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Standard Test Method for Unipolar Magnitude Estimation of Sensory Attributes¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This test method describes a procedure for the application of unipolar magnitude estimation to the evaluation of the magnitude of sensory attributes. The test method covers procedures for the training of assessors to produce magnitude estimations and statistical evaluation of the estimations.

1.2 Magnitude estimation is a psychophysical scaling technique in which assessors assign numeric values to the magnitude of an attribute. The only constraint placed upon the assessor is that the values assigned should conform to a ratio principle. For example, if the attribute seems twice as strong in sample B when compared to sample A, sample B should receive a value which is twice the value assigned to sample A.

1.3 The intensity of attributes such as pleasantness, sweetness, saltiness or softness can be evaluated using magnitude estimation.

1.4 Magnitude estimation may provide advantages over other scaling methods, particularly when the number of assessors and the time available for training are limited. With approximately 1 h of training, a panel of 15 to 20 naive individuals can produce data of adequate precision and reproducibility. Any additional training that may be required to ensure that the assessors can properly identify the attribute being evaluated is beyond the scope of this test method.

1.5 *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

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E18 on Sensory Evaluation and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E18.03 on Sensory Theory and Statistics.

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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.

E253 Terminology Relating to Sensory Evaluation of Materials and Products

E1871 Guide for Serving Protocol for Sensory Evaluation of Foods and Beverages

2.2 ASTM Publications:³

Manual 26 Sensory Testing Methods: 2nd Edition

STP 758 Guidelines for the Selection and Training of Sensory Panel Members

2.3 ISO Standards:⁴

ISO 11056:1999 Sensory Analysis—Methodology—Magnitude Estimation Method

ISO 4121:1987 Sensory Analysis—Methodology—Evaluation of Food Products by Methods Using Scales

ISO/DIS 5492:1990 Sensory Analysis—Vocabulary (1)

ISO 6658:1985 Sensory Analysis—Methodology—General Guidance

ISO/DIS 8586-1:1989 Sensory Analysis—Methodology—General Guide for Selection, Training and Monitoring Subjects—Part 1: Qualifying Subjects (1)

ISO 8589:1988 Sensory Analysis—General Guidance for the Design of Test Rooms

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 For general definitions related to sensory evaluation, refer to Terminology E253.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *external modulus, n*—number assigned by the panel leader to describe the intensity of the external reference sample or the first sample of the sample set. The external modulus is sometimes referred to as a “fixed modulus” or just the “modulus.” In this case the reference is said to be modulated.

3.2.2 *external reference sample for magnitude estimation, n*—sample designated as the one to which all others are to be compared, or to which the first sample of a set is to be compared, when each subsequent sample in the set is compared to the preceding sample. This sample is normally the first sample to be presented.

³ Available from ASTM Headquarters, 100 Barr Harbor Drive, PO Box C700, West Conshohocken, PA 19428–29593.

⁴ Available from International Organization for Standardization (ISO), ISO Central Secretariat, BIBC II, Chemin de Blandonnet 8, CP 401, 1214 Vernier, Geneva, Switzerland, <http://www.iso.org>.

3.2.3 *internal modulus*, n —number assigned by the assessor to describe the intensity of the external reference sample or the first sample of the sample set. The internal modulus is sometimes referred to as a “non-fixed modulus.” When an internal modulus is used, the reference is sometimes said to be unmodulated.

3.2.4 *internal reference sample for magnitude estimation*, n —sample present in the experimental set, which is presented to the assessor as if it were a test sample. The value assigned to this sample(s) can be used for normalizing assessors’ data. If an external reference is used, the internal reference(s) are normally identical to it.

3.2.5 *magnitude estimation*, n —process of assigning values to the intensities of an attribute of products in such a way that the ratios of the values assigned and the assessor’s perceptions of the attribute are the same.

3.2.6 *normalizing*, v —process of multiplying each assessor’s raw data by, or adding to the logarithm of each assessor’s raw data, a value which brings all the data onto a common scale. Also referred to as rescaling.

3.2.7 *Stevens’ Equation*, n —also referred to as the Psycho-physical Power Function:

$$R = KS^n \quad (1)$$

where:

- R = the assessor’s response (the perceived intensity),
- K = a constant that reconciles the units of measurement used for R and S ,
- S = the stimulus (chemical concentration or physical force), and
- n = the exponent of the power function and the slope of the regression curve for R and S when they are expressed in logarithmic units.

