc., 208 F.3d 981, 986 (Fed. Cir. 2000).

215 Antonious, 275 F.3d at 1072.

216 View Eng’g, Inc., 208 F.3d at 986.

217 See id.

218 See, e.g., Apple Computer, Inc. v. Articulate Sys., Inc., 234 F.3d 14, 27 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (concluding that a pretrial investigation was sufficient when the only proof was a single entry in the plaintiff’s privilege log that was never produced to the opposing party); Thomas I. Ross, Making Patent Plaintiffs Pay, Intell. Prop. & Tech. L.J., June 2006, at 1, 2 (noting that “Rule 11 is ineffective as a sword against patent plaintiffs”).
See Fed. R. Civ. P. 11(c)(2) (stating that a motion for sanctions under Rule 11 cannot be filed until a party is given the opportunity to withdraw the challenged filing, claim, or other argument within twenty-one days). See generally Lonnie T. Brown, Jr., Ending Illegitimate Advocacy: Reinvigorating Rule 11 Through Enhancement of the Ethical Duty to Report, 62 Ohio St. L.J. 1555 (2001) (describing how Rule 11 is easily circumvented by ill-intentioned attorneys).

See Fed. R. Civ. P. 11(b) (stating that presenting a pleading to the court certifies, inter alia, that it has been presented following a reasonable investigation); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(b)(3)(A) (“Ordinarily, a party may not discover documents and tangible things that are prepared in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for another party or its representative (including the other party’s attorney, consultant, surety, indemnitor, insurer, or agent).”). Indeed, this information is also potentially subject to the attorney-client privilege or work-product protection. See Menell et al., supra note 44, at 4-8.

See supra notes 106-08 and accompanying text.

Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 176-77.

Eon-Net L.P. v. Flagstar Bancorp, 249 F. App’x 189, 189-90 (Fed. Cir. 2007).

Id. at 197.

Id. at 196.


See supra Part II.B.

See Donoghue, supra note 94, at 6.

E.g., Sudarshan, supra note 9, at 164-65.

Id. at 165; see also Donoghue, supra note 94, at 12-13 (describing this burden as “Herculean”).


Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(a)(1)(A); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(d) (outlining the process for waiver which results in an extension of the time to answer).

See Donoghue, supra note 94, at 3-4.

See Menell et al., supra note 44, at 2-23 to 2-24 (discussing the heightened pleading requirements for inequitable conduct and noting that “[c]ourts can require defendants to identify specific prior art references they intend to assert as invalidating and to disclose invalidity claims based on written description, indefiniteness, or enablement”); N.D. Cal. Local Patent R. 3-3; see also infra Part III.B (discussing the application of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 9(b) to inequitable conduct).
For example, a patent is presumed to be valid, 35 U.S.C. § 282 (2006), so a plaintiff does not need to investigate the validity of a patent as part of its Rule 11 pre-filing investigation, whereas a defendant would need to do so in order to assert an invalidity defense. See Menell et al., supra note 44, at 2-28 to 2-29; see also Q-Pharma, Inc. v. Andrew Jergens Co., 360 F.3d 1295, 1303 (Fed. Cir. 2004).

See Douglas L. Price, Assessing the Patentability of Financial Services and Products, 3 J. High Tech. L. 141, 157 (2004) (“[T]here has been a substantial increase in nuisance cases by smaller companies who seek wealth by bringing patent infringement suits against larger companies.”); see also Bessen & Meurer, Lessons, supra note 26, at 14 (noting that “small firms and independent inventors might engage in more opportunistic litigation”).


See supra notes 134-35 and accompanying text.

See, e.g., Epstein, supra note 226, at 69-70 (noting the link between pleading standards and discovery); see also supra note 137 and accompanying text.

See, e.g., Donoghue, supra note 94, at 6; Heller & Gollin, supra note 97, § 70.01 (discussing the costs of discovery in patent infringement actions); see also supra notes 48-52 and accompanying text.

Donoghue, supra note 94, at 6; Harkins, supra note 59, at 443-44.

See supra notes 91-96 and accompanying text.

See, e.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 131-32.

See Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 569 n.14 (2007) ( “On certain subjects understood to raise a high risk of abusive litigation, a plaintiff must state factual allegations with greater particularity than Rule 8 requires.”).


