ISO standards are technical documents intended for repeated use: it is important to write them in such a way that they are understood and implemented consistently by all users.

Are you involved in writing ISO standards?

The following guidance will help you to draft ISO standards in a timely and effective manner, making them easier to read and to implement.

How?

By raising awareness on some fundamental aspects that:

- are applicable to drafting International Standards and other ISO documents,
- cover some key aspects from a drafting perspective,
- are complementary to the resources that constitute the official procedural and drafting rules.
1. Language – Making clear ISO standards

- ISO standards are technical documents.
  → Write in clear and concise plain language.
  → Ensure technical and textual ambiguities are removed.
  → Check consistency between text, tables, figures and formulae.

- ISO standards convey
  ✓ criteria to be fulfilled, i.e. "requirements", using "shall"
  ✓ actions to be performed, i.e. "instructions", using the imperative mood
  ✓ advice and guidance, i.e. "recommendations", using "should"
  ✓ permission, using "may"
  ✓ information, generally in the present tense.
  → First be clear on what you wish to express, then opt for the appropriate verbal forms.
  → Be consistent throughout the document.

- ISO standards, while published in English (French and Russian versions may also be issued), are developed in a multilingual environment.
  → Ensure the text is reviewed by experts fluent in English.
  → An accurate English version will facilitate consistent translations in all languages.

2. Structure – Making manageable ISO standards

- Scope and content
  → Keep your documents focused and concise, within the approved Scope.
  → Refrain from adding content that does not serve the purpose of standardization.
    The following contribute to slowing down the development/drafting of ISO standards and can make their understanding and use more difficult, so they should be avoided:
    literature reviews, extensive background or common knowledge, and repetitions.

- Technical Reports and committee websites
  → Consider developing informative Technical Reports that can be referenced in your ISO standards to provide supplementary information.
  → Committee websites accessible from iso.org can also be used to disseminate further information to a wider public.

- Multi-part ISO standards
  → Consider splitting your ISO standards into parts, each working as a stand-alone document: this will facilitate development, implementation and maintenance (revisions).
3. Policies – Making accurate ISO standards

Note that the following policies have an impact on the drafting of ISO standards.

- **Conformity assessment principles**
  - "Neutrality principle": An ISO standard cannot require that its conformity be assessed by only its users (first party), their customers (second party) or an independent body (third party) – all three options must be possible.
  
  "Separation principle": An ISO standard providing technical requirements cannot include requirements for conformity assessment: the latter must be given in a separate document developed in consultation with CASCO, the ISO Committee on conformity assessment.

- **ISO standards are not law**
  ISO standards and the law are not on the same level. While we must all observe the law, the implementation of ISO standards is voluntary. As such, it is not permissible for ISO standards to require compliance with the law, nor to include a superfluous and potentially confusing statement that the law takes precedence over ISO standards. Only **informative references** to the law are acceptable.

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**Resources** – As an ISO standards writer, you are encouraged to become familiar with the following essential documents:

- ISO/IEC Guide 2, *Standardization and related activities — General vocabulary*
- ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1, and ISO Supplement, *Procedures for the technical work*
- The ISO House Style: the ISO best drafting practice (including plain language guidance)
- Additional drafting resources (including a template to draft ISO standards and best practices)

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**The ISO/CS Editorial programme managers (EPMs) remain at your disposal for any questions or advice on drafting standards.**

✉️ Please send us an email!

Click on your committee on this list to get our contact details.