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Standard Guide for Sensory Claim Substantiation¹

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INTRODUCTION

Formats or standards for testing related to sensory claim substantiation cannot be considered without a frame of reference of where that format or standard would fit within the legal framework that surrounds the topic. Product sensory claims tests are performed for three basic reasons: (1) *Comparison of Products*—Determines how one product compares to another, usually a competitor or earlier version of itself. (2) *Substantiation of Claims*—Enables marketing personnel to use positive references through advertising or packaging, or both, in the presentation of the product to the consumer. (3) *Test Performance*—Ascertains and establishes the tested product performance within the scope of its intended use.

The risk associated with each claim is assessed when considering claims substantiation. Compelling and aggressive claims are sure to be scrutinized closely by competitive firms, and if inconsistencies are found through competitive test data, the claims could be challenged in one or more of the following venues: (1) National Advertising Division (NAD) of the Advertising Self-Regulatory Council (ASRC), (2) one or more media, such as print, broadcast, or electronic media, (3) Consumer Advocacy Organizations, and (4) Civil or Federal courts. No single test design or standard test will prevent challenges. The criteria used by each of the potential forums are not identical and are constantly evolving. With the introduction of new technologies coupled with changing consumer demands, testing processes and protocols that were sufficient five or ten years ago may not hold up under today's criteria and scrutiny. Testing requirements of the future can only be a matter for speculation. The one constant is that, as advocates of their clients' positions, attorneys will defend their clients' testing processes and protocol while questioning with great detail every aspect of their competitor's protocol in the attempt to sway the arbiter to agree that their clients are in the right. Legal counsel should be part of any team developing claim substantiation.

This guide demonstrates what a group of professionals who are skilled in the science of testing consider appropriate from a scientific and technical standpoint, and represents an effective method for both defendant and challenger to determine the viability of a sensory claim. The key word is "appropriate." If a particular aspect of a test, or method, is not appropriate for a specific application, it should not be used. Care should be taken to clearly define the reasons and data supporting a deviation from the standard, as any departure invites scrutiny. Since departures are inevitable, the word "should" is used in this guide to indicate when other techniques may have applications in certain unusual circumstances. Whenever a test protocol has been completed, it should be critiqued for weaknesses, including whether experts in the relevant field would consider the research objectively designed, conducted, and analyzed, using procedures that give accurate and reliable results. If weaknesses are found, corrective action should be taken, since the competition may point out any weakness or discrepancy and challenge the study.

While the scientific and technical community identifies the appropriateness of a research method used to support a sensory claim, the legal community evaluates substantiation for legal claims using "reasonableness" as the criterion. With the importance of having a legal "reasonable basis" for a claim, the question remains, "What is reasonable?" Unfortunately, there is no specific answer to that legal

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question, as it will depend on the type of claim, product application and use, applicable regulations where the product is sold, and other factors. These considerations, market pressures (such as timing), and testing budgets can influence and impact the protocols to support a specific claim. This guide provides principles and considerations that need to be addressed for good sensory and consumer testing practices.

1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers reasonable practices for designing and implementing sensory tests that validate claims pertaining only to the sensory or perceptual attributes, or both, of a product. This guide was developed for use in the United States and must be adapted to the laws and regulations for advertisement claim substantiation for any other country. A claim is a statement about a product that highlights its advantages, sensory or perceptual attributes, or product changes or differences compared to other products in order to enhance its marketability. Attribute, performance, and hedonic claims, both comparative and non-comparative, are covered. This guide includes broad principles covering selecting and recruiting representative consumer samples, selecting and preparing products, constructing product rating forms, test execution, and statistical handling of data. The objective of this guide is to disseminate good sensory and consumer testing practices. Validation of claims should be made more defensible if the essence of this guide is followed.

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1.2 This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

E253 Terminology Relating to Sensory Evaluation of Materials and Products

E1885 Test Method for Sensory Analysis—Triangle Test

E2164 Test Method for Directional Difference Test

2.2 ASTM Publications:³

ASTM Manual 13 Descriptive Analysis Testing for Sensory Evaluation

ASTM Manual 26 Sensory Testing Methods: Second Edition

STP 913 Physical Requirement Guidelines for Sensory Evaluation Laboratories

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Terms used in this guide are in accordance with Terminology E253. Additional terms are as follows:

3.1.1 *attribute difference rating test*—this test also determines if one or more specific attributes differ between two samples. The intensities of the attributes are measured on rating scales showing several degrees of intensity. One or more specific attributes of the product that relate to the claim are rated. Samples are presented, and the panelists' task is to evaluate and assign each test sample an intensity to reflect the amount of the designated attribute(s).

3.1.2 *attribute difference tests*—in these test methods, the attribute of interest is defined prior to testing, and the panelists are trained to be able to identify the attribute in question and select or rate the relative intensity of that attribute. It is not necessary to evaluate every occurring attribute, only the attributes being addressed in the claim.

3.1.3 *ceiling effects*—this typically occurs when the majority of the scores occur toward the top of a rating scale. When the products are well-liked, there is not a sufficient amount of scale available to the respondents to differentiate the products. Variation in rating scores is compressed, making mean-based statistical tests misleading. Therefore, analysis should be performed using a more robust statistical model that does not have distributional requirements and is less prone to outlier influence such as multinomial logistic regression.

