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**Information and documentation —  
Foundation and vocabulary**

*Information et documentation — Fondations et vocabulaire*

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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html)

The committee responsible for this document is ISO/TC 46, *Information and documentation*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 5127:2001), which has been technically revised.

ISO 5127 was previously published as a series of parts (from 1981).

## 0 Introduction

### 0.1 General

This document presents terms and definitions for selected concepts relevant to the field of information and documentation. It includes a good deal of foundational terms and definitions, also from international guidelines and reference works by organizations in liaison with ISO/TC 46. Thus, it serves as a sound basis in the understanding of existing as well as possibly projected information and documentation systems by systematically presenting well-established terminology. It is, thus, also intended as a tool to help in new developments to come, by underpinning scientific research projects and helping to organize them, through mutual understanding of some of the foundations. And this document is likewise intended as a handy, quick and comprehensive reference tool also for the newly inaugurated to the field. Proper attention has therefore been paid to a clear, easy to follow structure of the document. In its function as a handbook, this document may also be regarded as a legitimate and improved successor of well-known reference works like, e.g. the widely disseminated UNESCO “Terminology of documentation” of 1976 and others (see Bibliography).

This document has 13 main classes. It aims to provide a logical structure in the field of information and documentation.

The closer coalescence of the diverse professions Archives, Libraries, Museums, Printing and IT, within documentation, in some parts rests on digitization as the basis of this process. This has also led, to some degree, to the reformulation of documentation and its processes in terms of IT-driven concepts and models. Working with digital objects and systems has by no means diminished the importance of terminology and terminological precision for and in the subject field. On the contrary, this importance is underlined even more since the concepts and terms representing the objects need to be even more precise when, possibly, far-reaching automatic processing of data takes place. In any case, it is vital to keep conceptual conformance between the documentation terminology and the IT terminology in this subject field and to strive for the matching of terms and concepts so that an integrated, overall system of documentation and its applications remains visible.

### 0.2 Main contents of this document

This document provides a well-balanced selection of both abstract and concrete concepts (and their terms). Documentation and work in the documentation field today are increasingly characterized by the standard use of abstract models of the information field and of the communication flows in it, also for the design and optimization of information systems. This type of work requires, substantially refers to, and rests upon the structuring and exploration of the field by abstract reasoning and models, incorporated in the respective abstract concepts. This document satisfies the need for such abstract concepts, but also the equally required provision of a large number of concrete concepts (and terms) for concrete objects, documents and processes. ISO 5127, in its balanced approach, thus covers main components that constitute the information field:

- abstract general concepts for the nature of information, of systems building, of identifying concept systems, and of the basic communication features of language (thus also keeping the bridge to information science, and to other sciences relevant for documentation);
- a basic stock of vocabulary required and demanded to understand, analyse, and apply main documentation *operations* (to represent concept systems, for indexing, cataloguing, classifying);
- the required consideration of the storage and *preservation* of documents and of documentation results, and some *legal aspects* of documentation;

- a basic stock of vocabulary required and demanded to understand, analyse, and work with the *institutions* in the field;
- and, in particular, a basic stock of vocabulary required and demanded to understand, analyse, and work with the main “raw material” basis of documentation, the large variety of *documents* and components of documents. Vocabulary is provided for the general types of documents and their main subdivisions, and a number of concepts and their terms for particular special kinds of documents which are highly relevant but not always encountered in daily mass practice. Notably, some needs of special collections are addressed here, too. Both documents that are the result of, or considerably assist in, documentation are in focus, and a number of documents and their parts whose terminology is needed because these documents constitute important main objects for making societal documentation and information processes work.

This particular attention to “documents” and their parts concerns old and new ones: both those that are, and need to be, subject to documentation processes as well as those which are the result of such processes or serve as guidance in this work.

### 0.3 Functions of this document

The present-day situation of documentation and its field is also largely characterized by closer cooperation and sometimes merging of its individual professional areas and professions like librarianship, archivistics, text documentation, editing, media documentation, printing, publishing, sound and visual documents, broadcasting, museology, document conservation and more. ISO 5127 is intended to serve as a tool for the representation, and mutual understanding, of the specific terminology in the documentation field and at the same time for the closer cooperation of its different professional branches, while at the same time respecting the organizational autonomy, traditions and specific work procedures and related terminology of and between them.

