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Terminology Related to Friction Ridge Examination

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Terminology Related to Friction Ridge Examination

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Foreword

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences established the Academy Standards Board (ASB) in 2015 with a vision of safeguarding Justice, Integrity and Fairness through Consensus-based American National Standards. To that end, the ASB develops consensus-based forensic standards within a framework accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and provides training to support those standards. ASB values integrity, scientific rigor, openness, due process, collaboration, excellence, diversity and inclusion. ASB is dedicated to developing and making freely accessible the highest quality documentary forensic science consensus Standards, Guidelines, Best Practices, and Technical Reports in a wide range of forensic science disciplines as a service to forensic practitioners and the legal system.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Friction Ridge Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Friction Ridge Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for the improvement of this document can be sent to AAFS-ASB Secretariat, asb@aaafs.org or 410 N 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904.

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ASB procedures are publicly available, free of cost, at www.aaafs.org/academy-standards-board.

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DRAFT

Terminology Related to Friction Ridge Examination

1 Scope

This technical report defines terms for forensic science professionals actively engaged in friction ridge examination. It is not intended to define every term potentially applicable to friction ridge examination, but to define commonly used terms in the discipline.

2 Normative References

There are no normative reference documents. Annex A, Bibliography, contains informative references.

3 Terms and Definitions

3.1

ABIS

~~The acronym for Automated Biometric Identification System. A generic term for a computer-based system which is a primary repository of individuals' biometrics (such as fingerprints, palm prints, facial and/or iris images) and secondary repository of associated demographic data, equipped with functionality to process biometric searches, store and retrieve records for identification purposes.~~

3.2

ACE (an examination process)

~~An acronym used to refer to the Analysis, Comparison and Evaluation phases of an examination process.~~

3.3.1

administrative information

Records—such as evidence receipts, chain of custody, and submission forms (electronic or hard copy)—that do not constitute data or information resulting from examination work.

3.4.3.2

administrative review

Evaluation of records to verify consistency with the forensic service provider's administrative policies and with editorial correctness.

ISO 21043-1^a

3.5.3.3

agreement (synonym of correspondence and corresponding friction ridge detail)

A decision that an accumulation of observed similarities in pattern type, ridge flow, and friction ridge features in sequence, of the same or similar type, in the same relative position to each other, with associated intervening ridge counts, suggests overall conformity. Not to be confused with "similarity".

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3.63.4**analysis ~~(phase~~**

~~Phase of the~~ examination process}

~~The interpretation of where the~~ observed data in a friction ridge impression ~~in order~~ is interpreted to categorize its suitability/utility.

3.73.5**Automated ~~Fingerprint~~Biometric Identification System****AFIS****ABIS**

A ~~generic term for a~~ computer-based system ~~which that~~ is a primary repository of individuals' ~~friction ridge detail~~biometrics (such as fingerprints ~~and/or~~ palm prints) ~~and, facial and/or iris images~~) and a secondary repository of associated demographic data, equipped with functionality to process biometric searches, store and retrieve records for identification purposes.

3.83.6**blind verification**

A type of verification in which, at a minimum, the subsequent examiner(s) ~~has~~have no knowledge of any other examiner's suitability decisions, conclusions, or documented data used to support the conclusion.

3.93.7**case file**

Forensic ~~Service Provider's collection of all~~service provider's records detailing the forensic process including reports related to a case.

ISO 21043-1^b ~~(case file)~~

3.103.8**chain of custody**

Chronological record of the transfer, handling and storage of an item from its point of collection to its final return or disposal.

ISO 21043-1^c

3.113.9**clarity**

Assessment of the quality of a friction ridge impression, describing an examiner's opinion as to how easily the friction ridge features are visually observed in an impression. Sometimes referred to as an examiner's confidence in the presence of an observed feature, that can be discerned from the background.

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3.123.10

cognitive bias

Unconscious deviation from rationality in human ~~judgment~~judgement caused by influences on, and limitations of, human information processing.