3.1.4 *central location testing (CLT)*—method of testing that provides maximum control over product preparation and usage. Central location testing assures that the participant actually evaluated the product in question and provides his or her own opinion immediately following evaluation, rather than relying on past usage or recollection of a CLT.

3.1.5 *comparative claims*—designed to compare similarities and differences between two or more products. The basis for comparison can be within the same brand, between two brands, or between a brand and other products in the category.

3.1.6 *equivalence claims*—in equivalence claims, two products are claimed to be equivalent in one or more particular feature.

3.1.7 *experimental error*—variability between the panelist. This error can be accounted for by using more than one panelist to test each sample.

3.1.8 *home use testing (HUT)*—refers to tests that allow respondents to use the products in a more natural environment, rather than the controlled environment.

3.1.9 *measurement error*—repeatability within the individual panelist. This error can be accounted for by having each panelist test a particular sample more than once.

3.1.10 *monadic or single product tests*—product tests where only one product is experienced and rated.

3.1.11 *pattern effect*—any pattern in order will be detected quickly.

3.1.12 *product variability*—batch-to-batch variation. This error can be accounted for by testing multiple and representative batches of a product.

3.1.13 *self-administered questionnaire*—questionnaires independently completed by the respondent are referred to as self-administered.

3.1.14 *superiority claims*—a superiority claim is supported if a statistically significant proportion of the respondents prefer the advertiser's product.

3.1.15 *superiority claims*—superiority claims assert a higher level of performance or liking relative to another brand. Superiority claims can be opposed to competitive brands (for example, “cleans better than brand Z”) or opposed to an earlier formula of the brand (for example, “now more cleaning power than before”).

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

³ Available from ASTM International Headquarters, 100 Barr Harbor Drive, PO Box C700, West Conshohocken, PA 19428-2959.

3.1.16 *unsurpassed claims*—in unsurpassed claims, the claim stated indicates that the product(s) selected for comparison is not better/higher (or greater than) in some way to the target product(s) for which the analysis is executed.

4. Basis of Claim Classification

4.1 A fundamental step in advertising claim substantiation is creating an explicit statement of the claim prior to actual testing. The statement is then forwarded to all parties concerned in the substantiation process. Concerned parties could include marketing, marketing research, legal, consumer testing, sensory evaluation, research suppliers, etc. The statement is essential as it can encourage collaboration in terms of corporate resources, confirms the selection of appropriate test methods, and has the potential to maximize the chance of making reliable business decisions about the proposed claim, pending the results of substantiation research. Collaboration among all involved parties prior to executing substantiation research is critical in achieving the best results. All involved parties should meet and agree (perhaps several times) prior to implementing the substantiation research.

4.2 Familiarity with the general classification of advertising claims is important in developing clear statements of claims at an early stage and for developing a rational plan for testing. This familiarity also facilitates the process of selecting appropriate testing methods, among the many types of methods available to the consumer/sensory science professional. Each method answers specific questions and may support one type of claim but not another. Therefore, the consumer/sensory science function provides an important source of information and experience in claim substantiation and will provide much of the definition of testing methodology. There are multiple ways to support claims depending on the characteristics of the claim. Two approaches are consumer based and trained panel based evaluations.

4.3 Advertising claims can be divided into two fundamental classifications: Comparative and Non-Comparative. The distinction between the two classifications is whether a comparison is made relative to an existing product (advertiser’s or competitor’s) or to itself.

4.4 *Comparative Claims* are designed to compare similarities and differences between two or more products. The basis for comparison can be within the same brand, between two brands, or between a brand and other products in the category.

4.4.1 Comparative claims generally take one of three forms: superiority, equivalence, or unsurpassed. Superiority, equivalence, or unsurpassed claims are further sub-classified into two central areas of application: hedonic and attribute/perception. Hedonics broadly concern measuring the degree of liking and preference—either liking overall or liking that is limited to one or more specific attributes. Attribute/perception claims apply to intensity when measuring one or more specific product attributes.

4.4.2 *Equality/Equivalence Claims*—In equality claims, two products are Equivalence claims are claims that assert equivalent levels of performance or liking when comparing a particular product to another product. In general, equivalence claims are made relative to a market/category leader. Two products are not claimed to be exactly equal in one or more particular feature/features; rather, the products are claimed to be sufficiently similar as to be equivalent from a practical perspective.

4.4.2.1 *Hedonic*—“Tastes as good as brand X.”

4.4.2.2 *Attribute/Perception*: “Our product reduces odors as much as brand X.”

“Our product lasts as long as brand X.”

“Our cake is as moist as the leading brand.”

4.4.2.3 *Overall Equivalence*: “We’re just the same, except for the price.”

“You’ll never know the difference between us and brand X.”

4.4.3 *Unsurpassed Claims*—In unsurpassed claims, the claim stated indicates that the product(s) selected for comparison is not better/higher (or greater than) in some way to the target product(s) for which the analysis is executed. Examples of unsurpassed claims include the following types:

4.4.3.1 *Hedonic*: “No other product is better than our product.”

“No other product is more liked for butter flavor.”

4.4.3.2 *Attribute/Perception*: “No other cake is more moist than ours.”

“No other product has more butter flavor than ours.”

“No other product reduces odors more than our product.”

“No other product lasts longer than our product.”

“No other product is thicker than our product.”