See, e.g., Benchmark Elecs., Inc. v. J.M. Huber Corp., 343 F.3d 719, 724 (5th Cir. 2003) (“Put simply, Rule 9(b) requires ‘the who, what, when, where, and how’ to be laid out.” (quoting Williams v. WMX Techs., Inc., 112 F.3d 175, 179 (5th Cir. 1997))); U.S. ex rel. Costner v. United States, 317 F.3d 883, 888 (8th Cir. 2003) (noting that Rule 9(b) requires a claim to “identify who, what, where, when, and how”); Arruda v. Sears, Roebuck & Co., 310 F.3d 13, 19 (1st Cir. 2002) (stating that Rule 9(b) requires a plaintiff to specify “the time, place, and content of the alleged false or fraudulent representations” (quoting Powers v. Boston Cooper Corp., 926 F.2d 109, 111 (1st Cir. 1991))); Ullmo ex rel. Ullmo v. Gilmour Acad., 273 F.3d 671, 678 (6th Cir. 2001); Harrison v. Westinghouse Savannah River Co., 176 F.3d 776, 784 (4th Cir. 1999); 5A Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1297.

5A Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1297.

For a complete discussion of the rationales for Rule 9(b), see 5A Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1296.

See, e.g., Kearns v. Ford Motor Co., 567 F.3d 1120, 1125 (9th Cir. 2009); U.S. ex rel. Williams v. Martin-Baker Aircraft Co., 389 F.3d 1251, 1256 (D.C. Cir. 2004); U.S. ex rel. Clausen v. Lab. Corp. of Am., Inc., 290 F.3d 1301, 1310 (11th Cir. 2002); 5A Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1296; see also Friedlander v. Nims, 755 F.2d 810, 813 n.3 (11th Cir. 1985) (noting that Rule 9(b) serves to “eliminate fraud actions in which all the facts are learned through discovery after the complaint is filed”).
See, e.g., Williams, 389 F.3d at 1256; Clausen, 290 F.3d at 1310; Koch v. Koch Indus., Inc., 203 F.3d 1202, 1236-37 (10th Cir. 2000); 5A Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1296.

See Kearns, 567 F.3d at 1125 (noting that a purpose of Rule 9(b) is “to protect those whose reputation would be harmed as a result of being subject to fraud charges”); Ackerman v. Nw. Mut. Life Ins. Co., 172 F.3d 467, 469 (7th Cir. 1999); Harisco Corp. v. Segui, 91 F.3d 337, 347 (2d Cir. 1996); Guidry v. Bank of LaPlace, 954 F.2d 278, 288 (5th Cir. 1992) (“This higher standard stems from the obvious concerns that general, unsubstantiated charges of fraud can do damage to a defendant’s reputation.”); 5A Wright & Miller, supra note 117, § 1296.

E.g., Dura Pharms., Inc. v. Broudo, 544 U.S. 336, 341 (2005) (“Private federal securities fraud actions are based upon federal securities statutes and their implementing regulations.”).

15 U.S.C. § 78j (2006); see also id. § 78u-4(b).


E.g., Dura Pharms., Inc., 544 U.S. at 341 (“The courts have implied from these statutes and Rule a private damages action, which resembles, but is not identical to, common-law tort actions for deceit and misrepresentation.”); Herman & MacLean v. Huddleston, 459 U.S. 375, 380 (1983) (“The existence of this implied remedy is simply beyond peradventure.”).


See PSLRA § 1, 109 Stat. at 746-47.


See id. at 31.


See supra Part I.

Notably, other countries have imposed particularity requirements for pleading patent infringement actions. See, e.g., CPR 63.9 (U.K.), available at http://www.justice.gov.uk/civil/procrules_fin/pdf/parts/part63.pdf (requiring “particulars” in pleading patent infringement claim); see also CPR 63.9, PD P 11.1 (U.K.), available at http://www.justice.gov.uk/civil/procrules_fin/pdf/practice_directions/pd_part63.pdf (“In a claim for infringement of a patent—(1) the statement of case must—(a) show which of the claims in the specification of the patent are alleged to be infringed; and (b) give at least one example of each type of
See, e.g., Exergen Corp. v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 575 F.3d 1312, 1326-27 (Fed. Cir. 2009); Cent. Admixture Pharmacy Servs., Inc. v. Advanced Cardiac Solutions, P.C., 482 F.3d 1347, 1356-57 (Fed. Cir. 2007); Ferguson Beauregard/Logic Controls v. Mega Sys., L.L.C., 350 F.3d 1327, 1344 (Fed. Cir. 2003); see also Bartronics, Inc. v. Power-One, Inc., 245 F.R.D. 532, 535 (S.D. Ala. 2007) (listing cases); David Hricik, Wrong About Everything: The Application By the District Courts of Rule 9(b) to Inequitable Conduct, 86 Marq. L. Rev. 895, 905 (2003) (“A long line of district courts have held that Rule 9(b) applies to inequitable conduct claims.”).