In practice, Stevens’ Equation is generally transformed to logarithms, either common or natural:

$$\ln R = \ln K + n \ln S \quad (2)$$

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 Assessors judge the intensity of an attribute of a set of samples, presented in random order, on a ratio scale. For example, if one sample is given a value of 50 and a second sample is twice as strong, it will be given a value of 100. If it is half as strong it will be given a value of 25. There are three procedures that can be used.

4.1.1 Assessors are instructed to assign any value to describe the intensity of the first sample (external reference, which may or may not be part of the sample set). Assessors then rate the intensity of the following samples in relation to the value of the external reference.

4.1.2 The external reference is pre-assigned a value (modulus) to describe its intensity by the panel leader. Assessors rate the intensity of the following samples in relation to the external reference and the modulus.

4.1.3 Assessors rate the intensity of each subsequent sample in relation to the preceding sample. The first sample of the set may or may not have a modulus.

4.2 Individual judgments can be converted to a common scale by normalizing the data. Three normalizing methods can be used: internal standard normalizing, external calibration and, if a modulus is not used, no standard normalizing (method of averages). See 11.4 and Appendix X2 – Appendix X4.

4.3 Results are averaged using geometric means. Analysis of variance or other statistical analyses may be performed after the data have been converted to logarithms.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Magnitude estimation may be used to measure and compare the intensities of attributes of a wide variety of products.

5.2 Magnitude estimation provides a large degree of flexibility for both the experimenter and the assessor. Once trained in magnitude estimation, assessors are generally able to apply their skill to a wide variety of sample types and attributes, with minimal additional training.

5.3 Magnitude estimation is not as susceptible to end-effects as interval scaling techniques. These can occur when assessors are not familiar with the entire range of sensations being presented. Under these circumstances, assessors may assign an early sample to a category which is too close to one end of the scale. Subsequently, they may “run out of scale” and be forced to assign perceptually different samples to the same category. This should not occur with magnitude estimation, as, in theory, there are an infinite number of categories.

5.4 Magnitude estimation is one frequently used technique that permits the representation of data in terms of Stevens’ Power Law.

5.5 The disadvantages of magnitude estimation arise primarily from the requirements of the data analysis.

5.5.1 Permitting each assessor to choose a different numerical scale may produce significant assessor effects. This disadvantage can be overcome in a number of ways, as follows. The experimenter must choose the approach most appropriate for the circumstances.

5.5.1.1 Experiments can be designed such that analysis of variance can be used to remove the assessor effects and interactions.

5.5.1.2 Alternatively, assessors can be forced to a common scale, either by training or by use of external reference samples with assigned values (modulus).

5.5.1.3 Finally, each assessor’s data can be brought to a common scale by one of a variety of normalizing methods.

5.5.2 Logarithms must be applied before carrying out data analysis. This becomes problematic if values are near threshold, as a logarithm of zero cannot be taken (see 11.2.1).

5.6 Magnitude estimation should be used:

5.6.1 When end-effects are a concern, for example when assessors are not familiar with the entire range of sensations being presented.

5.6.2 When Stevens’ Power Law is to be applied to the data.

5.6.3 Generally, in central location testing with assessors trained in the technique. It is not appropriate for home use or mall intercept testing with consumers.

5.7 This test method is only meant to be used with assessors who are specifically trained in magnitude estimation. Do not use this method with untrained assessors or untrained consumers.

6. Conditions of Testing

6.1 The general conditions for testing, such as the location, preparations, presentation and coding of samples, and the selection and training of assessors are described in the standards for general methodology, such as ISO 6658, ISO/DIS 8586-1, ISO 8589, ASTM **STP 758**, or those describing methods using scales and categories, for example, ISO 4121 and ASTM Manual 26, and for specific serving protocols in Guide **E1871**.

7. Selection and Training of Assessors

7.1 Refer to ISO 8586-1 or ASTM **STP 758** for all the general considerations concerning the selection and training of assessors. Refer to ISO 11056 for considerations specific to magnitude estimation.