“No other product cleans faster than our product.”

4.4.4 *Superiority Claims*—Superiority claims assert a higher level of performance or liking relative to another brand. Superiority claims can be opposed to competitive brands (for example, “cleans better than brand Z”) or opposed to an earlier formula of the brand (for example, “now more cleaning power than before”). Examples of superiority claims include:

4.4.4.1 *Hedonic*: “Our product tastes better than brand X.”

“Our product tastes better than any other.”

“Our product is preferred over any other brand.”

4.4.4.2 *Attribute/Perception*: “Our cake is more moist than any other.”

“Reduces odors more than brand X.”

“Lasts longer than any other product.”

“Thicker than brand X.”

“Cleans faster than any other product.”

4.4.4.3 In superiority claims, combinations of hedonic claims and attribute/perception claims can sometimes be found, when superiority claims are established based on overall liking and for specific attributes (for example, “Our hosiery is preferred over Brand X for overall liking and it offers more support and comfort.”).

4.4.4.4 From a statistical perspective, it can be easier to support claims of unsurpassed than those of superiority or equivalence. Methods for hypothesis-testing will be discussed further in the section on statistical methods.

4.5 *Non-comparative/Communications Claims*—The objective of the non-comparative/communications claim is to convey something specific about the product, usually a product benefit or difference, and in general, does not seek to provide comparative claims relative to other products. For example, the statement “provides long-lasting flavor” or “smells strong for one month” tells us something about the product, but not in a comparative sense relative to an existing product. These types of claims are common in new product types, but also are used to bring attention to specific product benefits. Examples of non-comparative/communications claims include the following types.

4.5.1 *Hedonic*:

“Tastes great.”

“Makes your laundry outdoor-fresh.”

“Leaves a long-lasting freshness you will like.”

4.5.2 *Attribute/Performance*: “Removes odors for 60 days.”

“Leaves glass streak-free.”

“Leaves no residue on surfaces.”

“Works fast.”

NOTE 1—In the above attribute examples, some of these could be approached either as a non-comparative claim, since no other product is mentioned, or as a comparative claim versus an appropriate standard (streak-free glass, residue-free surface, odor-free room).

4.6 *Selecting the Appropriate Ad Claims Test*—Product claims made in print or on radio, TV, or the Internet require valid data that supports the intended claim. As with most sensory testing, it is necessary to first identify the project and test objectives for the study. The claim statement should indicate whether the claim is based on consumer or laboratory sensory methods or, in fact, some instrumental or chemical test. Sensory claims for preference or liking (“preferred over the leading brand” or “better than the competition”) require consumer tests with the preference or liking questions to support the claim. Claims about product attribute(s) or performance can be based on data from consumers, who are asked about the specific attribute, or from laboratory sensory tests designed to measure the specific attribute(s). In some cases, both types of testing (consumer and laboratory) can be used together to support the same claim. The ad claims team needs to determine the type of claim, the claim statement, the target population, and the aspect(s) of the product that is the focus of the claim. Only then can the test to support the claim generate data with the right focus and weight to support the claim.

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5. Consumer Testing: Selection of Study Respondents and Product

5.1 *Study Respondent Sampling*:

5.1.1 Representative sampling of relevant study respondents is a key element of a defensible claim study. The type of claim and the target audience of the advertising are two determining factors for the appropriate respondent sample, within practical considerations of the category and claim. Respondents should be typical users and not be restricted to any specific subset, such as heavy or light users, unless it is a qualified claim about that specific subset. It is also important to distinguish between purchasers or users of the product to ensure sampled respondents align with the claim.

5.1.1.1 Screening based on recent category usage is recommended to identify target respondents. A simple product statement should be used to describe the product to be tested with just enough information so that it is clear what the product is. The product statement should not contain puffery, benefits, aesthetic description, or ingredients, unless these are unusual enough to require an explanation. Sometimes respondents need to be screened to a more narrowly defined criterion. For example, a claim about strawberry yogurt should recruit respondents who like and eat strawberry yogurt, not just any yogurt with fruit. Conversely, respondents typically do not need to be restricted to use of only that product within the category, they may also use alternative products. For the same example, a claim about strawberry yogurt does not mandate that they be exclusive to eating strawberry yogurt. In some cases, the screening criteria needs to be broadened, for example a criterion for inclusion may be that all the participants have the same need, even though that need may be met by products that are designed very differently or for other purposes (for example, widely different products may be used for make-up removal).

5.1.1.2 If a claim is aimed at drawing future category users in addition to present users, future intent to use should be included as a screening criterion. If recent category usage is not applicable (more than the past three to six months), such as with seasonal products or products with long purchase-repeat cycles, or when a product is innovative and part of a newly created category, identifying study respondents based on positive future category usage intent (for example, concept or prototype acceptors) may be necessary. More detail than the simple product statement should only be used when it is necessary to clarify what the product is because of its potential to bias respondents in advance of the claims substantiation test. When the product is new to the market without any comparable product, a formal concept may be used to screen respondents for the claims substantiation testing.