Digital Control, Inc. v. Charles Mach. Works, 437 F.3d 1309, 1313 (Fed. Cir. 2006); see Exergen Corp., 575 F.3d at 1327 n.3 (“The substantive elements of inequitable conduct are: (1) an individual associated with the filing and prosecution of a patent application made an affirmative misrepresentation of a material fact, failed to disclose material information, or submitted false material information; and (2) the individual did so with a specific intent to deceive the PTO.”); Bruno Indep. Living Aids, Inc. v. Acorn Mobility Servs., Ltd., 394 F.3d 1348, 1351 (Fed. Cir. 2005); see also 37 C.F.R. § 1.56(a) (2009) (“Each individual associated with the filing and prosecution of a patent application has a duty of candor and good faith in dealing with the Office, which includes a duty to disclose to the Office all information known to that individual to be material to patentability as defined in this section.”).

E.g., Digital Control, Inc., 437 F.3d at 1313; Life Techs., Inc. v. Clontech Labs., Inc., 224 F.3d 1320, 1324 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (“A determination of inequitable conduct during the prosecution of a patent application renders the subsequently issued patent unenforceable.”).

E.g., Burlington Indus., Inc. v. Dayco Corp., 849 F.2d 1418, 1422 (Fed. Cir. 1988) (“The charge was formerly known as ‘fraud on the Patent Office,’ a more pejorative term, but the change of name does not make the thing itself smell any sweeter.”); see also Venetec Int’l, Inc. v. Nexus Med., L.L.C., 541 F. Supp. 2d 612, 618 (D. Del. 2008) (“Because inequitable conduct is a claim sounding in fraud, Rule 9(b) applies which requires the elements of inequitable conduct to be pled with particularity.”). Specifically, the Federal Circuit has held that “in pleading inequitable conduct in patent cases, Rule 9(b) requires identification of the specific who, what, when, where, and how of the material misrepresentation or omission committed before the PTO.” Exergen Corp., 575 F.3d at 1327.

See, e.g., Cent. Admixture Pharmacy Servs., Inc. v. Advanced Cardiac Solutions, P.C., 482 F.3d 1347, 1356 (Fed. Cir. 2007) (declining to apply Rule 9 to a claim for willful infringement); Ferguson Beauregard/Logic Controls, Div. of Dover Res., Inc. v. Mega Sys., L.L.C., 350 F.3d 1327, 1343 (Fed. Cir. 2003) (“Willfulness does not equate to fraud, and thus, the pleading requirement for willful infringement does not rise to the stringent standard required by Rule 9(b).”).


Donoghue, supra note 94, at 3; see also supra notes 190-91 and accompanying text.

Donoghue, supra note 94, at 10.

See supra notes 221-22 and accompanying text.

See supra notes 215-17 and accompanying text.

This is because a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim is made before discovery begins. Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b). A patentee would always be able to move the court to amend the complaint if necessary, which the rules state that a court should “freely give ... when justice so requires.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 15(a)(2).
Cf. William M. Richman et al., The Pleading of Fraud: Rhymes Without Reason, 60 S. Cal. L. Rev. 959, 969-71 (1987) (arguing that Rule 9(b) and Rule 8(a) should be harmonized and greater particularity required as needed for notice).

See supra Part II.C.

See Pamela H. Bucy, Private Justice, 76 S. Cal. L. Rev. 1, 75 (2002) (noting that a heightened pleading regime will require a plaintiff to conduct a “thorough investigation and well-conceived pleading from the beginning of a case”).

See Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 176-77 (noting how doctrinal shifts by courts affect patentees’ willingness to bring infringement suits).


See Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(c).

See supra notes 97-98 and accompanying text.

See supra Part II.B.


See Marcus, Revival of Fact Pleading, supra note 124, at 454 (arguing that pleadings practice should be used to resolve cases on the merits); see also Giarratano v. Johnson, 521 F.3d 298, 304 n.3 (4th Cir. 2008) (noting that “the Twombly standard is even more favorable to dismissal of a complaint”).