7.2 As is true for all methods of sensory evaluation, the panel leader will have to make judgments as to the level of proficiency required of the assessors. The objectives of the test, the availability of assessors, the costs of securing additional assessors and of additional training should all be considered in the design of a training program. Assessors generally reach a stable level of proficiency in the method itself after three to four exercises in assigning magnitudes.

7.3 Estimating the areas of geometric shapes has proven very useful for introducing assessors to the basic concepts of magnitude estimation. A set of 18 figures composed of six circles, six equilateral triangles, and six squares ranging in size from approximately 2 to 200 cm² has been used successfully for training assessors (see **Table 1**).

7.4 Prior to presenting the figures, the panel leader instructs the candidate in the principles of the method. This instruction should include, but is not necessarily limited to the following three points.

7.4.1 If the attribute is not present, the value 0 should be assigned.

7.4.2 There is no upper limit to the scale.

7.4.3 Values should be assigned on a ratio basis: if the attribute is twice as intense, it should receive a rating twice as large.

7.5 Assessors have a tendency to use “round numbers” such as 5, 10, 20, 25, and so forth. This should be pointed out explicitly during training. Assessors should be encouraged, “given permission,” to use all numbers. Assessors are also influenced by the ratios mentioned in training. Therefore, care should be taken to mention a variety of different ratios, for example, 3:1 and 1/3, 7.5, 2.4, not just 2:1 and 1/2.

7.6 *Assigning Codes to Figures*—The figures are presented singly, centered on an 8.5 × 11 in. sheet of white paper. The assessor states his magnitude estimate; the estimation is recorded. The 8.5-cm square is presented first with the instruction to assign it a value between 30 and 100. The balance of the geometric figures should be shuffled prior to each test so that the type of geometric figure and the size of the areas do not form a particular pattern.

7.7 *Comparing Results*—After completing the full set of shape estimates, assessors should be allowed to compare their results with the averaged results of the group. If this is not practical, the results from a previous group can also be used. The objective is to provide positive feedback, that is, to reassure the assessors that they understand the exercise. Care should be taken not to create the impression that there is a “right” answer. Unless their results are very different, departures from the group results should be explained as order effects, that is, their responses are affected by the order in which they evaluate the samples. They should be reassured that despite individual order effects, the group’s results will be accurate.

7.8 If the assessors’ results are very different, review the principles of the method again. If the panel leader judges that an assessor cannot be trained in the method, the training should be discontinued at this point and the assessor excused.

7.9 Once the panel has successfully completed the area estimation exercise, further training should be carried out with the commodity or type of test substance to be used in the main trial(s). This gives the assessor experience in applying magnitude estimation to attributes characterizing the test sample.

7.10 The panel leader may need to design exercises for training assessors to properly identify the attributes to be evaluated. The need for this will depend on the objectives and requirements of the test.

8. Number of Assessors Required

8.1 As is true for other forms of scaling, the number of assessors necessary for a given task depends on the complexity of the task, how close together the various test samples are in the attribute being evaluated, the amount of training the assessors have received, and the importance to be attached to the decision based on the test results (c.f. ISO 8586-1). Issues of statistical power need to be resolved based on the variance associated with a particular evaluation and the magnitude of the differences that need to be detected.

9. Reference Samples

9.1 *External References*—The panel leader specifies to the assessors that the reference sample has a value of, for example, 30, 50, 100, or whatever seems appropriate to the panel leader.

TABLE 1 Training Exercise Shapes

NOTE 1—Two 11.1-cm squares are included as a measure of reproducibility.

Circles		Triangles		Squares	
Radius	Area	Edge	Area	Edge	Area
1.4	6.2	2.2	2.1	3.2	10.2
2.5	19.6	4.1	7.3	4.2	17.6
3.7	43.0	7.6	25.0	8.5	72.3
5.4	91.6	12.2	64.4	11.1	123.2
6.8	145.3	15.5	104.0	11.1	123.2
8.3	216.4	19.2	159.6	14.2	201.6

The leader instructs the assessors to make his or her subsequent judgments relative to the value assigned.

9.2 The reference should have an intensity close to the geometric mean for the whole panel. A reference that represents an extreme value of the attribute will distort the data due to a contrast effect and reduce the sensitivity of the method.

9.3 Magnitude estimation does not impose any specific restrictions on sample presentation. However, the external reference sample, if used, is presented to the assessor first with the specification that the sample is to have a particular value. The value chosen should be between 30 and 100. In most instances, when the initial value is in this range, the assessor will not need to use decimals in order to conform to the ratio principle. Some assessors find it more difficult to use decimals and most will avoid using them unless specifically instructed to do so.

