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Standard Terminology Relating to Steel, Stainless Steel, Related Alloys, and Ferroalloys¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation A941; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope*

1.1 This standard is a compilation of definitions of terms related to steel, stainless steel, related alloys, and ferroalloys.

1.2 When a term is used in an ASTM document for which Committee A01 is responsible, it is included herein only when judged, after review by Subcommittee A01.92, to be a generally usable term.

1.3 Some definitions include a discussion section, which is a mandatory part of the definition and contains additional information that is relevant to the meaning of the defined term.

1.4 Definitions of terms specific to a particular standard will appear in that standard and will supersede any definitions of identical terms in this standard.

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
[E112 Test Methods for Determining Average Grain Size](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

Ac_{cm} , Ac_1 , Ac_3 , Ac_4 —See **transformation temperature**.

Ae_{cm} , Ae_1 , Ae_3 , Ae_4 —See **transformation temperature**.

age hardening, n —hardening by **aging**, usually after rapid cooling or **cold working**.

age hardening, n —see **precipitation hardening**.

¹ This terminology is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee A01 on Steel, Stainless Steel and Related Alloys and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee A01.92 on Terminology.

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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.

aging, n —a change in the properties of certain **steels** that occurs at ambient or moderately elevated temperatures after hot working or a heat treatment (**quench aging**, **natural aging**, or **artificial aging**) or after a cold-working operation (**strain aging**).

DISCUSSION—The change in properties is often, but not always, due to **precipitation hardening**, but never involves a change in the chemical composition of the **steel**.

alloy steel, n —a **steel**, other than a **stainless steel**, that conforms to a specification that requires one or more of the following elements, by mass percent, to have a minimum content equal to or greater than: 0.30 for aluminum; 0.0008 for boron; 0.30 for chromium; 0.30 for cobalt; 0.40 for copper; 0.40 for lead; 1.65 for manganese; 0.08 for molybdenum; 0.30 for nickel; 0.06 for niobium (columbium); 0.60 for silicon; 0.05 for titanium; 0.30 for tungsten (wolfram); 0.10 for vanadium; 0.05 for zirconium; or 0.10 for any other alloying element, except sulphur, phosphorus, carbon, and nitrogen.

annealing, n —a generic term covering any of several **heat treatments**.

DISCUSSION—This treatment is used for purposes such as reducing hardness, improving machinability, facilitating **cold working**, producing a desired microstructure, or obtaining desired mechanical, physical, or other properties. Where applicable, it is preferred that the following more specific terms be used: **box annealing**, **bright annealing**, **full annealing**, **intermediate annealing**, **isothermal annealing**, **process annealing**, **spheroidizing**, and **subcritical annealing**. The term “**annealing**,” without qualification, implies **full annealing**. Any process of **annealing** will usually reduce stresses; however, if the treatment is applied for the sole purpose of stress reduction, it should be designated **stress relieving**.

Ar_{cm} , Ar_1 , Ar_3 , Ar_4 —See **transformation temperature**.

artificial aging, n —aging above room temperature.

atmospheric corrosion resistance, n —the ability to resist degradation or alteration of material through chemical reaction with the surrounding atmosphere.

DISCUSSION—This term generally pertains to carbon steel, low alloy steel, or micro-alloyed steel.

austempering, n —**heat treatment** involving **quenching** a steel object from a temperature above the **transformation range** in a medium maintained at a temperature above the **martensite range** sufficiently fast to avoid the formation of

*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard

high temperature transformation products, and then holding it at that temperature until transformation is complete.

austenitizing, *n*—forming austenite by heating a steel object above the **transformation range**.

baking, *n*—heating to a low temperature in order to remove gases.

batch furnace, *n*—a heating device within which steel objects are held stationary or oscillated during the thermal processing cycle.

blank carburizing, *n*—simulating the **carburizing** operation without introducing carbon.

DISCUSSION—This is usually accomplished by using an inert material in place of the carburizing agent, or by applying a suitable protective coating on the object being heat treated.

blank nitriding, *n*—simulating the nitriding operation without introducing nitrogen.

DISCUSSION—This is usually accomplished by using an inert material in place of the nitriding agent, or by applying a suitable protective coating on the object being heat treated.

bluing, *n*—subjecting the scale-free surface of a steel object to the action of air, steam, or other agents at a suitable temperature, thereby forming a thin blue film of oxide and improving the object's appearance and corrosion resistance.

DISCUSSION—This term is ordinarily applied to sheet, strip, or finished parts. It is used also to denote the heating of springs after fabrication in order to improve their properties.

box annealing, *n*—**annealing** in a sealed container under conditions that minimize oxidation.

