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Technical communication — Vocabulary

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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 document 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).

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Suppliers of goods and services provide information for the use of their products, such as instructions, manuals, service information, information for assembly or troubleshooting information. Technical communication is the process of defining, creating and delivering these information products for the safe, effective and efficient use of supported products.

A standardized common terminology as provided in this document helps to prevent misunderstandings and disputes between acquirers and suppliers of information products as well as between manufacturers and customers. A standardized terminology for technical communication will support both acquirers and suppliers of information products. Organizations that provide information products can formulate more precise requirements, and providers can deliver information products according to specifications.

A standardized common terminology also helps to foster mutual understanding, both within the technical communication community and in contact with other relevant communities such as the language services industry. Furthermore, this document can be used as a basis for researching and teaching technical communication in various settings.

[Annex A](#) contains two concept models that illustrate the interrelations between some key concepts in technical communication.

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Technical communication — Vocabulary

1 Scope

This document defines terms for the theory and application of technical communication. It prepares the terminological background for all other standards in the field of technical communication by providing precise definitions and standardized terms for basic concepts in this domain.

This document is applicable to persons creating information products in the field of technical communication or using these information products professionally.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

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

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

3.1 Terms relating to core concepts

3.1.1

technical communication

DEPRECATED: technical writing

process of defining and creating *information for use* (3.1.2) to be delivered as *information products* (3.1.4) for the safe, effective and efficient use of a *supported product* (3.1.5) throughout its life cycle

Note 1 to entry: Technical communication includes all modes, such as *text* (3.7.1.2), image, *audio* (3.7.1.3) and all media, e.g. printed manuals, tutorial videos, *online help* (3.8.1.2).

Note 2 to entry: The term “technical writing” should not be used because it no longer reflects the variety of modes and media in current use.

Note 3 to entry: In some contexts, the term “technical communication” can refer to more general communicative acts concerning products, such as e-mail communication between engineers.

3.1.2

information for use

information identified and collected during the information development process

3.1.3

product

result of an action or process

Note 1 to entry: Products can be physical products, technical systems, software and services.

3.1.4

information product

product (3.1.3) consisting of *information for use* (3.1.2) that is delivered for the safe, effective and efficient use of a *supported product* (3.1.5)

Note 1 to entry: Information products can also be generated during runtime of a content delivery system.

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Note 2 to entry: Information products can contain *conceptual information* (3.4.2), *instructional information* (3.4.3) or *reference information* (3.4.4).

Note 3 to entry: Information products come in various forms, such as *manuals* (3.8.1.1) or *online help* (3.8.1.2).

3.1.5

supported product

product (3.1.3) to which an *information product* (3.1.4) relates

EXAMPLE

- industrial products (e.g. machinery, components, devices, equipment);
- consumer products (e.g. household appliances, audio-visual devices, communication devices, do-it-yourself products);
- medical devices, equipment and systems;
- complex systems of systems (e.g. industrial plants, refineries, production sites, data centres);
- means of transport (e.g. cars, trucks, ships, airplanes);
- application software (e.g. office software, web applications);
- software for operation and automatic control of systems;
- technical services.

Note 1 to entry: An *information product* (3.1.4) is an essential component of a supported product.

3.1.6

content

information in any form

EXAMPLE [Text](#) (3.7.1.2), [audio](#) (3.7.1.3), [video](#). [ISO/FDIS 24183 standards/sist/60a6df56-393e-46cd-ac7e-2a5f5e966587/iso-fdis-24183](#)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:—¹), 3.1.2]

3.1.7

technical documentation

set of *information products* (3.1.4) provided by the supplier of a *supported product* (3.1.5)

3.1.8

technical communicator

DEPRECATED: technical writer

person who develops *information for use* (3.1.2)

Note 1 to entry: The role of a technical communicator can include researching product information, defining target audience information needs, ensuring that legal and normative requirements are met, authoring *texts* (3.7.1.2), creating safety instructions and coordinating *translations* (3.6.3.1).

Note 2 to entry: The term “technical writer” should not be used because it no longer reflects the variety of modes and media in current use.