10. Procedure—Assigning Magnitude Estimations

10.1 Magnitude estimation imposes no special restrictions on the method or order of sample presentation. As in all sensory experiments, the order of sample presentation should be randomized and balanced across all assessors.

10.2 In the modalities of olfaction and gustation, the problems of adaptation and fatigue must be carefully considered when encouraging or requiring repeated evaluations of previous samples. When only a limited number of samples can be evaluated, it may be necessary to sacrifice statistical rigor to the known limitations of the sensory systems.

10.3 *Without an External Reference Sample*—The assessor evaluates the first sample and assigns a magnitude estimate. The assessor is instructed to be careful not to assign a value that is too small. It has generally been suggested that the first sample be assigned a value in the range of 30 to 100 (see 9.3).

10.3.1 The assessor is then instructed to rate each sample relative to its immediately preceding sample or to the first sample.

10.4 *With an External Reference Sample*—The assessor is presented the reference sample and is informed of its assigned value or allowed to assign a value of his own. The assessor next evaluates the first coded sample and assigns it a value relative to the reference sample. All subsequent samples are rated relative to either the identified reference or to its immediately preceding sample.

10.5 The procedure of rating each sample relative to its immediate predecessor can produce scale drift due to an accumulation of errors. In addition, the random error associated with each evaluation is no longer independent from the preceding evaluations (see Section 11).

11. Data Analysis

11.1 An analysis of variance (ANOVA), which explicitly accounts for all blocking factors and is carried out on logarithmically transformed data, will provide results of the highest precision. However, as a practical matter, it is not always possible to design and execute experiments in a manner that is consistent with an ANOVA model which contains all of the

critical factors. For example, when a project extends over multiple sessions, it may not be possible to assemble exactly the same group of assessors at each session. In other cases it may be necessary to combine samples from multiple projects into a single session. If your design does not conform to standard experimental design, every effort should be made to consult a statistician to develop an appropriate form of the ANOVA model. If this is not an option, a less desirable but workable solution may be to employ a one-way ANOVA using treatments as the only factor. Finally, when investigating the dose-response relationship between some physical parameter and a sensory attribute, regression analysis is appropriate.

11.1.1 It should be noted, that both normalizing and instructing the assessors to rate each sample relative to the immediately preceding sample cause certain theoretical problems in the statistical analysis. When these techniques are employed, the statistical probabilities arising from the analyses should be regarded as approximate. The statistical approaches to dealing with these problems are beyond the scope of this test method.

11.2 *Log Transformations*—Present knowledge indicates that magnitude estimations conform to a log-normal distribution, and that more precise results are obtained when analyses are carried out on logarithmically transformed data.

11.2.1 *Dealing with Zeros*—Since one cannot take the logarithm of zero, any zero response causes a problem. Different investigators have used different approaches to dealing with zeros. It is recommended that the zero values should be replaced by very small values. The specific value chosen should take into account the scale used by each assessor (for example, half of the smallest value assigned by that assessor).

11.3 *Product-Assessor Interactions:*

11.3.1 An external reference anchors the assessors to a common point on the scale. With experienced assessors, this often eliminates product-assessor interactions. (When this is the case, the data require no special processing to remove this interaction.)

11.3.2 With assessors who have just been trained or when no external reference is used, or both, product-assessor interactions may still occur. In this case, the methods discussed below can be used to reduce, or eliminate, this interaction.

11.4 *Normalizing*—Product-assessor interactions should first be removed by normalizing. This significantly improves the sensitivity of subsequent analyses. “Internal Standard Normalizing,” “No Standard Normalizing,” and “External Calibration” have been used for this purpose. The most precise of these methods is “Internal Standard Normalizing.” It is recommended that this method be used wherever possible.

11.4.1 *Internal Standard Normalizing*—This approach can be used whether or not an external reference is used. It requires that one or more unidentified internal reference samples be included in the test set.

11.4.1.1 When replicate internal reference samples have been included, one first averages a assessor’s estimates for these samples.

11.4.1.2 If no external reference has been used, one then calculates the value which would bring the average of the internal reference samples to some predetermined, fixed value.