DISCUSSION—The charge is usually heated slowly to a temperature below the **transformation range**, but sometimes above or within it, and is then cooled slowly.

bright annealing, *n*—**annealing** in a protective medium to prevent discoloration of the bright surface.

capped steel, *n*—a **rimmed steel** in which, during ingot solidification, the rimming action was limited by mechanical or chemical means.

carbon potential, *n*—the carbon content at the surface of a specimen of pure iron in equilibrium with the carburizing medium considered, and under the conditions specified.

carbon restoration, *n*—replacing the carbon lost from the surface layer in previous processing by carburizing this layer to substantially the original carbon level.

carbon steel, *n*—a **steel** that conforms to a specification that prescribes a maximum limit, by **heat analysis** in mass percent, of not more than: 2.00 for carbon and 1.65 for manganese, but does not prescribe a minimum limit for chromium, cobalt, molybdenum, nickel, niobium (columbium), tungsten (wolfram), vanadium, or zirconium.

DISCUSSION—Except as required above, it is permissible for carbon steel specifications to prescribe limits (minimum or maximum, or both) for each specified alloying element, subject to the following restrictions for the heat analysis limits in mass percent:

(a) for wrought carbon steel products, the specified maximum limit is not to exceed: 0.10 for aluminum, 0.60 for silicon, and 0.050 for titanium;

(b) for carbon steel castings, the specified maximum limit is not to exceed: 0.10 for aluminum, 1.00 for silicon, and 0.050 for titanium.

(c) for **carbon steels** that are required to be rephosphorized, the specified minimum limit for phosphorus is not to be less than 0.040;

(d) for **carbon steels** that are required to be resulfurized, the specified minimum limit for sulfur is not to be less than 0.060;

(e) for **carbon steels** that are not required to be rephosphorized or resulfurized, the specified maximum limit is not to exceed: 0.60 for copper, 0.050 for phosphorus, and 0.060 for sulfur; and

(f) for **carbon steels** that are required to contain boron, copper, or lead, the specified minimum limit is not to exceed: 0.0005 for boron, 0.35 for copper, and 0.25 for lead.

carbonitriding, *n*—**case hardening** in which a suitable steel object is heated above A_{c1} in a gaseous atmosphere of such composition as to cause simultaneous absorption of carbon and nitrogen by the surface and, by diffusion, to create a concentration gradient.

carburizing, *n*—a process in which an austenitized steel object is brought into contact with a carbonaceous environment of sufficient carbon potential to cause absorption of carbon at the surface and, by diffusion, to create a concentration gradient.

case, *n*—*in case hardening*, the outer portion that has been made harder than the **core** as a result of altered composition or microstructure, or both, from treatments such as **carburizing**, **nitriding**, and **induction hardening**.

case hardening, *n*—a generic term covering any of several processes applicable to **steel** that change the chemical composition or microstructure, or both, of the surface layer.

DISCUSSION—The processes commonly used are: **carburizing** and **quench hardening**; **nitriding**; and **carbonitriding**. It is preferred that the applicable specific process name be used.

cast analysis—Deprecated term. Use the preferred term **heat analysis**.

cementation, *n*—the introduction of one or more elements into the outer portion of a steel object by means of diffusion at high temperature.

certificate of compliance, *n*—*in manufactured products*, a document that states that the product was manufactured, sampled, tested, and inspected in accordance with the requirements of the specification (including year of issue) and any other requirements specified in the purchase order or contract, and has been found to meet such requirements.

DISCUSSION—A single document, containing test report information and certificate of compliance information, may be used.

certifying organization, *n*—*in product specifications*, the entity responsible for the conformance and certification of the product to the specification requirements.

check analysis—Deprecated term. Use the preferred term **product analysis**.

coarse grain practice, *n*—a steelmaking practice for other than **stainless steel** that is intended to produce a **killed steel** in which aluminum, niobium (columbium), titanium, and vanadium are **residual elements**.

cold working, *n*—mechanical deformation of a metal at temperatures below its **recrystallization temperature**.

cold treatment, *n*—exposing a steel object to temperatures below room temperature for the purpose of obtaining desired conditions or properties, such as dimensional or structural stability.

conditioning heat treatment, *n*—a preliminary **heat treatment** used to prepare a steel object for a desired reaction to a subsequent **heat treatment**.

continuous-conveyance furnace, *n*—a heating device through which steel objects are intentionally moved at a constant rate during the thermal processing cycle.

controlled cooling, *n*—cooling a steel object from an elevated temperature in a predetermined manner to avoid hardening, cracking, or internal damage, or to produce a desired microstructure or mechanical properties.

controlling cross section thickness (Tc), *n*—diameter of the largest theoretical sphere that can be inscribed within the volume of the component.