See supra note 275 and accompanying text; see also U.S. ex rel. Grubbs v. Kanneganti, 565 F.3d 180, 185 (5th Cir. 2009) (stating that Twombly “raises a hurdle in front of what courts had previously seen as a plaintiff’s nigh immediate access to discovery” and noting that “[i]n cases of fraud, Rule 9(b) has long played that screening function, standing as a gatekeeper to discovery”).

See Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 131.

See Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 557-60 (2007); see also Francis v. Giacomelli, 588 F.3d 186, 193 (4th Cir. 2009) (noting that §9(b) and Twombly sought to address “the recognized problems created by ‘strike suits’ ... and the high costs of frivolous litigation”); Smith v. Duffey, 576 F.3d 336, 340 (7th Cir. 2009) (“The [Twombly] Court held that in complex litigation ... the defendant is not to be put to the cost of pretrial discovery--a cost that in complex litigation can be so steep as to coerce a settlement on terms favorable to the plaintiff even when his claim is very weak--unless the complaint says enough about the case to permit an inference that it may well have real merit.”). This position has previously appeared in the Court’s jurisprudence. E.g.,

See Twombly, 550 U.S. at 557-59.


See Donoghue, supra note 94, at 13; see also Douglas G. Smith, The Twombly Revolution?, 36 Pepp. L. Rev. 1063, 1067 (2009) (“As the costs of litigation increase and the scope of discovery expands, the need for more stringent pleading standards increases.”).

See A. Benjamin Spencer, Understanding Pleading Doctrine, 108 Mich. L. Rev. 1, 12-13 (2009) (noting the tension between the forms and the pleading standard outlined in Twombly); see also supra notes 167-70.

See supra notes 202, 206 and accompanying text.

See McZeal v. Sprint Nextel Corp., 501 F.3d 1354, 1360 (Fed. Cir. 2007) (Dyk, J., concurring in part, dissenting in part) (“One can only hope that the rulemaking process will eventually result in eliminating the form, or at least in revising it to require allegations specifying which claims are infringed, and the features of the accused device that correspond to the claim limitations.”).

See id.

Compare id., with Fed. R. Civ. P. Form 18; see McZeal, 501 F.3d at 1360 (Dyk, J., concurring in part, dissenting in part). In 1963, the prayer for relief section of the form was amended to conform to the language of 35 U.S.C. § 284.


Id. at 2223; see David Silverstein, Patents, Science, and Innovation: Historical Linkages and Implications for Global Technological Competitiveness, 17 Rutgers Computer & Tech. L.J. 261, 304 (1991) (describing this period as the “Dark Ages” in the history of the U.S. patent system); see also Great Atl. & Pac. Tea Co. v. Supermarket Equip. Corp., 340 U.S. 147, 152 (1950) (“The function of a patent is to add to the sum of useful knowledge. Patents cannot be sustained when, on the contrary, their effect is to subtract from former resources freely available to skilled artisans.”); id. at 158 (Douglas, J., concurring) (“The patent involved in the present case belongs to this list of incredible patents which the Patent Office has spawned. The fact that a patent as flimsy and as spurious as this one has to be brought all the way to this Court to be declared invalid dramatically illustrates how far our patent system frequently departs from the constitutional standards which are supposed to govern.”); Jungersen v. Ostby & Barton Co., 335 U.S. 560, 566-68 (1949) (invalidating a patent for “want of invention”); id. at 572 (Jackson, J., dissenting) (stating that “the only patent that is valid is one which this Court has not been able to get its hands on”); Mercoid Corp. v. Mid-Continent Inv. Co., 320 U.S. 661, 665-69 (1944) (stating that “the limits of the patent are narrowly and strictly confined to the terms of the grant” and deciding to “limit substantially the doctrine of contributory infringement”); Cuno Eng’g Corp. v. Automatic Devices Corp., 314 U.S. 84, 91-92 (1941) (adopting a heightened test for patentability, which was to be strictly applied, that required a “flash of creative genius”).

Merges, supra note 300, at 2223.

Merges, supra note 300, at 2222.

Merges, supra note 300, at 2222; see also Prima Tek II, L.L.C. v. A-Roo Co., 222 F.3d 1372, 1379 n.2 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (“A ‘blocking patent’ is an earlier patent that must be licensed in order to practice a later patent. This often occurs, for instance, between a pioneer patent and an improvement patent.”).


