



Designation: C297/C297M – 15

# Standard Test Method for Flatwise Tensile Strength of Sandwich Constructions<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation C297/C297M; 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 ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

*This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the U.S. Department of Defense.*

## 1. Scope

1.1 This test method determines the flatwise tensile strength of the core, the core-to-facing bond, or the facing of an assembled sandwich panel. Permissible core material forms include those with continuous bonding surfaces (such as balsa wood and foams) as well as those with discontinuous bonding surfaces (such as honeycomb).

1.2 The values stated in either SI units or inch-pound units are to be regarded separately as standard. The values stated in each system are not exact equivalents; therefore, each system must be used independently of the other. Combining values from the two systems may result in nonconformance with the standard.

1.2.1 Within the text the inch-pound units are shown in brackets.

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 and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

### 2.1 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

**D2711/C2711M** Test Method for Density of Sandwich Core Materials

**C274** Terminology of Structural Sandwich Constructions

**D792** Test Methods for Density and Specific Gravity (Relative Density) of Plastics by Displacement

**D883** Terminology Relating to Plastics

**D2584** Test Method for Ignition Loss of Cured Reinforced Resins

**D2734** Test Methods for Void Content of Reinforced Plastics

**D3039/D3039M** Test Method for Tensile Properties of Polymer Matrix Composite Materials

**D3171** Test Methods for Constituent Content of Composite Materials

**D3878** Terminology for Composite Materials

**D5229/D5229M** Test Method for Moisture Absorption Properties and Equilibrium Conditioning of Polymer Matrix Composite Materials

**E4** Practices for Force Verification of Testing Machines

**E6** Terminology Relating to Methods of Mechanical Testing

**E122** Practice for Calculating Sample Size to Estimate, With Specified Precision, the Average for a Characteristic of a Lot or Process

**E177** Practice for Use of the Terms Precision and Bias in ASTM Test Methods

**E456** Terminology Relating to Quality and Statistics

**E1309** Guide for Identification of Fiber-Reinforced Polymer-Matrix Composite Materials in Databases

**E1434** Guide for Recording Mechanical Test Data of Fiber-Reinforced Composite Materials in Databases

**E1471** Guide for Identification of Fibers, Fillers, and Core Materials in Computerized Material Property Databases

## 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Terminology **D3878** defines terms relating to high-modulus fibers and their composites. Terminology **C274** defines terms relating to structural sandwich constructions. Terminology **D883** defines terms relating to plastics. Terminology **E6** defines terms relating to mechanical testing. Terminology **E456** and Practice **E177** define terms relating to statistics. In the event of a conflict between terms, Terminology **D3878** shall have precedence over the other terminologies.

### 3.2 Symbols:

3.2.1  $A$ —cross-sectional area of a test specimen

3.2.2  $CV$ —coefficient of variation statistic of a sample population for a given property (in percent)

3.2.3  $e$ —edge tolerance between specimen and loading blocks

3.2.4  $F_z^{flu}$ —ultimate flatwise tensile strength

3.2.5  $P_{max}$ —maximum force carried by test specimen before failure

<sup>1</sup> This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D30 on Composite Materials and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D30.09 on Sandwich Construction.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

3.2.6  $S_{n-1}$ —standard deviation statistic of a sample population for a given property

3.2.7  $x_i$ —test result for an individual specimen from the sample population for a given property

3.2.8  $\bar{x}$ —mean or average (estimate of mean) of a sample population for a given property

#### 4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 This test method consists of subjecting a sandwich construction to a uniaxial tensile force normal to the plane of the sandwich. The force is transmitted to the sandwich through thick loading blocks, which are bonded to the sandwich facings or directly to the core.

4.2 The only acceptable failure modes for flatwise tensile strength are those which are internal to the sandwich construction. Failure of the loading block-to-sandwich bond is not an acceptable failure mode.