DISCUSSION—The controlling cross section thickness (Tc) is used to determine the size of prolongations, test blocks, or representative test pieces. It is calculated based on the dimensions of the component at the time of heat treatment. Where components are heat treated with internal diameters the calculation is made based on the wall thickness.

core, *n*—*in case hardening*, the interior portion of unaltered composition or microstructure, or both, of a case hardened steel object.

core, *n*—*in clad products*, the central portion of a multilayer composite metallic material.

critical cooling rate, *n*—the slowest rate of continuous cooling at which austenite can be cooled from above the **transformation range** to prevent its transformation above M_s .

cycle annealing, *n*—**annealing** employing a predetermined and closely controlled time-temperature cycle to produce specific properties or a specific microstructure.

decarburization, *n*—the loss of carbon from the surface of a steel object as a result of its being heated in a medium that reacts with the carbon.

defect, *n*—an imperfection of sufficient magnitude to warrant rejection based on the specified requirements.

differential heating, *n*—heating that intentionally produces a temperature gradient within a steel object such that, after cooling, a desired stress distribution or variation in properties is present within the object.

diffusion coating, *n*—any process whereby a base metal is either coated with another metal and heated to a sufficient temperature in a suitable environment, or exposed to a gaseous or liquid medium containing the other metal, thereby causing diffusion of the coating or other metal into the base metal, with a resultant change in the composition and properties of its surface.

direct quenching, *n*—*in thermochemical processing*, **quenching** immediately following the thermochemical treatment.

direct quenching, *n*—*in thermomechanical processing*, **quenching** immediately following the final hot deformation.

document, *n*—a written, printed, or electronic record that provides information, evidence, or official statements.

double aging, *n*—employment of two different aging treatments, in sequence, to control the type of precipitate formed from a supersaturated alloy matrix in order to obtain the desired properties.

DISCUSSION—The first aging treatment, sometimes referred to as intermediate or stabilizing, is usually carried out at a higher temperature than the second.

double tempering, *n*—a treatment in which a quenched steel object is given two complete tempering cycles at substantially the same temperature for the purpose of ensuring completion of the tempering reaction and promoting stability of the resultant microstructure.

electronic data interchange, *n*—the computer to computer exchange of business information in a standardized format.

ellipsis, *n*—*in a tabular entry*, three periods (...) that indicate that there is no requirement.

ferritizing anneal, *n*—a **heat treatment** that produces a predominantly ferritic matrix in a steel object.

ferroalloy, *n*—an alloy of iron and one or more other metals, for use as an addition to the molten metal during the manufacture of **steels**, nickel alloys, or cobalt alloys.

ferrous material, *n*—metals and alloys that contain iron as the principal component.

DISCUSSION—The iron content is not always stated in the specification and is not always determined by chemical analysis. The iron content may be taken to be 100 % minus the sum of the mean values permitted by the specification for all other elements having a specified range or a specified maximum. For conformance purposes, the mean value for iron, whether specified or calculated, is compared on an individual basis to the mean values permitted by the specification for each of the other elements having a specified range or a specified maximum. If an element other than iron is not specified, but is listed as remainder or balance, then, for conformance purposes the mean value for iron is compared to the calculated value for that other element.

fine grain practice, *n*—a steelmaking practice for other than **stainless steel** that is intended to produce a **killed steel** that is capable of meeting the requirements specified for fine austenitic grain size when and if the as-rolled or as-forged product is reheated to a temperature at or above the transformation temperature, A_{c3} .

DISCUSSION—When stated as a requirement, **fine grain practice** normally involves the addition of one or more austenitic grain refining elements in amounts that have been established by the steel producer as being sufficient. Austenitic grain refining elements include, but are not limited to, aluminum, niobium (columbium), titanium, and vanadium. A **fine grain practice** requirement (1) does not specify a minimum austenitic grain refining element addition; (2) does not require prior austenite grain size testing or measurement, or both; (3) if tested, does not require meeting any prior austenite grain size requirement; and (4) does not apply to, nor in any way control, the prior austenite grain size

or the ferrite grain size of the steel in the as-rolled or as-forged condition. The prior austenitic grain size and the ferritic grain size of as-rolled or as-forged steel products are controlled by the manufacturing process and may be assisted by suitable chemistry. The appropriate manufacturing process controls needed to meet the mechanical property requirements of the specification in the as-rolled or as-forged condition are neither defined nor implied by the inclusion of a **fine grain practice** requirement.

flame annealing, *n*—**annealing** in which the heat is applied directly by a flame.

flame hardening, *n*—a process in which only the surface layer of a suitable steel object is heated by flame to above A_{c_3} or $A_{c_{cm}}$, and then the object is **quenched**.

fog quenching, *n*—**quenching** in a mist.

full annealing, *n*—**annealing** a steel object by **austenitizing** it and then cooling it slowly through the **transformation range**.