5.1.2 Hedonic or affective (such as liking, acceptance, preference, or purchase intent) claims should always apply to the target user population. Sampling from any population other than the users to whom the claim is focused, such as purchasers, may require a qualified claim to limit its generality. The test protocol should state clearly whether a claim is being made for one or more of the following:

Population	Examples
Product recommenders	'doctors prefer...'
Product recommenders	'doctors prefer...'
Purchasers	Pet food by pet owners "Choosy moms choose Jif ^A " is a claim specific to the purchaser, the user is the child
Purchasers	Pet food by pet owners "Choosy moms choose Jif ^A " is a claim specific to the purchaser, the user is the child
The ultimate consumer of a product	'now more refreshing'
The ultimate consumer of a product	'now more refreshing'

^ATrademark Jif is a registered trademark of the J.M. Smucker Company.

5.1.3 Perception claims are based on product attribute(s) or performance, or both, that are detectable in the target user population. Claims that state or imply detectability (for example, 'more chocolate flavor'), include study participants from the target user population. Note, trained and validated panel data can be used, if data related to the claim from the target population already exists, and it can be demonstrated that the trained panel's measurements can be used to predict the target population (see 10.3.2 and 10.3.3).

5.1.4 For category usage claims, respondents may be recruited by screening for brand usage, but care should be taken during screening to ensure respondents cannot determine which brands are targeted for testing. This can be accomplished by providing a large list of brands with the brand or brands of interest embedded in the questionnaire. Brand usage and frequency of use data also can be collected to help match the incidence of these variables in the respondent sample and target population. Target users can be defined by their responses to several questions, including:

5.1.4.1 "What one brand of this product type do you use most often?"

5.1.4.2 "What brands have you used in the last (insert time period appropriate for the category)?"

5.1.4.3 "What brand have you used most often in the last 'x' months?"

5.1.4.4 If the frequency of use is one of the criteria for recruitment, then the respondent also may be asked how often they use the product or how many times they have purchased the product within a specific time frame. More questionnaire discussion can be found in 6.9.

5.1.5 Potential allergies or sensitivities to product ingredients should be assessed based on the product being tested and nature of exposure. Participants in product studies need to be screened by self-report for potential allergens, sensitizers, or lifestyle factors, or combinations thereof, that may exclude them from the test (for example, tree nuts, wheat, or special diets for religious or ethical reasons for food and beverage products, nickel, and some perfume components for non-food products).

5.2 Study Respondent Sampling Techniques:

5.2.1 The type of claim should be kept in mind when determining sample size. For example, equivalence claims may require more respondents than superiority claims (see Section 14), and some objective claims (for example, "this product has more...") can be substantiated through descriptive analysis by a trained panel (see Section 10).

5.2.2 The demographics of the respondent sample should be consistent with those of the target population (that is, about whom the claim is being made). The demographics may include the population in terms of age, gender, product usage, culture, and language. A constrained demographic sample, such as a single gender should be employed when it is consistent with the stated claim and normal product usage (for example, a particular gender or age).

5.2.3 Using quotas on relevant respondent characteristics is important to achieve a match between sampled respondents and the intended target population. Demographic information must be collected to demonstrate the appropriateness of the sample and respondent chosen should reflect the target population. For example, representation of age and gender should reflect the target population.

5.2.4 Recruiting of the respondent sample must be stated in the test protocol and should be as objective as possible. Develop and document a rationale for both the number of respondents and for the inclusion and exclusion criteria. If the sample size is less or more than determined by statistical criteria alone, this should be included in the rationale. Consumer product testing respondents are usually obtained from stratified (not convenience) sampling procedures. Quotas are often used because they tend to produce a consumer sample that is fit for the purpose of testing with the target user population of interest. When there are multiple testing locations (see 5.2.7.2), then these quotas are applied within each of the locations. Probability sampling for consumer product testing is rarely practical because it would consider all consumers in the population of interest as potential participants in the test. In reality, many of these consumers cannot be located or are unwilling to participate.

5.2.4.1 Screening criteria should not be revealed to potential respondents during recruitment, and the standard security screening questions (for example, whether family members work in advertising or marketing or other related fields, including that of the test product) should be included.

5.2.5 *Sources for Selecting Respondents*—Potential respondents may be obtained from companies that provide testing services or sell marketing information. These databases are built using a variety of techniques, without targeting a particular manufacturer’s consumers. In some cases, a company may maintain its own branded database of product users. If using these databases, it is important to consider potential biases, for example, the repeated use of the same individuals, or the influence of the known sponsor of the research.

5.2.6 Respondents should be screened specifically for the claims substantiation test to ensure they currently meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria in the study design. To minimize over testing with the same consumers, it is common to screen for past study participation, excluding those who have tested a specific product in the past three months, or tested in the product category in the past six months. Other approaches to minimize sampling bias may include conducting testing across a range of days of the week and times of the day, and varying the locations where potential respondents are recruited.

5.2.7 *Geographic Area Recruiting*—Some claims will require geographic considerations as a function of the target population and the nature of the claim. The study design and rationale may need to include variables that reflect the geography of the claim. Variation in product use may be due to geographic variability in demographics. Product performance may be impacted by environmental factors such as temperature, humidity, water hardness, pollution, or hours of sunshine. For example, use of certain sauces and spices may vary geographically, laundry detergent performance and preferences may be impacted by water hardness, hair product performance may be impacted by humidity, and suntan lotion use may vary by geographic region.

