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Standard Practice for Specifying and Verifying the Performance of Color-Measuring Instruments¹

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INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in optics, electronics, and documentary ~~standards~~ standards have resulted in a proliferation of instruments for the measurement of color and appearance of materials and objects. These instruments possess very good performance but there has been little progress toward standardizing the terminology and procedures to quantify that performance. Therefore, the commercial literature and even some documentary standards are a mass of confusing terms, numbers and specifications that are impossible to compare or interpret.

Two recent papers in the ~~literature~~ literature have proposed terms and procedures to standardize the specification, comparison and verification of the level of performance of a color-measuring instrument.^{2,3} Following those procedures, those specifications can be compared to product tolerances. This becomes important so that instrument users and instrument makers can agree on how to compare or verify, or both, that their instruments are performing in the field as they were designed and tested in the factory.

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice ~~provides~~ covers standard terms and procedures for describing and characterizing the performance of spectral and filter based instruments designed to measure and compute the colorimetric properties of materials and objects. It does not set the specifications but rather gives the format and process by which specifications can be determined, communicated and verified.

1.2 This practice does not describe methods that are generally applicable to visible-range spectroscopic instruments used for analytical chemistry (UV-VIS spectrophotometers). ASTM Committee E13 on Molecular Spectroscopy and Chromatography includes such procedures in standards under their jurisdiction.

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.4 *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.*

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E12 on Color and Appearance and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E12.04 on Color and Appearance Analysis.

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² Ladson, J., "Colorimetric Data Comparison of Bench-Top and Portable Instruments," *AIC Interim Meeting, Colorimetry*, Berlin, 1995.

³ Rich, D., "Standardized Terminology and Procedures for Specifying and Verifying the Performance of Spectrocolorimeters," *AIC Color 97 Kyoto*, Kyoto, 1997.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:⁴

[D2244 Practice for Calculation of Color Tolerances and Color Differences from Instrumentally Measured Color Coordinates](#)

[E284 Terminology of Appearance](#)

[E1164 Practice for Obtaining Spectrometric Data for Object-Color Evaluation](#)

2.2 Other Documents:

[ISO VIM International Vocabulary of Basic and General Terms in Metrology \(VIM\)⁵](#)

[NIST Technical Note 1297 Guidelines for Evaluating and Expressing the Uncertainty of NIST Measurement Results⁶](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions of appearance terms in Terminology [E284](#) are applicable to this practice.

3.2 Definitions of metrology terms in ISO, International Vocabulary of Basic and General Terms in Metrology (VIM) are applicable to this practice.

3.3 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.3.1 *colorimetric spectrometer, n*—spectrometer, one component of which is a dispersive element (such as a prism, grating or interference filter or wedge or tunable or discrete series of monochromatic sources), that is normally capable of producing as output colorimetric data (such as tristimulus values and derived color coordinates or indices of appearance attributes) as well as the underlying spectral data from which the colorimetric data are derived.

3.3.2 *inter-instrument agreement, n*—the closeness of agreement between the results of measurements in which two or more instruments from the same manufacturer and model are compared.

3.3.3 *inter-model agreement, n*—the closeness of agreement between the results of measurements in which two or more instruments from different manufacturers, or of different but equivalent design, are compared.

3.3.3.1 Discussion—

Modern instruments have such high precision that small differences in geometric and spectral design can result in significant differences in the performance of two instruments. This can occur even though both instruments exhibit design and performance bias which are well within the expected combined uncertainty of the instrument and within the requirements of any international standard.

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 This practice defines standardized terms for the most common instrument measurement performance parameters (repeatability, reproducibility, inter-instrument agreement, inter-model instrument agreement, accuracy) and describes a set of measurements and artifacts, with which both the producers and users of color-measuring instruments verify or certify the specification and performance of color-measuring instruments. Following this practice can improve communications between instrument manufacturers and instrument users and between suppliers and purchasers of colored materials.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 In today's commerce, instrument makers and instrument users must deal with a large array of bench-top and portable color-measuring instruments, many with different geometric and spectral characteristics. At the same time, manufacturers of colored goods are adopting quality management systems that require periodic verification of the performance of the instruments that are critical to the quality of the final product. The technology involved in optics and electro-optics has progressed greatly over the last decade. The result has been a generation of instruments that are both more affordable and higher in performance. What had been a tool for the research laboratory is now available to the retail point of sale, to manufacturing, to design, and to corporate communications. New documentary standards have been published that encourage the use of colorimeters, spectrophotometers,

⁴ 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.

