
Question(s): N/A

Geneva, 19 March 2010

TEMPORARY DOCUMENT

Source: TSB*

Title: Guidance to ITU-T Study Groups on drafting definitions

The 12 February 2010 meeting of SCV agreed in principle to send a liaison to all ITU-T Study Groups based upon the input documents SCV TD-1 and SCV-C-2010-1. The current document presents the output of its 19 March 2010 virtual meeting that finalized the text.

The participants in the 19 March 2010 virtual meeting were:

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Question(s): Meeting, date: 19 March 2010
Study Group: Working Party:
Source: Standardization Committee for Vocabulary
Title: Guidance on creating terms and definitions

LIAISON STATEMENT

For action to: TSAG, All ITU-T Study Groups and Focus Groups

For comment to:

For information to: (ITU-R) Coordination Committee for Vocabulary

Approval: SCV virtual meeting, 19 March 2010

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Please don't change the structure of this table, just insert the necessary information.

[WTSA Resolution 67](#) (Johannesburg, 2008) established the Standardization Committee on Vocabulary (SCV), with responsibility for ensuring that the standardization of work on vocabulary within ITU-T shall be based on the proposals by the study groups in the English language. The SCV is comprised of experts in the various official languages and members designated by interested administrations and other participants in the work of ITU-T, as well as the rapporteurs for vocabulary of the ITU-T study groups, plus relevant ITU staff.

At its 12 February 2010 meeting, SCV agreed in principle to send a liaison to all ITU-T Study Groups based upon the input documents [SCV TD-1](#) and [SCV-C-2010-1](#). A virtual meeting was convened on 19 March 2010 wherein SCV agreed upon the attached material as guidance to the Study Groups in the creation of terms and definitions within ITU-T Recommendations.

The document has been drafted in the form of a proposed new Annex B to the [Author's guide for drafting ITU-T Recommendations](#). The attached document also has value with the design and documentation of terms and definitions within other types of publications.

ACTION REQUESTED (TSAG): incorporate the attached new Annex B into a revised version of the Author's guide for drafting ITU-T Recommendations.

ACTION REQUESTED (ITU-T Study Groups): begin using the attached guidelines to create and document terms and definitions within draft ITU-T Recommendations and submit any questions or suggestions for improvement of the guidance to SCV.

Annex B

Guidance on the development of definitions

1. Introduction

Much time is spent by study groups on terminology and definitions but the results can be duplicative and of inconsistent quality. Greater consistency is needed in the way definitions are drafted. In addition, consideration needs to be given to ensuring that definitions are drafted in a way that allows for automated compilation and processing of new definitions so that the ITU database of definitions can be more easily maintained. Annex 2 to WTS Resolution 67 (Johannesburg, 2008) provides basic guidelines for the preparation of terms and definitions. The current document builds on that guidance to help study groups to adopt a consistent approach to terminology and definitions and also to address the requirements for automated updating of the terminology database.

2. Terms and definitions

A *term* is simply a word, or group of words that is used to express a specific concept. A *definition* is a clear, concise and accurate statement that expresses the precise meaning of a term or concept.

3. Best practices for writing definitions within ITU-T Recommendations

3.1 Use of existing terminology

Developers of Recommendations spend much time on terminology development. While it is important that definitions accurately capture the subject concept or term, experience has shown that terminology discussions frequently occupy an unreasonable amount of technical meeting time. One way to reduce unnecessary discussion is to use already-defined terms.

New terms should not be developed where an acceptable definition already exists. Also, already-existing terms should not be re-defined. Existing definitions should be consulted before any new definition is developed to see if the term/concept has already been defined. Only if no satisfactory definition exists should development of a new definition be considered. When defining a new term/concept, the name used for the term should not duplicate the name used for an already-defined term/concept.

ITU provides an online database, “ITU Terms and Definitions” (<http://www.itu.int/ITU-R/go/terminology-database>) to assist in discovering existing terms and definitions in ITU-R and ITU-T Recommendations. This is a replacement for the SANCHO system which had not been updated since 2005.