ISO 21043-1^d

3.133.11

comparison ~~(phase~~

~~Phase of the~~an examination process}

~~The search where an examiner searches~~ for and ~~detection of~~detects similarities and dissimilarities in observed data between friction ridge impressions.

3.143.12

competency

Possessing and demonstrating the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities to successfully perform a specific task.

3.153.13

competency testing

Evaluation of a person's knowledge, skills and ~~ability~~abilities to perform work before authorization to do so independently.

OSAC Preferred Term

3.16—

complete friction ridge exemplars ~~(synonym of major case prints)~~

~~See major case prints.~~

3.14

complete friction ridge exemplars

A complete recording of all friction ridge detail appearing on the friction ridge skin of an individual. This includes the extreme sides of the palms, joints, tips, and sides of the fingers, as well as the extreme sides of the soles, joints, tips, and sides of the toes where required.

3.173.15

complexity (of a comparison)

A characteristic of a comparison in which the attributes of one or both impressions may require additional consideration and quality assurance measures relating to the evaluation of a source conclusion. ~~Usually refers to the quality, clarity, and completeness of at least one of the impressions in the comparison set, affecting the difficulty of the comparison.~~

NOTE Refer to ANSI/ASB BPR 166 for more detailed explanation, particularly of attributes.

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3.183.16**complexity (of an impression)**

A characteristic of an impression whose attributes may require additional consideration and quality assurance measures. ~~Usually refers to the quality, clarity, and completeness of the impression being analyzed, having the potential to affect the difficulty of a subsequent comparison.~~

NOTE Refer to ANSI/ASB BPR 165 for more detailed explanation, particularly of attributes.

3.193.17**conclusion ~~(synonym of, source conclusion)~~**

See **3.834** source conclusion.

3.203.18**confirmation bias**

A tendency to search for, collect, perceive, or interpret information in a manner that supports preconceptions, expectations, or desires.

NOTE This is a type of cognitive bias.
OSAC Preferred Term

3.213.19**conflict**

A condition in which two or more examiners disagree on a suitability decision or source conclusion.

3.223.20**consensus review**

A type of examination in which a reported decision or conclusion is determined that reflects the collective judgment of a group of examiners.

3.233.21**consultation**

A discussion or interaction initiated by an examiner seeking guidance for the purpose of interpreting an image or comparison.

3.243.22**contextual bias**

A tendency for exposure to or knowledge of case-specific information to affect the impartial collection, perception, or interpretation of evidence.

NOTE This is a type of cognitive bias.
OSAC Preferred Term

3.23**contextual information (friction ridge)**

Information external to the examination of friction ridge impressions.

3.253.24**control (material)**

Material of established origin used to evaluate the performance of a test or comparison.

OSAC Preferred Term [Modified]

3.263.25**control (test)**

A test performed to demonstrate that a test method works correctly and to ensure that data are valid.

OSAC Preferred Term *[Modified]*

3.273.26**corrective action**

Action to eliminate or mitigate the cause(s) of a nonconformity and to prevent recurrence.

NOTE ~~A corrective~~ **Corrective** action is taken to prevent recurrence whereas preventive action is taken to prevent occurrence.

ISO 9000:20152026^e (modified “or mitigate” added)

3.283.27**correspondence (synonym of agreement)**

See 3.3 agreement.

3.293.28**corresponding friction ridge detail (synonym of agreement)**

See 3.3 agreement.

3.303.29**customer**

Authority, organization or person(s) requesting the forensic services.

ISO 21043-1^f

3.313.30**disagreement**

A decision that **observed** dissimilarity₇ is deemed to be sufficiently outside of expected variations in the appearance of impressions from the same source that it results in overall nonconformity. Not to be confused with “*dissimilarity*”.