⁵ ISO/IDE/OIML/BIPM, *International Vocabulary of Basic and General Terms in Metrology*, International Organization for Standardization, Geneva, Switzerland, 1984.

⁶ Taylor, Barry N., and Kuyatt, Chris E., *Guidelines for Evaluating and Expressing the Uncertainty of NIST Measurement Results*, NIST Technical Note 1297, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1984.

and colorimetric spectrometers in applications previously dominated by visual expertise or by filter densitometers.⁷ Therefore, it is necessary to determine if an instrument is suitable to the application and to verify that an instrument or instruments are working within the required operating parameters.

5.2 This practice provides descriptions of some common instrumental parameters that relate to the way an instrument will contribute to the quality and consistency of the production of colored goods. It also describes some of the material standards required to assess the performance of a color-measuring instrument and suggests some tests and test reports to aid in verifying the performance of the instrument relative to its intended application.

6. Instrument Performance Parameters

6.1 *Repeatability* is generally the most important specification in a color-measuring instrument. Colorimetry is primarily a relative or differential measurement, not an absolute measurement. In colorimetry, there is always a standard and a trial specimen. The standard may be a real physical specimen or it may be a set of theoretical target values. The trial is usually similar to the standard in both appearance and spectral nature. Thus, industrial colorimetry is generally a test of how well the instrument repeats its readings of the same or nearly the same specimen over a period of minutes, hours, days, and weeks.

6.1.1 The ISO VIM defines repeatability as a measure of the random error of a reading and assumes that the sample standard deviation is an estimate of repeatability. Repeatability is further defined as the standard deviation of a set of measurements taken over a specified time period by a single operator, on a single instrument with a single specimen. This definition is similar to that in Terminology E284, except that the ISO explicitly defines the metric of “closeness of agreement” as the sample standard deviation. Since color is a multidimensional property of a material, repeatability should be reported in terms of the multidimensional ~~variance-covariance~~variance-covariance matrix, or in terms of the 95 % confidence interval of its combinatorial color difference for a single specimen. See 6.6.

6.1.2 The time period over which the readings are collected must be specified and is often qualitatively described as “short,” “medium,” or “long.” The definitions of these time frames do not overlap. This is intentional, providing clearly defined milestones in the temporal stability of test results.

6.1.2.1 For the purposes of colorimetry, “short” is normally the time required to collect a set of 30 readings, taken as fast as the instrument will allow. The actual time will vary as a function of lamp and power supply characteristics but should be less than one hour.

6.1.2.2 “Medium” term is normally defined as ~~as~~ at least the period of one work shift (~~8 h~~)(8 h) but less than three work shifts (one day).

6.1.2.3 “Long” term is open ended but is often described as any set readings taken over a period of at least 4 to 8 weeks. The longest known reported study described readings taken over a period of 3¼ years.⁸

6.2 *Reproducibility* is the second most important specification in a color-measuring instrument. According to Terminology E284, reproducibility is the closeness of agreement of the results of measurements in which one or more of the measurement parameters have been systematically changed. Thus the sample is different, the procedures or instrument are different, or the time frame is very long. The increase of disorder over a very long time changes the instrument systematically and the set of readings really compares a “young” instrument with an “old” instrument.

6.2.1 The ISO VIM defines reproducibility as the closeness of agreement of the results of measurements in which either the time frame is very long, in which the operator changes, the instrument changes, or the measurement conditions change. ISO again recommends estimating this with a standard deviation. Reproducibility is further defined as the standard deviation of a set of measurements taken over a specified period of time by a single ~~operator~~operator on a single instrument with a single specimen. This definition is similar to that in Terminology E284, except that the ISO again, explicitly defines the metric of “closeness of agreement” as the sample standard deviation. Again, since color is a multidimensional property of a material, reproducibility should be reported in terms of the multidimensional ~~variance-covariance~~variance-covariance matrix.

⁷ ISO 13655 Spectral Measurement and Colorimetric Computation for Graphic Arts Images, International Organization for Standardization, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁸ Rich, D. C., Battle, D., Malkin, F., Williamson, C., Ingleson, A., “Evaluation of the Long-Term Repeatability of Reflectance Spectrophotometers,” *Spectrophotometry, Luminescence and Colour: Science and Compliance*, C. Burgess and D. G. Jones, eds., Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1995.

