



# ISO DRAFTING MADE **EFFICIENT**

**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*
- [ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2](#), *Principles and rules for the structure and drafting of ISO and IEC documents* (including verbal forms)
- 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)

**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.