3.1.9

information structure

organization of *information for use* (3.1.2) in order to optimize presentation and understanding

3.1.10

structuring method

content organization according to semantic or functional criteria in order to ensure *consistency* (3.6.5.1.6) and interchangeability of information

1) Under preparation. Stage at the time of publication: ISO/FDIS 20539:2023.

3.1.11**style guide**

set of specifications designed to ensure *information quality* (3.6.5.1) and *information product quality* (3.6.5.2)

Note 1 to entry: Style guides should take into account information quality principles such as *completeness* (3.6.5.1.4) and *consistency* (3.6.5.1.6) as well as information product quality criteria such as *usability* (3.6.5.2.2) and *readability* (3.6.5.2.4).

3.1.12**single source publishing**

content management approach which allows the same source *content* (3.1.6) to be delivered across different forms of media and more than once

3.1.13**terminology**

set of designations and concepts belonging to one domain or subject

[SOURCE: ISO 1087:2019, 3.1.11]

3.1.14**terminology work**

work concerned with the systematic collection, description, processing and presentation of concepts and their designations

[SOURCE: ISO 1087:2019, 3.5.1, modified — admitted term “terminology management” and Notes 1 and 2 to entry have been removed.]

3.1.15**translatability**

ease of rendering *content* (3.1.6) from one language or culture to another

3.2 Terms relating to users**3.2.1****user**

person who interacts with a *supported product* (3.1.5)

Note 1 to entry: Users can be part of a specific *target audience* (3.2.2).

Note 2 to entry: “User” can include persons who install, operate, service, maintain or dispose of the product.

[SOURCE: IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2019, 3.47, modified — “a supported product” has been replaced by “the product” in the definition. A new Note 1 to entry has been added. The former Note 1 to entry has been renumbered as Note 2 to entry.]

3.2.2**target audience**

audience

group of persons for whom an *information product* (3.1.4) is intended

Note 1 to entry: A target audience can consist of specific *users* (3.2.1) or other persons.

[SOURCE: IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2019, 3.42, modified — “the information product” has been replaced by “information for use” and “by the supplier” has been deleted in the definition. The admitted term “audience” and Note 1 to entry have been added.]

3.2.3

skilled person

person with relevant technical education, training and/or experience

[SOURCE: IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2019, 3.36, modified — “person” has been replaced by “individual”, “and/or” has been replaced by “or” and “to enable perceiving risks and avoiding hazards occurring during use of a product” has been deleted in the definition.]

3.3 Terms related to product and information life cycles

3.3.1

put into service

prepare a system for its *intended use* ([3.6.4.1](#))

3.3.2

put out of service, verb

change a system from an operational status to a non-operational status

3.3.3

product life cycle

period of time from the first idea to the ultimate *disposal* ([3.3.4.10](#)) or *recycling* ([3.3.4.11](#)) of a *product* ([3.1.3](#))

Note 1 to entry: The product life cycle is divided into defined periods called phases in which activities that belong together are grouped, e.g. product concept, design, production. The beginning and end of phases require definite decisions.

[SOURCE: ISO 15226:1999, 3.7, modified — “or recycling” has been added in the definition. “(e.g. releases)” has been deleted.]

3.3.4

product life cycle phase

stage in the *product life cycle* ([3.3.3](#))

EXAMPLE Design, development, *storage* ([3.3.4.9](#)), transport, *installation* ([3.3.4.1](#)), *commissioning* ([3.3.4.2](#)), *operation* ([3.3.4.4](#)), troubleshooting, *maintenance* ([3.3.4.5](#)), *repair* ([3.3.4.6](#)), *decommissioning* ([3.3.4.9](#)), dismounting, *disposal* ([3.3.4.10](#)).

3.3.4.1

installation

product life cycle phase ([3.3.4](#)) in which a *product* ([3.1.3](#)) is prepared such that it fulfils its *intended use* ([3.6.4.1](#))

3.3.4.2

commissioning

procedures prior, or related, to the handing over of a physical *product* ([3.1.3](#)) ready to be placed into service

Note 1 to entry: Commissioning can include final acceptance testing, the handing over of relevant documentation for the *supported product* ([3.1.5](#)) or instructing personnel.

