

Australian Standard™

Shorthand speed tests



S t a n d a r d s Australia



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PREFACE

This Standard was prepared by the Standards Australia Committee MS-016, Keyboarding and Shorthand Speed Tests.

The objective of the Standard is to provide a uniform method for use by bodies that conduct, assess and certify shorthand speed tests for speed and accuracy.

The Standard provides a method that facilitates the comparison of individual shorthand speeds. Previously, tests to determine Shorthand speed varied widely, producing results that were not comparable. This Standard will eliminate the need, to some extent, for employers to conduct their own shorthand speed tests.

The major problem in developing this Standard was the standardization of difficulty levels of test passages. For passages to provide a valid measure of shorthand skill, variations in candidates' performances must, as far as possible, reflect changes in skill rather than changes in passage difficulty. However, there are a large number of variables associated with passage difficulty, some of them, such as flow, indefinable. The committee was acutely aware that the test method had to be useable as well as accurate. After an examination of existing test methods, characteristics of Australian business language, and reports of overseas studies, four specific requirements regulating difficulty were included—test duration, passage length, syllabic intensity, and percentage of common words. These are accompanied by general requirements for style and content.

One of the deciding factors in including the two latter difficulty measures was the ease with which the syllabic intensity and percentage of common words in a passage could be determined by computer.

There are several commercially available programs that will measure syllabic intensity.

Percentage of common words may be determined using any spelling verification program in which it is possible to insert a separate dictionary, i.e. the list of 500 commonly used words. Further information on the study of Australian business documents from which the 500 word list was derived is also available in SAI MP 51, *A study of language in Australian business documents*, published by Standards Australia.

The terms 'normative' and 'informative' have been used in this Standard to define the application of the appendix to which they apply. A 'normative' appendix is an integral part of a Standard, whereas an 'informative' appendix is only for information and guidance.

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STANDARDS AUSTRALIA

Australian Standard
Shorthand speed tests

SECTION 1 SCOPE AND GENERAL

1.1 SCOPE

This Standard sets out a method for the design, conduct, assessment, and certification of shorthand speed tests of 60 wpm or greater, conducted in the English language.

This Standard does not deal with tests in shorthand theory.

1.2 APPLICATION

This Standard is intended for use by all bodies that conduct tests to measure shorthand speed.

1.3 REFERENCED DOCUMENTS

The following documents are referred to in this Standard:

SAI

HB 59 Ergonomics—The human factor — A practical approach to work systems design
Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, AGPS Press, Canberra

1.4 DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this Standard, the definitions below apply.

1.4.1 Dictionary word

A meaningful unit of speech which when written or printed is shown with space on either side of it.

1.4.2 Examining body

An institution or group that devises, administers, assesses, and certifies shorthand speed tests in accordance with this Standard.

1.4.3 Font

A printing typeface of a particular style and size.

1.4.4 Shall

Indicates that a statement is mandatory.

1.4.5 Shorthand

Any system of speed writing by means of substituting contractions or signs for letters or words and including that which may be written by shorthand machine.

1.4.6 Should

Indicates a recommendation.

1.4.7 Speed

The rate of taking shorthand from dictation. (Speed is measured in standard shorthand words per minute (wpm) in increments of 10 words per minute, starting at 60 words per minute.)

1.4.8 Standard shorthand word

A notional unit of word length equivalent to 1.5 syllables.

1.4.9 Syllable

A character or set of characters corresponding to a vocal sound or set of sounds uttered with a single effort of articulation and forming a word or an element of a word.

NOTE: In the implementation of this Standard, syllable divisions are determined in accordance with the Oxford or Macquarie series of dictionaries.

1.4.10 Syllabic intensity

The average number of syllables per dictionary word.

1.4.11 Transcription time

The time allowed for the conversion of shorthand notes to a keyed in or written form of language.

1.4.12 wpm

Standard shorthand words per minute.

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION OF SHORTHAND SPEED

2.1 TEST MATERIAL

2.1.1 Format

The test passage should be presented in the following form:

- (a) *Font style* Times New Roman or similar.
- (b) *Font size* 12 point.
- (c) *Line spacing* Not less than one-and-a-half spaces or 18 points, and not more than two spaces or 24 points.

2.1.2 Timing marks

The test passage shall include timing marks denoting quarter-minute intervals as follows:

- (a) First quarter-minute /
- (b) Second quarter-minute //
- (c) Third quarter-minute ///
- (d) Fourth quarter-minute (1), (2), etc.

The position of the timing marks shall be determined in accordance with Table 2.1. If the end of a quarter-minute occurs within a dictionary word, the timing mark shall be placed as follows:

- (i) Where the mark would unevenly divide the word — at the nearer end of the word, e.g.

▼ gua / ran.tee par.tic.u / lar ▼

- (ii) Where the mark would evenly divide the word — at the beginning of the word, e.g.

▼ gar / den.

NOTES:

- 1 An example of a dictation passage is provided in Appendix A.
- 2 A simple method of counting the syllables in each quarter-minute is provided in Appendix B.

2.1.3 Subject

The subject of the test passage shall be of a business, governmental or social nature.

2.1.4 Style

The test passage shall consist of continuous prose without headings, enumerations, or unusual proper nouns. It should not include sentences of intricate or repetitive structure. The passage should be easy to understand and able to be read fluently.

2.1.5 Title

The test passage shall have a title of not more than eight words that shall not be part of the test.

2.1.6 Syllabic intensity

The average syllabic intensity of the test passage shall be between 1.4 and 1.6 syllables per dictionary word.

2.1.7 Technical or infrequently used words

The test passage shall not contain highly technical or infrequently used words.

2.1.8 Commonly used words

The test passage shall be composed such that 70 ± 2 percent of the words in the passage are from the 500 commonly used words listed in Appendix C.

NOTE: The common word count includes only the words listed in Appendix C. Derivatives are not automatically included unless they occur as one of the common words in the list. For example, details, functions, advise, and advised are included in the list, but detail, function, advises, and advising are not.

2.1.9 Figures and symbols

Figures and symbols shall be written and counted in words as in normal speech, e.g. sixteen million, four hundred thousand and forty-four dollars and twenty-seven cents, or nineteen eighty-three.

TABLE 2.1
POSITION OF TIMING MARKS

Shorthand speed wpm	Number of syllables between timing marks			
	Time interval			
	First quarter- minute	Second quarter- minute	Third quarter- minute	Fourth quarter- minute
60	22	23	22	23
70	26	26	26	27
80	30	30	30	30
90	34	34	34	33
100	37	38	37	38
110	41	41	41	42
120	45	45	45	45
130	49	49	49	48
140	52	53	52	53
150	56	56	56	57
160	60	60	60	60
170	64	64	64	63
180	67	68	67	68

2.1.10 Abbreviations

Abbreviations shall be dictated and counted in full but may be written in the test passage or transcribed in their full or abbreviated forms, for example:

Written form in test passage	Dictated as	Number of syllables	Transcribed as
Co. or company	company	3	Co. or company
Mr. or Mister	mister	2	Mr. or Mister
etc. or etcetera	etcetera	4	etc. or etcetera

2.1.11 Length

The test shall end with a complete sentence and should contain the exact number of syllables appropriate to the test.