6.2.2 The time period over which the readings are collected must be specified. Repeatability and reproducibility have traditionally been evaluated in colorimetry by comparing the color differences of a set of readings to a single reading or to the average of the set of readings.

6.3 *Inter-Instrument Agreement*, as defined in 3.3.2, describes the reproducibility between two or more ~~instruments~~instruments of identical design. The ISO has no definition or description of such a concept. This is because in most test results, a method or instrument dependent bias can be assessed. In this situation, such a test measures the consistency of the design and manufacturing process. Within the technical description of the standard geometric and spectral parameters for the measurement of diffuse reflectance factor and color, a significant amount of latitude exists. This latitude results in a random amount of bias. For a given design, a manufacturer may reduce the random bias, often to a level less than the stability of reference materials. The most common form of test for inter-model instrument agreement is pairwise color difference assessment of a series of specimens. Various parameters are reported in the literature including the average color difference, the maximum color difference, the typical color difference, the RMS color difference, or the MCDM mean color difference from the mean, taking the average of all instruments as the standard and the other as the test instrument. Using pairs of instruments and materials one can derive a multivariate confidence interval against the value 0.0 difference and then test individual components to determine which ~~attribute~~attributes (lightness, chroma, hue) are the significant contributors to the differences between instruments. If a group of instruments ~~are~~is being tested then a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) can be performed to test the agreement of the means of the instrument.

6.4 *Inter-Model Agreement*, as defined in 3.3.3, describes the reproducibility between two or more instruments of differing design. The latitude within the standard geometric and spectral parameters described in the preceding paragraph is at a maximum when the designs differ. The systematic bias may increase by factors of from 5 to 10 because of the increased latitude. Standardizing laboratories will report either the algebraic differences between measurement results or the ratio of the measurement values between two labs. The former will be a normal statistical variable if the measurement values are normally distributed, and the latter will be distributed as a ratio of normally distributed variables. This distribution can be estimated from the multivariate ~~variance-covariance~~variance-covariance matrix. Using pairs of instruments and materials, one can derive a multivariate confidence interval against the value 0.0 difference and then test individual components to determine which ~~attribute~~attributes (lightness, chroma, hue) are the significant contributors to the differences between instruments. If a group of instruments ~~are~~is being tested then a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) can be performed to test the agreement of the means of the instrument.

6.5 *Accuracy*, while occasionally critical, is generally the least significant parameter in characterizing the performance of a color-measuring instrument. ISO defines accuracy as the conformance of a series of readings to the accepted or true value. In modern colorimetry, the volume of the total combined uncertainty around the accepted value is often many times larger than volume of visual acceptability of the products whose color is being quantified. Therefore, an “accurate” color measurement may result in an unacceptable product color. There are two scales in a spectrophotometer that can be assigned nominal values and tested against standard values. They are the radiometric scale and the wavelength scale.

6.5.1 The wavelength scale includes the sampling position (centroid wavelength) and the sampling window width (spectral bandwidth). These parameters are normally tested against physical standards of wavelength based on fundamental phenomena, such as discharge lamps or laser lines. In very abridged instruments it may not be possible to test directly against such a physical standard, so either material standards are used, such as holmium oxide or didymium oxide glasses or pairs of sharp-cutting filter glasses, or a scanning monochromator are characterized against physical standards. In the case of the monochromator, the output intensity is equalized and scanned across the input to the abridged spectrometer to resolve the location of the wavelength centroid at each sampling point in the abridged spectrum.

6.5.2 Radiometric scale accuracy is more difficult to evaluate since it involves three aspects: the zero level, white level, and the linearity between the two levels. White level can be tested by direct comparison to a primary standard of reflectance or transmittance and the result reported as \pm the expanded uncertainty at a stated confidence level, as described in NIST Technical Note 1297. The expanded uncertainty is the combined uncertainty of the white plaque and the instrument under test combined in quadrature at the 95 % confidence level and multiplied by the appropriate coverage factor. The exact methods for propagating the uncertainty in a reflectance factor measurement into the color coordinates is still a matter of some dispute. Methods have been proposed in the literature but are not widely accepted and used.⁹

6.5.3 The black level only needs to be tested to show that the optical zero is less than some minimum value, since it is impossible

⁹ Fairchild, M. D., and Reniff, L., “Propagation of Random Errors in Spectrophotometric Colorimetry,” *Color Research & Application*, Vol. 16, 1991, p. 360.

to define the optical zero except in terms of the noise floor of the spectrometer or colorimeter. The results of measurements of near black materials (black glass of known refractive index or a suitably designed black trap) shall show results that are less than some upper limit. For example, the zero level $\leq 0.025\%$.