See, e.g., Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 18; Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 115-23 (outlining how the Federal Circuit expanded patentable subject matter and made invalidity challenges more difficult).

See Jaffe & Lerner, supra note 35, at 110-16 (discussing how the Federal Circuit has strengthened the remedies available to a patentee for infringement).


E.g., id. at 79-80.

See supra notes 31-34 and accompanying text.


See supra notes 32-33 and accompanying text.


See, e.g., Eidos Commc’ns, L.L.C. v. Skype Techs. SA, ___ F. Supp. 2d ___, 2010 WL 638337, at *4 (D. Del. Feb. 24, 2010) (“The complaint at bar does not mimic Form 18, insofar as no category of product (or general identification of a process or method) is identified.”); Bender v. Motorola, Inc., No. Civ. A. 09-1245 SBA, 2010 WL 726739, at *3 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 26, 2010) (“The form contemplates that the pleader identify the accused device with some semblance of specificity to alert the alleged infringer which device is at issue. It does not contemplate that the accused device or devices be described in terms of a multiplicity


319 Id.

320 See, e.g., Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 596 (2007) (Stevens, J., dissenting) (criticizing the majority as enacting a “fundamental--and unjustified--change in the character of pretrial practice”); Spencer, supra note 148, at 433 (concluding that Twombly is “an unwarranted interpretation of Rule 8 that will frustrate the efforts of plaintiffs with valid claims to get into court”); Editorial, Throwing Out Mr. Iqbal’s Case, N.Y. Times, May 20, 2009, at A28 (stating that Iqbal represents “[t]he [C]ourt’s conservative majority ... increasingly using legal technicalities to keep people from getting a fair hearing”.

321 See Notice Pleading Restoration Act of 2009, S. 1504, 111th Cong. § 2 (stating that “a Federal court shall not dismiss a complaint under rule 12(b)(6) or (e) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, except under the standards set forth by the Supreme Court of the United States in Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41 (1957)”; Open Access to Courts Act, H.R. 4115, 111th Cong. (2009) (“A court shall not dismiss a complaint under subdivision (b)(6), (c), or (e) of Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure unless it appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of the claim which would entitle the plaintiff to relief. A court shall not dismiss a complaint under one of those subdivisions on the basis of a determination by the judge that the factual contents of the complaint do not show the plaintiff’s claim to be plausible ....”).

322 See supra notes 278-79 and accompanying text.


324 See Spencer, supra note 148, at 481 (noting that “plausibility pleading rejects potentially valid, meritorious claims”).


326 See Donoghue, supra note 94, at 3 (“Holding plaintiffs to a heightened pleading standard will not substantially increase a patent plaintiff’s pre-filing burden.”).

327 See supra Part II.C.1.

328 Unfortunately, no empirical data is available that would permit an estimate as to what percentage of patent infringement suits currently fall into this category.

329 Indeed, to the extent additional pre-filing requirements are imposed, as one commentator points out, requiring a greater investment in pre-filing investigation can “pay dividends later in the litigation if the results help guide a more efficient discovery process.” Bone, supra note 323, at 926-27.

330 See Jeffrey I. D. Lewis & Art C. Cody, Unscrambling the Egg: Pre-Suit Infringement Investigations of Process and Method Patents, 84 J. Pat. & Trademark Off. Soc’y 5, 19 (2002) (noting that it may be difficult for a plaintiff to establish infringement of a process patent prior to discovery); see also Menell et al., supra note 44, at 2-29 (noting that “some infringement (for example, of software patents) is difficult to ascertain from publicly available information”).
See Lewis & Cody, supra note 330, at 7 (“When it comes to determining whether a process or business method infringes a patent, the inquiry is often illusive because critical information is not available to the patent holder.”); see also Spencer, supra note 148, at 481 (noting that heightened pleading prevents discovery “in circumstances where the needed supporting facts lie within the exclusive possession of the defendants”).

See 35 U.S.C. § 295 (2006) (creating a rebuttable presumption that a process patent has been infringed by a product as long as the patentee makes “a reasonable effort to determine the process actually used in the production of the product”); see also 3 Moy, supra note 164, § 12:42 (stating that few cases have used this section).