5.2.7.1 Preference claims and usage claims may have a potential for geographic and demographic dependencies. These claims may vary by region or by socioeconomic factors, such as urban versus suburban versus rural. The evidence for or against such dependencies could come from patterns in product sales, or usage, or both. These considerations need to be included in the sampling rationale when they apply.

5.2.7.2 When geographic region is assumed to be a factor relevant to a claim, the geography of respondents should be consistent with the scope of the claim. A rationale should be developed when testing country-wide or regionally, ensuring a fair representative sample of the defined target population in multiple markets dispersed across the geography stated or implied in the claim. For example, some studies conducted via Central Location Testing (CLT, 6.6) in the USA sample from the four major regions (West, East, Central, and South), with two cities per region. An example for Home Use Testing (HUT, 6.6), is using zip codes or postal codes, to ensure testing in multiple markets across the geography. Other approaches for selection of test locations are possible; they need to be included in the rationale.

5.2.8 If market share is a criterion, be cautious when selecting markets and ensure that the test adequately represents the people residing in the geographic territory on which the claim is based. In categories with strong geographic differences in market share, the total market share should be approximated by representing high, low, and average share markets in the study. Regional sample sizes may vary, reflecting their contribution in terms of population density, but not heaviness of usage.

5.2.9 *Analysis Plan*—Claims substantiation is confirmatory testing, not exploratory testing. Once a target population is defined in the study protocol and represented adequately by sampling, results from the total sample are used for substantiating a claim. Results among some subgroup may not correspond to overall results because sample size in subgroups are smaller, and therefore may not be as statistically reliable. Moreover, since there is a risk of false positives and false negatives in testing any hypothesis, analysis of multiple subgroups will increase the overall error rate. Therefore, the analysis plan reflects the intended claim(s) and any subgroup testing should be determined before testing begins (for example, ensure adequate sample size for any analysis and minimize the number of hypotheses to test). Any subgroup analyses that were not planned and properly designed may not be a sound analytical practice for claims substantiation (see Section 14).

5.2.10 Be prepared to defend your rationale for respondent sample criteria if challenged.

5.3 *Selection of Products:*

5.3.1 If a test is being conducted to support a competitive claim that is not brand-specific (for example, versus “other leading brands”), then the competitive brands should be the two brands with the highest national market share. If the market is highly fractionated, such that the top two national brands control less than 50 % of the market, then more competitors must be included in the test. Either the three leading national brands or any brand that is among the top two in the four major geographic regions of the country must be tested. Unless the product is tested against brands representing at least 85 % of the national market, it is recommended that claims should be made against specific brands in lieu of general superlative claims. Eighty-five percent (85 %) of the market is defined as all products within said category, including the brand making the claim.

5.3.2 Competitive brands should be in the same market segment as the brand for which the claim is being made. If a brand straddles market segments, then products most similar in a reasonable competitive context should be used.

5.3.3 When competing products are sold in more than one form, the products being tested must be of the same form or in the form most relevant to the claim. If a powdered drink mix is being compared with a competitor’s product that also comes in a powdered drink mix and as a reconstituted liquid, both brands would have to be tested in their reconstituted from powdered forms. The specific directions for preparation given on each product must be followed. If there is substantial crossover use of different forms, a claim involving different forms may be desired. The forms tested must be stated explicitly as part of the claim, for example, “instant tastes as good as ready-made.”

5.4 *Sampling of Products When Both Products are Currently on the Market:*

5.4.1 For central location consumer tests, commercial products to be used for competitive claims testing should be purchased at the end of the distribution chain to ensure the product is representative of the product the consumer would purchase. Some products are made at different or multiple manufacturing sites. In those instances, the product should be purchased from a distribution center that services the particular test areas.

5.4.2 For other test methods in which the test product is manufactured at one location, samples can be purchased from any high volume store. Products should be sourced at the same time from the same store(s) in each local testing area. Products should reflect the choice available to local consumers. Care should be taken to include a variety of production sites and dates that typically are found on the retail shelf.

5.4.3 In cases where competitive products are not sold in the same stores (for example, fast food restaurants and private label products) test products should be sourced as close in time as possible from locations that reflect choices available to local consumers. It is important that the geographic identity of samples match that of local test participants. This way, if national products manufactured in more than one site have been formulated differently to appeal to regional differences in sensory preferences, appropriate products will be tested against relevant regional competitors. It is critical that all information regarding product sourcing be documented.

5.4.4 Competitive products should be purchased in the standard size package with the highest unit volume or in similar size, or both, to the test product. Trial size and club-store oversized product packages should not be used unless the package meets the specific target of the claim.

5.4.5 Every effort should be made to obtain competitive products of representative freshness found in the marketplace. All products in the test should be of typical age. A freshly-made product should not be compared against a product nearing its expiration date.

5.5 *Handling of Products When Both Products are Currently on the Market:*

5.5.1 After procurement but prior to testing, handling, length of storage, and storage conditions of all products must be identical and consistent with normal consumer practice.

5.5.2 Competitive samples must not show any signs of mishandling or abuse. If products become non-homogeneous during handling, in that they cannot be returned to their original state (precipitates may be returned to solution, but fractured pieces cannot be made whole), then test samples should be remedied for such defects. For example, the last serving or two from a box of cereal that may have a disproportionate share of fines should be discarded or screened.

