
International Standard



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Documentation — Transliteration of Arabic characters into Latin characters

Documentation — Translittération des caractères arabes en caractères latins

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work.

Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for approval before their acceptance as International Standards by the ISO Council. They are approved in accordance with ISO procedures requiring at least 75 % approval by the member bodies voting.

International Standard ISO 233 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 46, *Documentation*.

It cancels and replaces ISO Recommendation R 233-1961, of which it constitutes a technical revision.

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0 Introduction

0.1 Standards on conversion of systems of writing

This International Standard is one of a series of International Standards dealing with the conversion of systems of writing. The aim of this International Standard and others in the series is to provide a means for international communication of written messages in a form which permits the automatic transmission and reconstitution of these by men or machines. The system of conversion, in this case, must be univocal and entirely reversible.

This means that abstraction should be composed of all phonetic and esthetic considerations, as well as certain national customs; all these considerations are, however, ignored by the machine performing the function.

The adoption of this International Standard for international communication leaves every country free to adopt for its own use a national standard which may be different, on condition that it be compatible with this International Standard. The system proposed herein should make this possible; and be acceptable for international use if the graphisms it creates are such that they may be converted automatically into the graphisms used in any strict national system.

This International Standard may be used by anyone who has a clear understanding of the system and is certain that it can be applied without ambiguity. The result obtained will not give a correct pronunciation of the original text in a person's own language; but it will serve as a means of finding automatically the original graphism and thus allow any one who has a knowledge of the original language to pronounce it correctly. Similarly one can only pronounce correctly a text written in for example, English or Polish, if one has a knowledge of English or Polish.

The adoption of national standards compatible with this International Standard will permit the representation, in an international publication, of the morphemes of each language according to the customs of the country where it is spoken. It will be possible to simplify this representation in order to take into account the number of the character sets available on different kinds of machines.

0.2 General principles of conversion of writing systems

0.2.1 Definitions and methods

0.2.1.1 The words in a language, which are written according to a given script (the converted system), sometimes have to be rendered according to a different system (the conversion system), normally used for a different language. This operation is often followed for historical or geographical texts, cartographical documents and in particular for bibliographical work in every case where it is necessary to write words supplied in various alphabets in a manner that allows intercalation with other words in a single alphabet so as to enable a uniform alphabetization to be made in bibliographies, catalogues, indices, toponymic lists, etc.

It is indispensable in that it permits the univocal transmission of a written message between two countries using different writing systems or exchanging a message the writing of which is different from their own.

It thereby permits transmission by manual, mechanical, as well as electronic means.

The two basic methods of conversion of a system of writing are transliteration and transcription.

0.2.1.2 **Transliteration** is the operation which consists of representing the characters¹⁾ of an entirely alphabetical system of writing by the characters of the conversion alphabet.

In principle, this conversion should be made character by character: each character of the alphabet converted is rendered by one character, and one only, of the conversion alphabet, this being the easiest way to ensure the complete and unambiguous reversibility of the conversion alphabet in the converted alphabet.

When the number of characters used in the conversion system is smaller than the number of characters of the converted system, it is necessary to use digraph or diacritical marks. In this case one must avoid as far as possible arbitrary choice and

1) A **character** is an element of a system of writing, whether or not alphabetical, that represents a phoneme, a syllable, the word or even prosodical characteristics of the language by using graphical symbols (letters, diacritical marks, syllabic signs, punctuation marks, prosodical accents, etc.) or a combination of these signs (a letter having an accent or a diacritical mark, for example â, è, ö, is therefore a character in the same way as a basic letter).