3.323.31**discriminability**

The degree to which information in an impression can be used to distinguish it from impressions made by different sources. The discriminability of an impression is a combination of the quantity, spatial arrangement, clarity, and rarity of features observed.

3.333.32**dissimilarity**

An observation that two impressions have a general difference of appearance when comparing an individual feature or detail. Not to be confused with “*disagreement*.”

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3.343.33**enhancement**

Process to reveal, intensify, magnify or clarify a property of an item.

ISO 21043-1^g

3.353.34**evaluation ~~(phase~~**

~~Phase of the~~ an examination process)

~~The weighting of where~~ the aggregate strength of the evidence (observed similarities and dissimilarities when considering two competing propositions) is weighed between the observed data in the friction ridge impressions being compared ~~in order~~ to formulate a source conclusion.

3.363.35**examiner (friction ridge)**

An individual who has successfully completed their ~~FSP's~~ forensic service provider's training program, and is authorized to conduct independent friction ridge examinations ~~for the FSP~~ by observing and interpreting data, making decisions, forming conclusions and opinions, issuing reports and/or providing testimony.

NOTE Use of the term “examiner” in these documents refers to a “friction ridge examiner” and not a “trainee”.

3.36

exemplar impression ~~(synonym of exemplar or known and exemplar prints)~~
~~exemplar or known (synonym of exemplar impression and exemplar prints)~~
~~exemplar prints (synonym of exemplar impression and exemplar or known)~~
(synonym of known impression)

The deliberately recorded images or impressions from the friction ridge skin of an individual.

NOTE ~~Examples may include:~~ For example, inked tenprints, inked palm prints, ~~Livescan~~ livescan prints, powder and lift prints, casted/molded prints, or photographs of friction ridge skin.

3.37**forensic light source**

A light source that may be fixed, filtered or tunable to a variety of spectral ranges.

3.38**forensic process**

Set of interrelated or interacting forensic activities including methods, techniques and processes used to establish conclusions and/or opinions, facts and findings, which can be used for legal proceedings.

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3.39**forensic service provider****FSP**

Organization that performs all or part of the forensic process.

NOTE A forensic service provider can be a large or small organization, including an organization consisting of a single examiner.

ISO 21043-1^h

3.40**friction ridge detail (synonym of friction ridge features)**

See ~~friction ridge features~~.

3.413.40**friction ridge features (synonym of friction ridge detail)**

The combination of ridge flow, ridge characteristics, and ridge structure of friction ridge skin, as reproduced and observed in an impression. The observed data used to compare and interpret similarity or dissimilarity between impressions.

3.423.41**friction ridge impression (synonym of impression)**

A reproduction of an area of friction ridge skin produced on a substrate by contact or transfer.

~~Impressions may be referred to as exemplar impressions, latent impressions, or questioned impressions.~~

3.433.42**friction ridge skin**

The skin found on the palms of the hands (full palmar surface including fingers) and soles of the feet (full plantar surface including toes).

3.443.43**ground truth**

The actual or true state of nature concerning the source or type of items submitted for evaluation.

3.453.44**impartiality**

Objectivity, neutrality and fairness along with the reduction of the risk of bias.

NOTE It is important for impartiality that possible conflicts of interest are declared, resolved or do not exist.

ISO 21043-1ⁱ

3.463.45**impression (synonym of friction ridge impression)**

See **3.41** friction ridge impression.

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3.473.46**inconclusive**

The conclusion that the observed data do not provide more support for one proposition over the other.

3.483.47**inconclusive with dissimilarities**

The conclusion that the observed data provide more support for the proposition that the impressions originated from different sources rather than the same source; however, there is insufficient support for a Source Exclusion.

3.493.48**inconclusive with similarities**

The conclusion that the observed data provide more support for the proposition that the impressions originated from the same source rather than different sources; however, there is insufficient support for a Source Identification.

3.503.49**independent examination**

Independent examination indicates an autonomous examination, but not necessarily one without knowledge of a prior examiner's decision, conclusion or opinion.