5.5.3 To minimize the likelihood of product recognition by respondents, manufacturers sometimes try to “blind” the competitive product. Manipulations beyond labeling the original package should be approached with extreme caution. Repackaging of product would need to be supported by instrumental and sensory tests demonstrating no impact on the product. Any alteration of the product itself to minimize recognition could potentially impact acceptability and should be applied with the utmost discretion. It may be feasible to remove a product from its identifying package, but altering the structure of a product, such as grinding cereals to mask their shape, may change a product beyond the point where the competitive assessment is credible. When a product is instantly recognizable by its appearance, shape, or design, then cognitive factors due to brand recognition or previous experience with the product may contribute to the ratings obtained in the study.

5.6 *Sampling of Product Not Yet on the Market:*

5.6.1 If the manufacturer’s product is not yet on the market at the time of testing, the product should represent commercial production, and either be typical retail age of competitive products or expected age of the product when the cycle of the manufacturer’s distribution is observed. The competitive product should be selected to represent average retail age at the time of testing. If a suitable product is not available in the test city, the product should be sourced from a nearby location.

5.6.2 To ensure that the claimed benefit of the new product results from the product itself and not from special handling during limited scale production, it is desirable, but may not always be practical, for the new product to have been made at the production facility. A new product, therefore, should be made at its intended manufacturing site, preferably on the same equipment and under normal operating conditions that will be used to manufacture the product. If pilot plant material must be used for claim support, then supplemental testing, for example, discrimination test for similarity, must be conducted to demonstrate that the claim benefits extend to material made at the production facility.

5.7 *Sample Preparation/Test Protocol:*

5.7.1 To minimize bias, it is essential that all samples for testing are prepared and served in a manner that will have limited impact on the perception of the products and in a manner that treats all of the products fairly.

5.7.2 For claims substantiation tests in particular, samples should be prepared and served under reasonably realistic conditions, that is, in a manner consistent with normal consumer practice. Samples should not be prepared in any fashion that would mask or alter various product characteristics.

5.7.3 All samples should be tested blind and with unbiased codes, such as three-digit codes. The respondents should have no leading or biasing information about the products that they are testing or about the overall objective of the study.

5.7.4 A decision must be made regarding the manner in which the samples will be presented to the respondents. For example, the samples can be served as pairs or one at a time (monadic presentation). Differences among samples are more likely to be detected when two or more samples are presented together; however, monadic presentation generally is considered more representative of the consumer experience.

5.7.5 The order of sample presentation must also be considered prior to testing and this must be designated according to a statistical design. Various psychological factors can influence judgment, for example, the impact for which the following order effects must be accounted:

5.7.5.1 *Context/Contrast Effect*—~~The flavor/texture of one~~As defined in E253 ~~sample can have an influence on the perceived flavor/texture of each subsequent sample.~~Standard Terminology Relating to Sensory Evaluation of Materials and Products.

5.7.5.2 *Positional Bias*—Respondents may be more sensitive to differences in specific samples in a series, such as the first or last sample.

5.7.5.3 *Pattern Effect*—Any pattern in order will be detected quickly.

5.7.5.4 *Ceiling Effects*—This typically occurs when the majority of the scores occur towards the top of a rating scale. When the products are well-liked, there is not a sufficient amount of scale available to the respondents to differentiate the products. Variation in rating scores is compressed, making mean-based statistical tests misleading. Therefore, analysis should be performed using a more robust statistical model that does not have distributional requirements and is less prone to outlier influence such as multinomial logistic regression.

5.7.6 It is essential to balance the order of presentation to distribute these effects across all products.

5.7.7 The test and questionnaire should be designed to be free of all forms of bias. Bias during testing may come from the samples, the test protocol, including the questionnaire, or the test environment, or a combination thereof. Other sections of this guide discuss these issues.

6. Test Design—Consumer Testing

6.1 Monadic designs are those in which a single product is rated by respondents at a time.

6.1.1 Sequential monadic designs require each respondent to evaluate products one at a time and in consecutive order.

6.1.2 Protomonadic tests consist of providing one product, obtaining ratings of that product on a variety of attributes, removing the first product, and replacing with a second product. No monadic ratings are obtained on the second product; instead, a paired-comparison test is conducted.

6.2 Comparative test designs are those in which two or more products are presented to the same respondents to compare the products to each other.

6.3 Comparative claims imply, but are not limited to, comparative designs, where each respondent evaluates two or more products. For comparative claims, paired comparisons are used most frequently. Simultaneous presentation provides the most direct comparison of the products. In some situations, sequential presentation may be needed that introduces execution and sensitivity issues, so there should be a rationale for choosing a sequential (monadic) presentation.

6.3.1 In cases where there are multiple products to be compared, the respondents may be able to evaluate all of the products (complete balanced block design) or a subset of products (an incomplete block design) or only a single product (monadic design). When the products are evaluated in subsets, overlapping product blocks may be constructed using techniques such as Balanced Incomplete Blocks (BIBS) and Partially Balanced Incomplete Blocks (PBIBS). These Incomplete Block designs may require specialized analysis procedures to construct the correct averages, as outlined in Cochran and Cox (1)⁴ and other statistical references.