#### 5. Significance and Use

5.1 In a sandwich panel, core-to-facing bond integrity is necessary to maintain facing stability and permit load transfer between the facings and core. This test method can be used to provide information on the strength and quality of core-to-facing bonds. It can also be used to produce flatwise tensile strength data for the core material. While it is primarily used as a quality control test for bonded sandwich panels, it can also be used to produce flatwise tensile strength data for structural design properties, material specifications, and research and development applications.

5.2 Factors that influence the flatwise tensile strength and shall therefore be reported include the following: facing material, core material, adhesive material, methods of material fabrication, facing stacking sequence and overall thickness, core geometry (cell size, cell wall thickness), core density, adhesive thickness, specimen geometry, specimen preparation, specimen conditioning, environment of testing, specimen alignment, loading procedure, speed of testing, facing void content, adhesive void content, and facing volume percent reinforcement. Properties that may be derived from this test method include flatwise tensile strength.

#### 6. Interferences

6.1 *Material and Specimen Preparation*—Poor material fabrication practices, lack of control of fiber alignment, and damage induced by improper specimen machining are known causes of high data scatter in composites in general. Specific material factors that affect sandwich composites include variability in core density and degree of cure of resin in both facing matrix material and core bonding adhesive. Important aspects of sandwich panel specimen preparation that contribute to data scatter are incomplete or nonuniform core bonding to facings, misalignment of core and facing elements, the existence of joints, voids or other core and facing discontinuities, out-of-plane curvature, facing thickness variation, and surface roughness.

6.2 *System Alignment*—Excessive bending will cause premature failure. Every effort should be made to eliminate excess

bending from the test system. Bending may occur as a result of misaligned grips, poor specimen preparation, or poor alignment of the loading blocks and loading fixture. If there is any doubt as to the alignment inherent in a given test machine, then the alignment should be checked as discussed in Test Method [D3039/D3039M](#).

6.3 *Geometry*—Specific geometric factors that affect sandwich flatwise tensile strength include core cell geometry, core thickness, specimen shape (square or circular), adhesive thickness, facing thickness, and facing per-ply thickness.

6.4 *Environment*—Results are affected by the environmental conditions under which the tests are conducted. Specimens tested in various environments can exhibit significant differences in both strength behavior and failure mode. Critical environments must be assessed independently for each facing, adhesive and core material tested.

6.5 *Conditioning*—As it is inappropriate to bond a moisture-conditioned specimen to the loading blocks, it is necessary to perform the bonding operation prior to such conditioning. The presence of the loading blocks will affect the degree of moisture intake into the specimen, in comparison to a non-bonded sample.

#### 7. Apparatus

7.1 *Micrometers and Calipers*—A micrometer with a 4 to 7 mm [0.16 to 0.28 in.] nominal diameter ball-interface or a flat anvil interface shall be used to measure the specimen thickness. A ball interface is recommended for thickness measurements when facings are bonded to the core and at least one surface is irregular (e.g. the bag-side of a thin facing laminate that is neither smooth nor flat). A micrometer or caliper with a flat anvil interface is recommended for thickness measurements when facings are bonded to the core and both surfaces are smooth (e.g. tooled surfaces). A micrometer or caliper with a flat anvil interface shall be used for measuring length and width, as well as the specimen thickness when no facings are present. The use of alternative measurement devices is permitted if specified (or agreed to) by the test requestor and reported by the testing laboratory. The accuracy of the instruments shall be suitable for reading to within 1 % of the sample dimensions. For typical specimen geometries, an instrument with an accuracy of  $\pm 0.025$  mm [ $\pm 0.001$  in.] is adequate for the length, width, and thickness measurements.

7.2 *Loading Fixtures*—The loading fixtures shall be self-aligning and shall not apply eccentric loads. A satisfactory type of apparatus is shown in [Fig. 1](#). A dual-pin connection or universal joint shall be attached to each loading block to minimize any moments imparted to the test specimen. The loading blocks shall be sufficiently stiff to keep the bonded core or facings essentially flat under load. Loading blocks 40 to 50 mm [1.5 to 2.0 in.] thick have been found to perform satisfactorily. Recommended dimensions and tolerances for the loading blocks are provided in [Fig. 2](#).