DISCUSSION—The austenitizing temperature is usually above A_{c_3} for hypoeutectoid steels and between A_{c_1} and $A_{c_{cm}}$ for hypereutectoid steels.

grain growth, *n*—an increase in the grain size of a steel object, usually as a result of exposure to elevated temperatures.

grain size, *n*—the dimensions of the grains or crystals in a polycrystalline metal, exclusive of twinned regions and subgrains when present.

DISCUSSION—**Grain size** is usually estimated or measured on the cross section of an aggregate of grains, and designated by an ASTM grain size number. (See Test Methods E112.)

graphitization annealing, *n*—**annealing** a steel object in such a way that some or all of the carbon is precipitated as graphite.

hardenability, *n*—the property that determines the depth and distribution of hardness induced by **quenching** a steel object.

hardening, *n*—increasing the hardness by suitable treatment, usually involving heating and cooling.

DISCUSSION—Where applicable, it is preferred that the following more specific terms be used: **age hardening**, **case hardening**, **flame hardening**, **induction hardening**, **precipitation hardening**, and **quench hardening**.

heat, *n*—a generic term denoting a specific **lot of steel**, based upon steelmaking and casting considerations.

DISCUSSION—Where it is necessary to be more definitive, the following more specific terms are used: **primary heat**, **multiple heat**, and **remelted heat**. In product specifications, the term **heat** generally is used, without qualification, to mean the **primary**, **multiple**, or **remelted heat**, whichever is applicable.

heat analysis, *n*—the chemical analysis determined by the steel producer as being representative of a specific **heat of steel**.

DISCUSSION—Where the analysis reported by the steel producer is not sufficiently complete for conformance with the heat analysis requirements of the applicable product specification to be fully assessed, the **manufacturer** may complete the assessment of conformance with such heat analysis requirements by using a product analysis for the **specified**

elements that were not reported by the steel producer, provided that product analysis tolerances are not applied and the **heat analysis** is not altered.

heat number, *n*—the alpha, numeric, or alphanumeric designator used to identify a specific **heat of steel**.

heat treatment, *n*—heating and cooling a steel object in such a way as to obtain desired conditions or properties.

DISCUSSION—Heating for the sole purpose of hot working is excluded from the meaning of this definition.

high-strength low-alloy steel, *n*—a **steel**, other than a **carbon steel** or an **interstitial-free steel**, that conforms to a specification that requires the minimum content for each specified alloying element to be lower than the applicable limit in the definition for **alloy steel**, and the yield point or yield strength of the product to be at least 36 ksi or 250 MPa.

homogeneous carburizing, *n*—a process that converts a low-carbon steel to one of substantially uniform and higher carbon content throughout the section, so that a specific response to **hardening** may be obtained.

homogenizing, *n*—holding a steel object at high temperature to eliminate or decrease chemical segregation by diffusion.

hot-cold working, *n*—the mechanical deformation of austenitic and precipitation hardening steels at a temperature just below the **recrystallization temperature** to increase the yield strength and hardness by plastic deformation or precipitation hardening effects induced by plastic deformation, or both.

hot-finished, *n*—the condition of a product that has been cooled directly after the last **hot-working** operation, without **cold-working** (except for straightening or flattening), and independent of the temperature at which hot-working was completed.

DISCUSSION—The tolerances and surface finish of hot-finished product can be different from those of cold-finished, cold-drawn, or cold-rolled product.

hot quenching, *n*—an imprecise term used to cover a variety of quenching procedures in which the quenching medium is maintained at a prescribed temperature above 160 °F or 70 °C.

hot working, *n*—mechanical deformation of a metal at temperatures above its **recrystallization temperature**.

imperfection, *n*—a material discontinuity or irregularity that is detectable by **inspection**.

inclusion shape control, *n*—the addition of elements during steel making in order to affect the inclusion morphology.

induction hardening, *n*—*in surface hardening*, a process in which only the surface layer of a suitable steel object is heated by electrical induction to above A_{c_3} or $A_{c_{cm}}$, and then the object is **quenched**.

induction hardening, *n*—*in through hardening*, a process in which a suitable steel object is heated by electrical induction to above A_{c_3} or $A_{c_{cm}}$ throughout its section, and then the object is **quenched**.

induction heating, *n*—heating by electrical induction.

inspection, *n*—the process of measuring, examining, testing, gaging, or otherwise comparing the unit of product with the applicable requirements.

intermediate annealing, *n*—**annealing** wrought steel objects at one or more stages during manufacture prior to final thermal treatment.

interrupted aging, *n*—**aging** at two or more temperatures, by steps, and cooling to room temperature after each step.

interrupted quenching, *n*—**quenching** in which the object being quenched is removed from the quenching medium while the object is at a temperature substantially higher than that of the quenching medium.

interstitial-free steel, *n*—a **steel** that has essentially all of its carbon and nitrogen chemically combined with stabilization elements rather than being present interstitially.