6.5.4 Finally, linearity must be specified in a testable way. If the spectrometer is linear then at any wavelength, plots of the measured values versus the standard values of a set of neutral samples should lie on a line passing through the origin with a slope of 1.0. Unfortunately, it is possible to fit a line by least squares to a higher order function (having some errors positive and some negative) and obtain a slope of 1.0. Estimating the slope of the line passing through all points will not identify that kind of non-linearity. To avoid this, standardizing laboratories and some analytical instruments use the addition-of-radiance method, either with two sources or with a double aperture apparatus to generate a signal and a $2\times$ signal into the spectrometer that can be adjusted to cover the radiometric range of the spectrometer. Since commercial colorimeters are not easily configured with such devices, the use of neutral plaques or neutral filters is the best compromise.

6.6 *The 95 % Confidence Interval of a Combinatorial Color Difference*—Make at least 20, and preferably as many as 30, individual measurements of the reflectance spectra of a single specimen with replacement. With replacement, the operator removes and replaces the specimen in the sampling aperture of the instrument, attempting to replace the specimen in the same position as the previous measurement to the best of his ability. Choose a specimen to be representative of materials being assessed, or carry out the entire process on multiple specimens separately to accomplish that aim. Retain the spectra in a list.

6.6.1 Obtain the color differences of this set of measurements by differencing the first measurement with the second through the last measurement. Then repeat this step by differencing the second measurement with the third through the last measurement. Continue this process until the next-to-last measurement is differenced with the last measurement. This will obtain a list of $n(n-1)/2$ differences where n is the number of measurements in the original set. Calculate these color differences with a color difference equation chosen from Practice [D2244](#), and state the equation used in the report.

6.6.2 Sort this list of differences in ascending order. The member of the sorted list whose index is $\text{Int}[0.95 * n * (n - 1) / 2]$ contains the value of the 95 % confidence interval of the combinatorial color difference. The symbol *Int* means the integer value of the expression in the square brackets.

7. Procedures

7.1 Repeatability shall be measured by placing a white plaque at the measurement port of a recently standardized instrument and making replicate readings of the plaque without moving the plaque. For short-term repeatability, at least 30 readings shall be collected as fast as the instrument allows. The quantity of reading (30 or more) depends upon the desired level of confidence in the results and the time required to acquire that number of readings. For very slow instruments, the costs of performing even 30 measurements may be very high, in those cases a lower number of readings may be adequate if the variance-covariance is adequately characterized. For medium term repeatability, at least 60 readings shall be collected, uniformly spread out over an 8-h period, with at least 60 s between readings. Use of a white plaque is recommended because the radiometric random noise is generally highest near the upper end of the scale of diffuse reflectance. A noise level of a few hundredths of a percent is expected at a 90 % reflectance while the noise level may be a few thousandths of a percent at 4 % reflectance. Spectrally selective (colored) standards are not recommended as they tend to confound the radiometric noise with temperature and mechanical sensitivity in a way that is not representative of the general performance of the instrument. Often, a light gray plaque may be substituted for the white plaque when an instrument is never used to measure very light or white specimens as the gray level may result in values for repeatability that are more representative of typical materials. Measurements of medium, dark, or black specimens will not generally add any useful information since the radiometric noise level tends to be proportional to the signal and the noise will be lost inside the resolution limit of the spectrometer.

7.1.1 The basic measurement values of a colorimetric spectrometer are the set of reflectance factors and those of a filter colorimeter are the tristimulus values. Those variables are the most closely related to a normal statistical random variable. The reported repeatability shall be either twice the univariate standard deviation of at least three, widely separated reflectance factors, $\Delta R_\lambda(2\sigma)$, ($\lambda=440\text{ nm}, 560\text{ nm}, 660\text{ nm}$) that are returned from the instrument, or if the reflectance factors are not available, then twice the univariate standard deviation of the individual tristimulus values $\{\Delta X(2\sigma), \Delta Y(2\sigma), \Delta Z(2\sigma)\}$. Since the variance (standard deviation) of closely spaced spectral reflectance factors or tristimulus values are generally, not independent, it will be necessary to report the multivariate variance-covariance matrix instead of the square root of the variance for each measurement point. If the set of univariate standard deviations (multiple reflectance factors or multiple tristimulus values) must be reduced to a single dimension, then it is recommended that a weighted standard deviation be reported, the weight being proportional to the sum of the standard observer functions [$\text{weight}=(\bar{x}, \bar{y}, \bar{z})$] or the variances of the tristimulus values themselves ($\sigma_x^2 + \sigma_y^2 + \sigma_z^2$).