As a terminology standard, among the main functions it serves are the following:

- to be a quick one-stop shop, a reference pool showing a comprehensive overview of the entirety of the terminology (terms) and its individual pieces in the field, also for ISO/TC 46 and its field of work;
- to provide an interrelated conceptual overview, based on the underlying elaborate concept system, of the field of information and documentation as a whole, thus creating a summary of main terminology of the field, for the use of ISO/TC 46, related Committees and the entire information community;
- to facilitate international communication both between countries and within international organizations, on all matters within the scope of this document; and so, at the same time (both national and international) between the individual professions and disciplines involved in the documentation field;
- to be at hand as a reference tool for questions as to individual items in the field and for ensuring the correct understanding of individual terms as they may be used in different places;
- to act, as a nucleus of validated terminology, as a reference point and for the establishing of national language versions (translations) of this terminology; so it would assist both in the exact understanding/interpretation of certain technical terms and in their translation and exchange between different languages;
- to provide, as much as is in its scope, solid foundational assistance in the *teaching* of “documentation”;

- to serve as a stock of precisely defined items (concepts) that are at hand when *data elements* for all sorts of information and documentation data exchange systems and networks are to be defined, agreed and machine-implemented;
- to serve as a vocabulary pool for *indexing, abstracting and cataloguing* services covering, and active in, the field of documentation;
- to serve as the source and starting point for creating *metadata*, also keeping in mind the developments of linked data;
- to provide a pool, as a starting and reference point, for further and proper *formalization* of concepts into directly applicable IT-conforming entities;
- to as well provide necessary material for future establishing of *ontologies* of parts of the documentation field or of the whole field, for more elaborate operation of automated IT processes;
- to maintain the connection to all *classification* systems that undertake, for any purpose, to classify and to order the field of documentation; through its own richly cross-referenced structure, to serve as a first collection for the possible building of one or more *thesauri* of the field;
- to assist further study and *scientific exploration* of the field, and the sciences, of information and documentation.

In its approach to related concepts and their definitions through generic relations, and to, in a number of instances, connect entries through “See references” in the “Notes to entry”, ISO 5127 presents a slight look and feel in the direction of paving the way for a thesaurus application.

### 0.4 A coherent terminology

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In view of the now widespread formation and application of terminology of and for documentation, the coherent terminology offered in ISO 5127 also provides, to the degree required, information on the relation of some terms and concepts from this document to those in other ISO standards to maintain this information and the relation mentioned, for the benefit of the users of ISO 5127. In partially fulfilling the function of a general overview, net and vocabulary on which the individual standards in ISO/TC 46 are built, this document may also serve as far as possible, when drafting ISO/TC 46 or other standards, as a source of good and workable definitions. When such ISO 5127 definitions need to be tailored to specific further-reaching applications in individual Committees' definitions, this can be done using “Notes to entry”, adaptations and similar means.

As the terminology standard of ISO/TC 46, in addition to providing the basic concept system, ISO 5127 offers a collection of terminology as laid down in various ISO/TC 46 and other ISO standards. Notwithstanding that, ISO 5127 is, and persists as, a solid corpus of terminology in its own right, being not just a mere compilation but a proper, interrelated system. As a proper terminology standard (following the rules from ISO/TC 37), it is built on an underlying concept system, aims at well-balanced coverage of the whole field, is arranged in all its Clauses from the general to the specific and in keeping adjacent, neighbouring, or antonymic terms always close to each other. ISO 5127 also respects the rule of definitions as short, generic expressions of a concept, the rule to avoid circular definitions, and of defining concepts whenever possible by referring to their broader concept. Finally, a terminology standard is more than a dictionary, not least because it does not show the sometimes several meanings of a term under just one entry word but separates different meanings (concepts) of a word into different (separate) entries. In real-life practice, terms representing the concepts of a subject field like “documentation” are, of course, often also used metaphorically; while this is, of course, possible any such use lies outside the scope of this document.



## 0.5 Organization of entries

The entries in this document are organized according to ISO 10241-2. They are comprised of the entry number and preferred term, identified synonyms, the definition and the source of the definition. In some cases the definition is complemented by examples and “Notes to entry” for better explanation of the term and its relationship with correlative terms in other domains. The selection of terms and the wording of definitions follow the rules established in ISO 704. Terms, definitions, examples and notes are provided using British spelling. The terms may, of course, occasionally be used with other spellings, obtained e.g. from an authoritative dictionary, in accordance with ISO Directives Part 2, 6.6.2. EXAMPLE: “information center” instead of “information centre”.

As a convention, “or” in this document is generally to be understood as “and/or”. If a definition in ISO 5127 is taken from other standards, the priority of selection generally is: ISO/TC 46 technical standards, then technical standards in other relevant fields within ISO, and then other terminology-related standards.