DISCUSSION—The heat analysis limits (minimum or maximum, or both) that are permitted to be prescribed in interstitial-free steel specifications are as given in the definition for **carbon steel**, except that the 0.050 % maximum limit for titanium does not apply.

isothermal annealing, *n*—**austenitizing** a steel object and then cooling it to, and holding it at, a temperature at which austenite transforms to a ferrite-carbide aggregate.

isothermal transformation, *n*—a change in phase at any constant temperature.

killed steel, *n*—a **steel** deoxidized to such a level that essentially no reaction occurred between carbon and oxygen during solidification.

laser beam welding, *n*—a welding process that uses a laser beam as the heat source.

lot, *n*—a definite quantity of product manufactured under conditions that are considered uniform.

low-alloy steel, *n*—a **steel**, other than a **carbon steel** or an **interstitial-free steel**, that conforms to a specification that requires the minimum content for each specified alloying element to be lower than the applicable limit in the definition for **alloy steel**.

M_p , M_s —See **transformation temperature**.

manufacturer, *n*—the organization responsible for the conversion of materials into products meeting the requirements of a product specification.

maraging, *n*—a precipitation hardening treatment applied to a special group of **alloy steels** to precipitate one or more intermetallic compounds in a matrix of essentially carbon-free martensite.

martempering, *n*—**quenching** an austenitized steel object in a medium at a temperature in the upper part of, or slightly above, the **martensite range**, holding it in the medium until its temperature is substantially uniform throughout, and then cooling it in air through the **martensite range**.

martensite range, *n*—the temperature interval between M_s and M_f .

microalloyed steel, *n*—a **low-alloy steel** that conforms to a specification that requires the presence of one or more carbide-, nitride-, or carbonitride-forming elements, generally in individual concentrations less than 0.15 mass percent, to enhance strength.

DISCUSSION—The most common microalloying elements are niobium (columbium), titanium, and vanadium.

multiple heat, *n*—two or more molten **primary heats**, in whole or in part, combined in a common ladle or in a common non-oscillating mold.

DISCUSSION—A **multiple heat** is identified by a single **heat number** representative of the **multiple heat**, or by the individual **heat numbers** of the **primary heats** contained in the **multiple heat**. The **heat analysis** of a **multiple heat** identified by a single **heat number** is the weighted average analysis of the individual **primary heats** contained in the **multiple heat**. Two or more molten **primary heats** sequentially strand cast (poured into an oscillating mold) constitute a series of individual **heats**, not a **multiple heat**.

natural aging, *n*—spontaneous aging of a super-saturated solid solution at room temperature.

nickel alloy, *n*—a material that conforms to a specification that requires by mass percent more nickel than any other element.

DISCUSSION—In castings, the nickel content requirement is not normally stated in the specification and is not normally determined by chemical analysis, but is taken to be 100 % minus the sum of the mean values permitted by the specification for all other elements having a specified range or a specified maximum.

nitriding, *n*—introducing nitrogen into a solid steel object by holding it at a suitable temperature in contact with a nitrogenous environment.

nonferrous material, *n*—metals and alloys that do not contain iron as the principal component.

DISCUSSION—The iron content is not always stated in the specification and is not always determined by chemical analysis. The iron content may be taken to be 100 % minus the sum of the mean values permitted by the specification for all other elements having a specified range or a specified maximum. For conformance purposes, the mean value for iron, whether specified or calculated, is compared on an individual basis to the mean values permitted by the specification for each of the other elements having a specified range or a specified maximum. If an element other than iron is not specified, but is listed as remainder or balance, then, for conformance purposes, the mean value for iron is compared to the calculated value for that other element.

normalizing, *v*—reheating a steel object to a temperature above the **transformation range** and then cooling it in air to a temperature substantially below the transformation range to achieve both grain refinement and improved homogenization.

overaging, *n*—**aging** under conditions of time and temperature greater than those required to obtain maximum change in a certain property, so that the property is altered away from the maximum.

overheating, *n*—heating a steel object to such a high temperature that excessive grain growth occurs.