7.3 *Testing Machine*—The testing machine shall be in accordance with Practices [E4](#) and shall satisfy the following requirements:



FIG. 1 Flatwise Tension Test Setup

testing laboratory conditions. This chamber shall be capable of maintaining the gage section of the test specimen at the required test environment during the mechanical test.

## 8. Sampling and Test Specimens

8.1 *Sampling*—Test at least five specimens per test condition unless valid results can be gained through the use of fewer specimens, as in the case of a designed experiment. For statistically significant data, consult the procedures outlined in Practice E122. Report the method of sampling.

8.2 *Geometry*—Test specimens shall have a square or circular cross section, and shall be equal in thickness to the sandwich panel thickness. Recommended dimensions and tolerances for the core specimens are provided in Fig. 3. Minimum specimen facing areas for various types of core materials are as follows:

8.2.1 *Continuous Bonding Surfaces (for example, balsa wood, foams)*—The minimum facing area of the specimen shall be 625 mm<sup>2</sup> [1.0 in.<sup>2</sup>], and the minimum width or diameter of the loading blocks shall be 25 mm [1.0 in.]. Recommended tolerances for the core specimens are provided in Fig. 3.

8.2.2 *Discontinuous Cellular Bonding Surfaces (for example, honeycomb)*—The required facing area of the specimen is dependent upon the cell size, to ensure a minimum number of cells are tested. Minimum facing areas and specimen dimensions are recommended in Table 1 for the more common cell sizes. These are intended to provide approximately 60 cells minimum in the test specimen. The largest facing area listed in the table (5625 mm<sup>2</sup> [9.0 in.<sup>2</sup>]) is a practical maximum for this test method. Cores with cell sizes larger than 9 mm [0.375 in.] may require a smaller number of cells to be tested in the specimen.

8.3 *Specimen Preparation and Machining*—Specimen preparation is extremely important for this test method. Take precautions when cutting specimens from large panels to avoid notches, undercuts, rough or uneven surfaces, or delaminations due to inappropriate machining methods. Obtain final dimensions by water-lubricated precision sawing, milling, or grinding. The use of diamond tooling has been found to be extremely effective for many material systems. Edges should be flat and parallel within the specified tolerances. Record and report the specimen cutting preparation method.

8.4 *Labeling*—Label the test specimens so that they will be distinct from each other and traceable back to the panel of origin, and will neither influence the test nor be affected by it.

8.5 *Loading Fixture Bonding*—The loading blocks shall be bonded to the core or facings of the test specimen using a suitable adhesive. To minimize thermal exposure effects upon the existing core-to-facing bonds, it is recommended that the assembly bonding temperature be at room temperature, or at least 28 °C [50 °F] lower than that at which the sandwich was originally bonded. Similarly, the assembly bonding pressure shall not be greater than the original facing-to-core bonding pressure. It is recommended to bond the specimens to the loading blocks using a suitable bonding fixture (e.g. one with a deep 90° v-shaped notch and a corner undercut) that provides support and alignment to the assembly during the entire

7.3.1 *Testing Machine Configuration*—The testing machine shall have both an essentially stationary head and a movable head.

7.3.2 *Drive Mechanism*—The testing machine drive mechanism shall be capable of imparting to the movable head a controlled velocity with respect to the stationary head. The velocity of the movable head shall be capable of being regulated in accordance with 11.6.

7.3.3 *Force Indicator*—The testing machine force-sensing device shall be capable of indicating the total force being carried by the test specimen. This device shall be essentially free from inertia lag at the specified rate of testing and shall indicate the force with an accuracy over the force range(s) of interest of within ±1 % of the indicated value.

7.4 *Conditioning Chamber*—When conditioning materials at non-laboratory environments, a temperature/vapor-level controlled environmental conditioning chamber is required that shall be capable of maintaining the required temperature to within ±3 °C [±5 °F] and the required relative humidity level to within ±3 %. Chamber conditions shall be monitored either on an automated continuous basis or on a manual basis at regular intervals.