The source citations in this document are provided for traceability and to support interoperability with other International Standards. Variations of definitions from the sources have “modified” written in the “SOURCE” indication below the definition. Individual terms and their definitions from all ISO standards can at any time be searched and verified as to their current use with the help of the ISO Online Browsing Platform (<https://www.iso.org/obp/>). Users of ISO 5127 are also encouraged to consult, whenever appropriate, the terminology standards from ISO/TC 46 neighbouring TCs, such as ISO/IEC 2382, which is now mainly accessible only online.

A further revised and augmented edition of ISO 5127 is planned for the near future.

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# Information and documentation — Foundation and vocabulary

## 1 Scope

This document provides a concept system and general vocabulary for the field of documentation within the whole information field. It has been created with a balanced representation of major work areas in mind: documentation, libraries, archives, media, museums, records management, conservation as well as legal aspects of documentation. The scope of the vocabulary provided in this document corresponds to that of ISO/TC 46: standardization of practices relating to libraries, documentation and information centres, publishing, archives, records management, museum documentation, indexing and abstracting services, and information science.

## 2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

### 3.1 Basic and framework concepts

#### 3.1.1 Basic concepts

##### 3.1.1.01

##### **object**

anything perceivable or conceivable

Note 1 to entry: *Objects* may be material (e.g. an engine, a sheet of paper, a diamond), immaterial (e.g. conversion ratio, a project plan) or imagined (e.g. a unicorn).

[SOURCE: ISO 1087-1:2000, definition 3.1.1]

Note 2 to entry: See also “*entity*” (3.1.13.27); and ISO/IEC 27000:2016, definition 2.55.

##### 3.1.1.02

##### **concept**

unit of *knowledge* (3.1.1.17) created by a unique combination of *characteristics* (3.1.1.04)

Note 1 to entry: *Concepts* are not necessarily bound to particular languages. They are, however, influenced by the social or cultural background, which often leads to different categorizations.

[SOURCE: ISO 1087-1:2000, definition 3.2.10]

Note 2 to entry: *Concepts* represent *objects* (3.1.1.01).

Note 3 to entry: See also ISO 25964-1:2011, definition 2.11.

Note 4 to entry: See also “*class*” (3.8.5.03), “*conceptual object*” (3.1.1.61), “*mentefact*” (3.2.1.03).

### 3.1.1.03

#### **property**

distinguishing feature of a *material object* (3.1.1.60)

[SOURCE: <http://iso.i-term.dk/login.php>, modified]

Note 1 to entry: See also ISO 21127:2014, definition 3.14.

### 3.1.1.04

#### **characteristic**

abstraction of a *property* (3.1.1.03) of an *object* (3.1.1.01) or of a *set* (3.1.1.09) of objects

Note 1 to entry: Characteristics are used for describing *concepts* (3.1.1.02).

[SOURCE: ISO 1087-1:2000, definition 3.2.4]

### 3.1.1.05

#### **essential characteristic**

*characteristic* (3.1.1.04) which is indispensable to understanding and forming a *concept* (3.1.1.02)

### 3.1.1.06

#### **media format**

way an *information* (3.1.1.16) *object* (3.1.1.01) is presented

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EXAMPLE Length and differing conceptions of a TV show; printed document or an e-book; presentation of news by a single speaker or in a discussion panel; feature film; computer game.

Note 1 to entry: See also *data format* (3.1.13.12), *bibliographic format* (3.7.2.30).

### 3.1.1.07

#### **in situ**

of an *object* (3.1.1.01) being in its original *context* (3.1.2.05)

### 3.1.1.08

#### **ex situ**

of an *object* (3.1.1.01) taken away from its original *context* (3.1.2.05)

### 3.1.1.09

#### **set**

assembly of *objects* (3.1.1.01) or *concepts* (3.1.1.02) considered as a whole

Note 1 to entry: See also “*collection* (2)” < *gathering* > (3.6.1.05) and ISO 18461:2016, definition 2.5.34.

**3.1.1.10****element**

*object (3.1.1.01) constituting part of a set (3.1.1.09)*

Note 1 to entry: *elements* may be *concepts (3.1.1.02)*.

**3.1.1.11****string**

sequence of *elements (3.1.1.10)* of the same nature, such as *characters (3.1.4.02)*, considered as a whole

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC TR 9789:1994, definition 3.20]

**3.1.1.12****relationship**

relation

intellectual connection between two or more *elements (3.1.1.10)*

Note 1 to entry: Kinds of *relationships* include association, *generalization*, metarelationship, flow and several kinds grouped under 'dependency'.