6.4 Since monadic testing is not the most direct method for making comparisons, it is not always the most desirable approach. Nevertheless, sometimes it may be the only practical method to support comparative claims. For example, some products may require long periods of repeated usage to provide a consumer benefit, which can undermine the ability to make direct comparisons. In this case, product performance can be assessed by giving each product to a different group of consumers and conducting statistical analysis on the ratings. In monadic designs, respondents, as well as products, contribute to the total variation, rendering it less sensitive and larger differences or larger sample sizes are required for significance. It is critical that the groups be matched adequately.

6.5 Non-comparative claims may be supportable by either monadic or sequential-monadic test designs. While a monadic rating may provide a measure free from influences inherent in multi-product, sequential-monadic designs, either approach is sufficient to meet the “reasonable basis” required to make a claim.

6.5.1 Qualitative research, such as focus groups, is not acceptable for claims support since one cannot project their findings to a larger population of consumers.

6.5.2 Both central location (CLT) and home use (HUT) test methods can be acceptable, depending on the specifics of the category and usage. CLTs include all locations other than respondents’ homes. These locations may include sensory facilities, mall facilities, field sites, supplier’s premises, community centers, or others. Each type of location has some benefits and limitations that must be taken into consideration when projecting results.

6.6 Data Collection Strategies:

6.6.1 *Central Location Testing (CLT)*—This method of testing provides maximum control over product preparation and usage. Central location testing assures that the participant actually evaluated the product in question and provides his or her own opinion

⁴ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this standard.

immediately following evaluation, rather than relying on past usage or recollection. Blind testing often precludes the need to repackage product. In addition, CLTs can provide direct product comparisons, isolate specific attributes, such as color or crunchiness, vanilla flavor, and so forth, and accommodate complex evaluation protocols. They are appropriate for superiority, equivalence, or unsurpassed claims.

6.6.1.1 Key limitations are that central location tests usually involve a single product exposure with small amounts of product under conditions that may not closely duplicate typical usage. Questions about whether such exposure can exaggerate trivial differences or whether CLTs provide a basis for forming a preference have been raised. Other limitations that can be controlled are potential for respondents to overhear one another, and testing at times of day that are inappropriate for the product, for example, breakfast cereal in the evening. Where these issues outweigh the limitations inherent to central location testing, home use testing can be considered.

6.6.1.2 Respondents can be intercepted from a public area if they meet the screening criteria or they may be pre-recruited and scheduled for testing (useful when testing is targeted to a specific time of day or where incidence is low). Tests that require special equipment have limited shelf life, or shortened project schedules may not be feasible in mall or intercept type facilities, and are better handled with pre-recruiting.

6.6.2 *Home Use Testing*—The term “Home Use Test” (HUT) refers to tests that allow respondents to use the products in a more natural environment, rather than the controlled environment of a CLT. Since there is still experimenter intervention (product placement and questionnaires) the HUT is not a truly normal use environment; but, it comes closer to how consumers actually use and evaluate products. These HUTs allow for product use that is more typical of normal use conditions, as respondents typically use the products where, when, and how they normally would. HUTs are particularly useful when an overall evaluation of the product cannot be realistically conducted in a CLT environment, or when a feature or benefit must be experienced under normal usage conditions.

6.6.2.1 The choice to use a HUT rather than a CLT to substantiate or evaluate a claim should be determined by the nature of the claim, the amount, type, and length of usage of the product. A very narrow claim about a particular flavor of a pre-made product could very well be evaluated in a CLT, while in an overall claim for suitability would usually require more extended use in the home environment, as with an air freshener.

6.6.2.2 Even if the product as a whole may require a HUT, certain visual, tactile, aural, or olfactory properties of the product may be evaluated in a CLT when the objective is to evaluate salient, non-use characteristics of the products. As an example, respondents could evaluate the look or hand and skin feel, or a combination thereof, of products such as toilet paper and other toiletries, feminine care products, or the aroma of a product. If a claim is being made concerning the context or setting of the actual use, or both, it would still need to be proven on a case-by-case basis that testing a given product outside of the home use environment does not artificially influence consumer behavior or perception.

6.6.2.3 When deciding between a CLT or HUT, one needs to consider the issue of realistic product performance and the ability to generalize the study results to the population that is being targeted by the claim. Certain product categories, such as moisturizing creams, lotions, and acne preparations may require usage over an extended period of time for respondents to evaluate product performance realistically. In such instances, HUT may be the most feasible method for providing realistic performance and evaluations that can be generalized to the population that is being targeted by the claim.

6.6.2.4 A key difference between a CLT and a HUT is the limited experimental control in the HUT. As the HUT provides a more realistic use and evaluation environment, the experimenter has less control over product preparation or use, and must rely on the respondent’s ability to recall features of the product use. As in normal use, this recall may be influenced by comments received from family and friends, and a respondent’s overall impression of a product may influence his/her recall of particular attributes (for example, halo effect). Often, the usage experience will require sequential product placement and usage in a sequential design. The products may be compared at the end (as in a paired comparison or ranking design) or evaluated after each use (as in sequential monadic design or blocked design). These sequential designs may not be appropriate when the product substantially changes the test environment, so the environment in which a second or later product is applied would not be comparable to the first. Example products could include drain cleaners, mold or mildew removers, or shoe polish. This effect may require that respondents use only a single product (for example, a “monadic” or unblocked ANOVA).