These sanctions could stem from several sources. First, as previously discussed, Rule 11 provides such a mechanism. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 11(b). The U.S. Code also has a patent-specific section allowing a court to award attorney’s fees in “exceptional” cases. See 35 U.S.C. § 285 (2006). Finally, a court also has the inherent power to award fees. See 28 U.S.C. § 1927 (2006).

See supra notes 221-222 and accompanying text.

See, e.g., Q-Pharma, Inc. v. Andrew Jergens Co., 360 F.3d 1295, 1304 (Fed. Cir. 2004) (“A patent owner who brings a suit for infringement, without more, is generally exempt from the antitrust laws for that action ....”); Intergraph Corp. v. Intel Corp., 195 F.3d 1346, 1362 (Fed. Cir. 1999) (“The antitrust laws do not negate the patentee’s right to exclude others from patent property”).

See, e.g., Q-Pharma, Inc., 360 F.3d at 1304-05; Atari Games Corp. v. Nintendo of Am., Inc., 897 F.2d 1572, 1576 (Fed. Cir. 1990) (“When a patent owner uses his patent rights not only as a shield to protect his invention, but as a sword to eviscerate competition unfairly, that owner may be found to have abused the grant and may become liable for antitrust violations when sufficient power in the relevant market is present.”); Handgards, Inc. v. Ethicon, Inc., 601 F.2d 986, 990 (9th Cir. 1979) (“The bringing of a series of ill-founded patent infringement actions, in bad faith, can constitute an antitrust violation in and of itself if such suits are initiated or pursued with an intent to monopolize a particular industry (and, of course, the other elements of a Section 2 violation are present”).

See, e.g., Nobelpharma AB v. Implant Innovations, Inc., 141 F.3d 1059, 1072 (Fed. Cir. 1998) (“[A] sham suit must be both subjectively brought in bad faith and based on a theory of either infringement or validity that is objectively baseless.”); Argus Chem. Corp. v. Fibre Glass-Evenco Co., 812 F.2d 1381, 1386 (Fed. Cir. 1987).


See, e.g., Meurer, supra note 10, at 539 (“Antitrust law does not reach opportunistic litigation because the purpose of such litigation is to extract a settlement payment, not to exclude a rival.”); see also Meurer, supra note 10, at 540 (“[Antitrust] claims based on sham litigation are very common, but almost never successful.” (footnote omitted)).

See, e.g., C.R. Bard, Inc. v. M3 Sys., Inc., 157 F.3d 1340, 1369 (Fed. Cir. 1998) (“The law recognizes a presumption that the assertion of a duly granted patent is made in good faith; this presumption is overcome only by affirmative evidence of bad faith.” (citation omitted)); Carpet Seaming Tape Licensing Corp. v. Best Seam Inc., 616 F.2d 1133, 1143 (9th Cir. 1980) (“[I]nfringement suits are presumed to be in good faith, a presumption which can be rebutted only by clear and convincing evidence.”).

See, e.g., N.D. Cal. Local Patent R. 3-1; E.D. Tex. Local Patent R. 3-1; see also Advanced Analogic Techs., Inc. v. Kinetic Techs., Inc., No. C-09-1360, 2009 WL 1974602, at *1 (N.D. Cal. July 8, 2009) (denying a motion for a more definite statement because “Patent Local Rule 3-1 requires AATI to identify by name and model number and no later than ten days after the initial case management conference, each accused product, device, and apparatus”).


See McZeo v. Sprint Nextel Corp., 501 F.3d 1354, 1360 n.3 (Fed. Cir. 2007) (Dyk, J., concurring in part, dissenting in part).

See id. (noting that local rules have ameliorated some of the problems with notice pleading but “do nothing to require an adequate statement of the claim before discovery commences”).

Interestingly, the Eastern District of Virginia, which, according to one study, had the fastest median time-to-trial for patent cases from 1995 to 2008 (0.88 years), does not have any local patent rules. See PriceWaterhouseCoopers, supra note 53, at 17. See generally E.D. Va. Local R., available at http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov/localrules/EDVALRMay2009.pdf.

See, e.g., Integrated Circuit Sys., Inc. v. Realtek Semiconductor Co., 308 F. Supp. 2d 1106, 1107 (N.D. Cal. 2004) (“The purpose of the Patent Local Rules is to place the parties on an orderly pretrial track which will produce a ruling on claim construction approximately a year after the complaint is filed.”).

Bessen & Meurer, supra note 5, at 146.