3.2 Structure

A formal definition is a concise, logical statement that comprises three essential elements:

- i) The term (word or phrase) to be defined (e.g., country code (see Note below));
- ii) The class of object or concept to which the term belongs (e.g., combination of one, two or three digits); and
- iii) The characteristics that distinguish it from all others of its class (e.g., identifying a specific country).

Note – the above examples would form a complete definition in the ITU-T style as:
country code: The combination of one, two or three digits identifying a specific country.

3.3 Conciseness

Definitions should be concise and to-the-point. To avoid complexity and confusion, each definition should describe only one concept.

Definitions should contain only information that makes the concept unique and should not contain detailed explanations or extraneous material. Any additional descriptive information or other supplementary (i.e. non-normative, non-essential) information that is necessary to differentiate the concept from other concepts may be included as notes, figures or equations.

Figures, equations and tables should not replace the verbal representation of the defined term but may form useful supplementary information.

Note – it is recognized that, for mathematical terms, equations may be the most effective and efficient way of defining the term.

3.4 Clarity and accuracy

Definitions must be accurate, clear and positive. Inaccurate and negative definitions are not acceptable. Nor should definitions be circular or include, or paraphrase, the term being defined. The language used in a definition must either be common English language terms or defined elsewhere in the text.

3.5 Independence

Definitions must be able to stand alone. That is, one should be able to understand the meaning without requiring reference to other parts of the Recommendation. This is particularly important since the terms and definitions are being extracted for use by delegates, and consumers on the web.

3.6 Grammatical form

The form of the definition should also be the same part of speech¹ as the term or concept being defined. For example, if the term being defined is a noun, the definition should not be expressed as a verb or other part of speech.

3.7 Illustrations within definitions

While figures or equations can assist with the understanding of the meaning of a term, they should not form the essence of the definition. In other words, they are best applied as supplemental, informative material to enhance the presentation of the concepts involved. In general, they should not replace the textual representation of the basic definition. Note also that inclusion of figures in definitions currently precludes the inclusion of the definition in the ITU Terms and Definitions online database.

3.8 Symbols and abbreviations

Where abbreviations are used within a definition, an explanation or expansion of those abbreviations must be included. Standard symbols for measurement units should not be defined.

¹ “parts of speech” are *verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc.*

3.9 Protocol elements

Formal or detailed descriptions of protocol elements should be avoided within the Definitions clause; these are best handled within the body of the Recommendation (clause 6² or later).

3.10 Variables and special notations catalogued within definitions

Definitions should be limited to concepts related to terms and not the method of representing information within a Recommendation. The latter group is more appropriately documented in within clause 5, Conventions².

3.11 Undefined terms

Where a term is used but not defined (either explicitly, or by reference), it must be assumed that common English language usage (i.e. the dictionary definition) of the term is intended. Recognized English language dictionaries include: *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, *The Collins Concise English Dictionary*, *Webster's New World College Dictionary* or *Chambers Concise Dictionary*.

4. Formatting of Definitions

Formatting requirements for definitions are illustrated in clause 3 of the [Author's Guide] and explained in clause 8.3 of that document.

Note – The formatting requirements for definitions within common or twin texts jointly developed with ISO/IEC JTC 1 are illustrated in clause 3 of Appendix II of [Cooperation Guide].

In addition, the following stylistic aspects are preferred:

- Each definition should begin with a clause number, placed at the margin with a tab between the number and the term. The term should be in bold, beginning with a lower-case letter and followed by a colon. Definitions should end with a period.
- Definitions with more than one explanation should be separated with semi-colons.
- Definitions should appear in alphabetical order.

5. Bibliography

[Author's Guide] ITU-T, Author's Guide for drafting ITU-T Recommendations, March 2007, <http://www.itu.int/oth/?lang=en&parent=T0A0F000004>.

[Cooperation Guide] ITU-T A.23, Annex A, Guide for ITU-T and ISO/IEC JTC 1 Cooperation, February 2010, <http://www.itu.int/rec/T-REC-A.23/en>.

[Essay] Essay Writing Center, *Definition Essay*, http://essayinfo.com/essays/definition_essay.php. (Referenced 06.01.2010)

[ISO] ISO 704:2009, Terminology work — Principles and methods.

² The layout of Recommendations and the subject matter of the various clauses are indicated in [Author's Guide].