7.5 *Environmental Test Chamber*—An environmental test chamber is required for test environments other than ambient

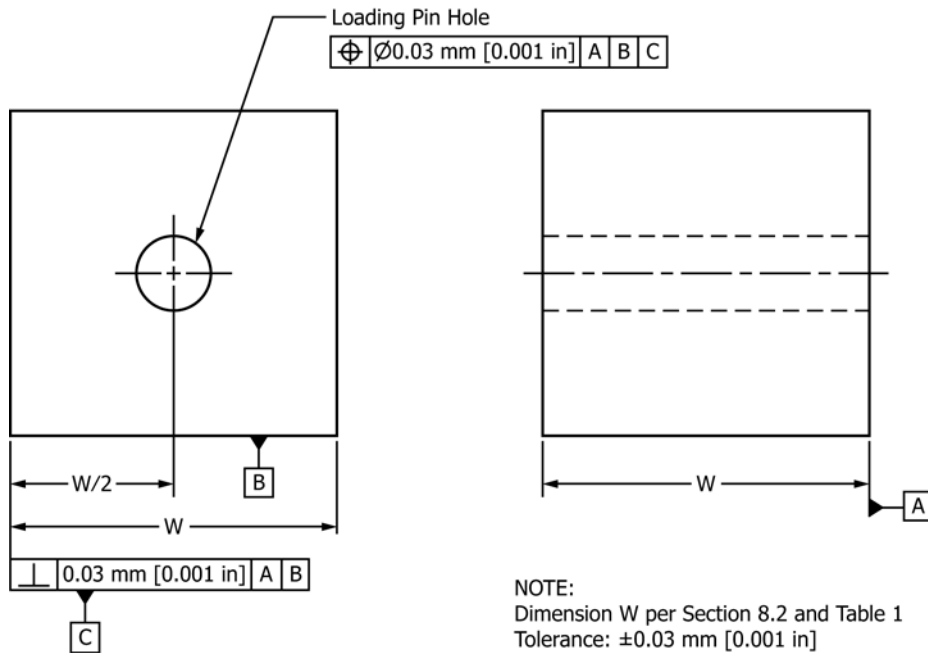
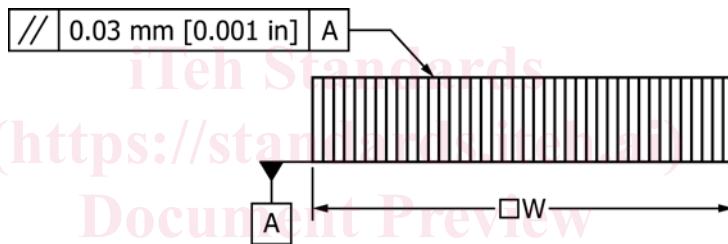


FIG. 2 Loading Block Dimensions and Tolerances



NOTES:

1. Dimension W per Section 8.2 and Table 1
2. Tolerance:
  - a) Cores with continuous bonding surfaces:  $\pm 0.03$  mm [0.001 in]
  - b) Cores with discontinuous bonding surfaces: Minimum {(cell size)/2;  $\pm 3$  mm [ $\pm 0.1$  in]}

FIG. 3 Core Specimen Dimensions and Tolerances

TABLE 1 Recommended Minimum Specimen Facing Area and Loading Block Dimensions

Minimum Cell Size (mm [in.])	Maximum Cell Size (mm [in.])	Minimum Loading Block Dimension W (mm [in.])	Minimum Facing Area (mm <sup>2</sup> [in. <sup>2</sup> ])
-	3.0 [0.125]	25 [1.0]	625 [1.0]
3.0 [0.125]	6.0 [0.250]	50 [2.0]	2500 [4.0]
6.0 [0.250]	9.0 [0.375]	75 [3.0]	5625 [9.0]

bonding process. Take care to ensure that the specimen and blocks do not move during the bonding process. Permissible tolerances for the bonded assembly are provided in Fig. 4. Edge tolerances ( $e$ ) between the specimen and loading block

edges, as well as those between loading block edges, shall meet the requirements of Fig. 4 along each side of the specimen. Loading block edge parallelism requirements in Fig. 4 may be