[SOURCE: IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2019, 3.2, modified — “physical” added before “product” in the definition.]

3.3.4.3

setup

process by which a system or component is prepared for *operation* ([3.3.4.4](#))

3.3.4.4

operation

product life cycle phase ([3.3.4](#)) comprising all technical, administrative and managerial actions, other than maintenance actions, that result in the system functioning according to its *intended use* ([3.6.4.1](#))

3.3.4.5**maintenance**

set of actions intended to retain a *product* (3.1.3) in, or restore it to, a useful and safe condition, in which it can perform the *intended use* (3.6.4.1)

3.3.4.6**repair**

corrective *maintenance* (3.3.4.5) of defective or damaged parts or functions of a *product* (3.1.3)

[SOURCE: IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2019, 3.31]

3.3.4.7**emergency operation**

set of actions and functions intended to end or avert an emergency situation

[SOURCE: ISO 12100:2010, 3.39, modified — "all" has been replaced by "set of" at the beginning of the definition.]

3.3.4.7.1**emergency stop**

emergency operation (3.3.4.7) by means of a single human action

3.3.4.8**storage**

life cycle phase of a physical *product* (3.1.3) being kept available in an adequate environment

3.3.4.9**decommissioning**

life cycle phase of a physical *product* (3.1.3) being *put out of service* (3.3.2) permanently

3.3.4.10**disposal**

life cycle phase of a physical *product* (3.1.3) describing its elimination or repurposing

3.3.4.11**recycling**

life cycle phase involving the repurposing of a material or component which has previously been processed for inclusion in a *product* (3.1.3)

[SOURCE: ISO 10209:2022, 3.13.5, modified — "action of reprocessing" has been replaced by "life cycle phase involving the repurposing" at the beginning of the definition.]

3.4 Terms relating to information for use**3.4.1****information type**

class of information determined according to structural principles

3.4.2**conceptual information**

information for use (3.1.2) which explains and describes the relevant operating principles of the *supported product* (3.1.5)

EXAMPLE *Functional description* (3.4.2.1).

Note 1 to entry: In analysing information for use, it is possible to differentiate between conceptual information, *instructional information* (3.4.3) and *reference information* (3.4.4).

3.4.2.1

functional description

overall description that explains how each part of a product is expected to operate, interact and be interacted with

[SOURCE: ISO 16484-1:2010, 3.10, modified — "the system/plant" has been replaced by "a product" and Note 1 to entry has been removed.]

3.4.3

instructional information

information for use (3.1.2) which states procedures and task-oriented steps to be followed or considered

EXAMPLE *Step-by-step instructions.*

3.4.4

reference information

information for use (3.1.2) which comprises additional details that need to be retrieved on occasion

EXAMPLE *Troubleshooting information* (3.8.2.3.5), commands, codes.

3.4.5

document type

class of a document defined with respect to its specified purpose, function and form of presentation

3.5 Terms relating to information creators

3.5.1

terminology manager

expert responsible for the planning, organization and coordination of all terminological activities in the information development process

3.5.2

terminologist standards.iteh.ai/catalog/standards/sist/60a6df56-393e-46cd-ac7e-2a5f5e966587/iso- expert who performs *terminology work* (3.1.14) as a main function of a professional activity

[SOURCE: ISO 12616-1:2021, 3.30]

3.5.3

terminology worker

person whose role is to perform *terminology work* (3.1.14) as an ancillary function of other professional activities

[SOURCE: ISO 12616-1:2021, 3.29]

3.5.4

information architect

person who collects target audience requirements and develops an information strategy

Note 1 to entry: Other terms that are used in some contexts are "content strategist", "indexer" or "taxonomy architect", who carry out similar tasks.

3.5.5

information developer

person responsible for designing, creating, collecting or implementing a range of *information product* (3.1.4) aspects, such as *text* (3.7.1.2), video, photos or other media

Note 1 to entry: Information product aspects include modes, such as *text* (3.7.1.2), image, *audio* (3.7.1.3) and media, for example printed manuals, tutorial videos, *online help* (3.8.1.2).