7.1.1.1 If an estimate of expected color difference is desired, then it can be reported using the multivariate variance-covariance matrix which will be a ~~three-dimensional~~ three-dimensional ellipsoid for tristimulus data or color coordinate data. [Annex A1](#) shows the steps required to compute the precision of color differences or the significance of a mean color difference.

7.1.1.2 It is also acceptable to report the repeatability in ranges. For example, one value for wavelengths less than 460 nm, a second value for wavelengths between ~~460 nm and 640 nm~~ 460 nm and 640 nm and a third value for wavelengths greater than ~~640 nm, 640 nm,~~ using the appropriate number of wavelengths in the computation of the multivariate confidence volume.

7.2 Reproducibility shall be measured by collecting readings on a set of at least 10 material standards, including both neutral and chromatic samples. It is important to standardize the instrument before each measurement series. Long term repeatability involves daily measurement of the standard for a period of at least 30 days.

NOTE 1—This shall be 30 measurement days, not 30 calendar days.

7.2.1 Reproducibility shall be reported as either two times the univariate standard deviation of the 30 readings of the reflectance factor $\Delta R_i(2\sigma)$ at the same three wavelengths or as twice the univariate standard deviation of the tristimulus values $\{\Delta X(2\sigma), \Delta Y(2\sigma), \Delta Z(2\sigma)\}$. However, keep in mind that ΔX , ΔY and ΔZ are generally correlated and not independently distributed. Again, to compensate for correlation between tristimulus values or to provide statistics based on uniform color spaces, the reproducibility shall be computed and reported as described in [Annex A1](#).

7.3 Accuracy has to be independently tested on each of the two scales, wavelength and radiometric. The wavelength scale has the advantage that there are physical standards of wavelength that can be utilized by some colorimetric spectrometers. Procedures for verifying the wavelength scale, bandwidth and radiometric scale are described in Practice [E1164](#). Specific additional procedures are given here.

7.3.1 The wavelength scale includes the sampling position (centroid wavelength) and the sampling window width (bandwidth). These are normally tested against physical standards of wavelength such as a discharge lamp or laser line. In very abridged instruments it may not be possible to test directly against a physical standard, so one of two options may be exercised. In option 1, a material standard is used, such as holmium oxide or didymium oxide glasses. In option 2, a modern, digital, direct scanning monochromator is characterized against physical sources and the output intensity is equalized and scanned across the input to the abridged spectrometer.

7.3.2 It is recommended that for sampling frequencies of fewer than 16 points across the visible region (~~400 nm to 700 nm~~) (400 nm to 700 nm) the wavelength accuracy and bandwidth or filter fit, be tested and reported at each sampling point. Small numbers of spectral samples are usually more independent and have wider spectral windows making each sample point more critical. For sampling frequencies of 16 or more points it is recommended to report the wavelength scale conformance and bandwidth at three specific wavelengths (450 nm \pm 0.x nm, 550 nm \pm 0.x ~~nm,~~ nm, 650 nm \pm 0.x nm) with bandwidths of ($bw \pm 0.x$ nm). Here the tolerances are twice the sample standard deviation for at least 10 replicate determinations of the wavelength scale. If there is a significant bias in the scale position, then that shall be reported as well.

7.3.2.1 As indicated in [6.5.2](#), the radiometric scale accuracy is more difficult to assess. White level must be tested by direct comparison to a primary standard of reflectance or transmittance obtained from a suitable standardizing laboratory. The result shall be reported along with the expanded uncertainty, as described in [6.5.2](#).

7.3.2.2 The results of the measurements of the white level can be reported as $100 \% \pm U \%$. Using white ceramic plaques with luminous reflectance factors (Y) of 85 or greater, the 100 % level expanded uncertainty will be in the range of $\pm 0.3 \%$ or the uncertainty of the primary standard, whichever is larger. NPL currently cites uncertainties of $\pm 0.5 \%$ (2σ) and NIST cites uncertainties of $\pm 0.3 \%$ (2σ) on white primary standards of reflectance.

7.3.2.3 As indicated in [6.5.3](#), the black level needs only to be tested to the extent to show that the optical zero is less than some value. The results of measurements of a near black material or a black trap shall be less than 0.0005 (that is, 0.05 %).