Note 2 to entry: See also ISO 19103:2015, definition 4.30, and for relationships in general ISO 25964-1:2011 and ISO 704:2009.

**3.1.1.13****system**

combination of interacting *elements (3.1.1.10)* organized to achieve one or more stated purposes

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015, definition 4.1.46]

Note 1 to entry: See also IEC 81346-1:2009, definition 3.2; ISO 10209:2012, definition 2.82; ISO/TS 27790:2009, definition 3.72.

**3.1.1.14****order**

mathematical *relationship (3.1.1.12)* among values

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 11404:2007, definition 3.38]

**3.1.1.15****data, pl**

reinterpretable representation of *information (3.1.1.16)* in a formalized manner suitable for *communication (3.1.8.04)*, interpretation, or processing

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 2382:2015(en), 2121272]

Note 1 to entry: *Data* are often understood as taking the form of a *set (3.1.1.09)* of values of qualitative or quantitative variables.

**3.1.1.16****information**

*data (3.1.1.15)* that are processed, organized and correlated to produce *meaning (3.1.8.03)*

[SOURCE: ISO 22320:2011, definition 3.9]

Note 1 to entry: *Information* concerns facts, *concepts*, *objects*, events, ideas, processes, etc. See also ISO 2382-16:1993, definition 16.01.03.

**3.1.1.17**

**knowledge**

maintained, processed, and interpreted *information* (3.1.1.16)

**3.1.1.18**

**itemized knowledge**

single item of *knowledge* (3.1.1.17)

**3.1.1.19**

**knowledge entirety**

universe of *knowledge*

entirety of all *knowledge* (3.1.1.17) which is known at a given time, or that which is pertaining to a given subject or *domain* (3.1.2.09) as a whole

**3.1.1.20**

**collective knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) which is shared by a larger group or by a society as a whole

**3.1.1.21**

**individual knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) present in, and disposable to, a given human individual

**3.1.1.22**

**subjective knowledge**

*individual knowledge* (3.1.1.21) held true by, and in some cases having *meaning* (3.1.8.03) only for, one or a few given human individuals and which may result exclusively from a subjective individual experience

**3.1.1.23**

**objective knowledge (1)**

<independent knowledge> *knowledge* (3.1.1.17) which can be traced also outside of, and, in cases of doubt, independent from, any single one specified individual human mind(s)

Note 1 to entry: See also *objective knowledge (2)* (3.1.1.24).

**3.1.1.24**

**objective knowledge (2)**

<verified knowledge> *knowledge* (3.1.1.17) which is based on empirical, methodologically assured experience or rational *reasoning* (3.1.1.35) and has passed, or passes, verification

Note 1 to entry: See also *objective knowledge (1)* (3.1.1.23).

**3.1.1.25**

**technical/scientific knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) which has emerged from, and is usually based upon, the application of particular defined methods which in a given social *context* (3.1.2.05) are considered as science or as leading to scientific results

**3.1.1.26****world knowledge**

commonsense knowledge

very basic items of *knowledge* (3.1.1.17), not necessarily always witting, from early on deeply inherent in living organisms as they act, learn about themselves and their surrounding and the resulting reactions

**3.1.1.27****empirical knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) gained through observation, including experiments and test series, of material phenomena, their interrelations, and their behaviour

**3.1.1.28****theoretical knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) gained through *reasoning* (3.1.1.35)

**3.1.1.29****traditional knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) traded by an enculturation process without necessarily being proven or justified with reasons

**3.1.1.30****explicit knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) laid down, and accessible, in *recorded* (3.1.8.26) form

Note 1 to entry: See also "*document*" (3.1.1.38).

**3.1.1.31****implicit knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) that is implied rather than expressly stated

**3.1.1.32****tacit knowledge**

*knowledge* (3.1.1.17) that is not codified and thus can only be transferred by personal contact between humans

**3.1.1.33****perception**

intake of sensory stimuli into a living organism which at the same time is often the starting point of a *mental representation* (2) <process> (3.1.1.42)

**3.1.1.34****imagination**

*mental representation* (1) <unit> (3.1.1.41) of an *object* (3.1.1.01) or of notions connected with a *word* (1) <orthographic word> (3.1.5.18)

**3.1.1.35****reasoning**

activity in the human mind, without the presence of *material objects* (3.1.1.60) always required, of analyzing, connecting, assessing, and possibly bringing into question of *mental representations* (1) <unit> (3.1.1.36)