6.6.2.5 Certain test conditions may compensate for some of the issues mentioned in 6.6.2.4 by using simultaneous or split-sample designs. An example could be the case where a respondent cleans one-half of a surface with one product and the other half with a second product. Other cases might include shampoo on different sides of the head or skin cleansers or treatments on different sides of the body or face. Care must be taken so split-sample use is counterbalanced across respondents to avoid potential limitations due to handedness and other biases.

6.7 *Interviewing Techniques:*

6.7.1 *Self-Administered:*

6.7.1.1 Questionnaires independently completed by the respondent are referred to as self-administered. Responses can be collected on paper questionnaires, from on-site computerized questionnaires, or from questionnaires administered over the Internet. Paper copies have the advantage of keeping the original data in its real state for an indefinite period of time. Paper copies of questionnaires can be re-examined as needed if any questions about the data arise. Automated data collection and Internet questionnaires have the advantage of being a direct record of consumer rating, uninfluenced by any possible human bias. The

biggest risk in data collection is in the home use environment due to the lack of control over who answers the questionnaire, and therefore, whom the information actually represents, whether collected from paper or automated questionnaires.

6.7.1.2 Self-administered questionnaires can be used in both CLTs and in HUTs. Trained panelists exclusively use self-administered questionnaires.

6.7.1.3 A self-administered questionnaire must be understandable by the respondents with minimal to no verbal instructions by a test administrator. The questionnaire is simple and structured in a logical and unbiased manner. When the questionnaires do not meet these criteria, one-on-one interviewing may be required.

6.7.2 *One-on-One Interviewing Techniques:*

6.7.2.1 One-on-one interviews involve eliciting answers or opinions, or both, from a single respondent through an interviewer, either face-to-face or via telephone.

6.7.2.2 Interviewer training and instruction with practice ensure consistent and flawless execution by all interviewers at all test sites. Instructions include spelling out all actions and their contingencies so that no decisions need to be made by the field agency or the interviewer. Interviewers are thoroughly briefed and practiced before beginning data collection. It is strongly recommended that instructions be tested.

6.7.2.3 Interviewers record respondent responses to questions after they are exposed to a stimulus. The stimulus could be asking a question or testing a product.

6.7.2.4 Interviewer bias can be a major concern and a potential disadvantage with this technique. Double blind testing, where neither the respondent nor the interviewer knows the identity of the sponsor or the products, is imperative. Interviewer bias can be further minimized by using unique code numbers for test products to better mask their identity and make trends more difficult for interviewers to discern.

6.7.2.5 If the questionnaire has several questions, the one-on-one interviewing format is preferred over self-administered questionnaires, since interviewing will prevent respondents from reading ahead or going back, which may influence their answers to other questions.

6.7.2.6 When a claim substantiation study questionnaire involves skipping questions based on the answers to previous questions, referred to as skip patterns, the one-on-one format is recommended over the self-administered format, unless computerized interviewing software is used to ensure correct skips.

6.7.3 *Telephone:*

6.7.3.1 Use of the telephone for claim substantiation support usually will be limited to studies where respondents are not immediately reacting to a stimulus, as they would in a taste, visual, or tactile evaluation, but rather voicing their opinion of a product's performance during actual use or over an extended period of time.

6.7.3.2 Responses can be collected over the telephone from a self-administered questionnaire completed during product usage, or interviewers can ask questions based on respondents' recall of their product experience.

6.8 *Type of Questions:*

6.8.1 *Rankings*—When respondents can compare three or more products, a simple way to establish superiority, equivalence, or unsurpassed within that set of products is through the use of ranking. In this case, a respondent is presented with a set of products simultaneously and asked to rank the products for preference or other attributes (see section on data analysis). In cases where the advertiser is comparing more products than can be accurately ranked, blocking designs, such as Balanced and Partially Balanced Incomplete Block designs (BIBs and PBIBs) may be used, according to Meilgaard et al (2). Consult a statistician for assistance in constructing these designs.

6.8.2 *Preference*—The choice among two or more alternative products is the most direct way to establish superiority, equivalence, or unsurpassed, given adequate sample size.

6.8.3 *Acceptance*—The nine-point hedonic scale traditionally is used for sensory acceptance measurements because it is reliable, valid, and of practical value. In addition to measuring degree of liking of a single product or multiple products evaluated sequentially, it measures degree of differences in acceptance and direction of liking. A large enough difference in mean ratings on an acceptance scale might lead to the researcher making an inference about preference. The hedonic acceptance scale can be used with a wide variety of products and with minimal respondent instruction. Absolute levels of liking can change over time and between groups, but scalar differences between products are reproducible with different groups of respondents. Resulting data lends itself to powerful parametric statistics. Other structured, semi-structured, and numerical scales can be used effectively for acceptance testing. When using other scales, care should be taken that the distributions are relatively normal so parametric statistics can be used. If not, nonparametric statistics should be applied.

6.8.4 *Attribute/Diagnostic*—There are four types of attribute/diagnostic questions in general use: (1) hedonic, (2) preference, (3) just right, and (4) intensity.

6.8.4.1 Hedonic scales measure the degree of liking of the level of an individual attribute in a product (for example, measuring the degree of liking of the level of fragrance of a product).

6.8.4.2 Attribute preference scales present questions about individual product attributes, such as the fit of a pair of jeans and the preference between the fit of two products.

6.8.4.3 Just right scales measure the appropriateness of the individual attribute level, for example, too sweet, just right or not sweet enough.