3.51**interested party (synonym of stakeholder)**

See **stakeholder**.

3.50**interested party**

Person or organization that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity.

ISO 9000:2026^j

3.523.51**interlaboratory comparison**

Organization, performance, and evaluation of measurements or tests on the same or similar items by two or more laboratories in accordance with predetermined conditions.

OSAC Preferred Term

3.533.52**interpretation**

Part of the examination that uses professional judgement, logic, expertise, and relevant data and information and, if applicable, statistical models to infer the meaning of observations so as to provide opinions with respect to questions asked.

ISO 21043-1^k

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3.543.53**intralaboratory comparison**

Organization, performance, and evaluation of measurements or tests on the same or similar items within the same laboratory in accordance with predetermined conditions.

OSAC Preferred Term

3.55**item**

~~Object, substance, material or mark that is collected, derived or sampled as part of the forensic process~~

~~ISO 21043-1¹~~

3.54

~~latent~~**known** impression (synonym of **exemplar**)

See 3.36 **exemplar**.

3.563.55**latent, synonym of unknown)**

An impression from an unknown source of friction ridge skin. Typically, ~~latent impressions~~**latents** are not readily visible and can be developed or enhanced by optical, physical, and/or chemical processing techniques.

3.573.56**likelihood ratio**

Expression of an examiner's assessment of the ratio of the probabilities of the observations if one of two competing propositions were true versus if the other proposition were true.

NOTE 1 The likelihood ratio gives the probative value of the observations for the competing propositions.

NOTE 2 Only the term "likelihood ratio" is used in the ~~present standard~~**ISO 21043 series**. This is not intended to exclude the calculation of Bayes factors instead of likelihood ratios.

NOTE 3 Likelihood ratios are described in terms of "probability". If the data are continuously valued, the numerator and denominator of the likelihood ratio will involve probability density functions rather than probabilities.

~~ISO 21043-1^m~~

3.583.57**limited examinations**

~~Examinations of latent friction ridge evidence~~**Limited examinations are partial analyses, comparisons, and/or processing that are do not complete as defined by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs fully utilize the capabilities of a Forensic Service Provider (FSP).**

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3.593.58**limited processing**

The selective application of sequential processing without exhausting the full capabilities of the Forensic Service Provider (FSP).

3.603.59**livescan impression**

An inkless, electronic means of capturing impressions from the friction ridge skin of an individual associated with a known source or claimed identity in a digital format.

3.611.1**~~major case prints (synonym of complete friction ridge exemplars)~~**

~~A complete recording of all friction ridge detail appearing on the friction ridge skin of an individual. This includes the extreme sides of the palms, joints, tips, and sides of the fingers, as well as the extreme sides of the soles, joints, tips, and sides of the toes where required.~~

3.623.60**matrix**

~~Transfer medium~~ The substance that is deposited or removed by the friction ridge skin when making an impression.

NOTE For example, grease, ~~oil~~, sweat, dust, blood, ~~etc. paint, semen. May be a biological or non-biological substance.~~

SWGFAST- Document 19ⁿ [Mod]

3.633.61**minutia**

The point where a friction ridge terminates, or splits into two or more ridges. A subset of the friction ridge detail/features traditionally consisting of ridge endings, bifurcations, and dots, or any combination thereof, used to compare and interpret similarity and dissimilarity between two impressions.

3.643.62**negative ~~controls~~**

~~Controls~~ control

A control test that ~~confirm~~ confirms that the procedure does not produce an unintended result.

3.653.63**observed data**

Any information seen within an impression that an examiner may rely upon to reach a decision, conclusion, or opinion. This not only includes minutiae, but attributes such as clarity, scars, creases, edge shapes, pore structure, and other friction ridge features.

ⁿ SWGFAST Document 19. Standard Terminology of Friction Ridge Examination (Latent/Tenprint).
https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2016/10/26/swgfast_standard-terminology_4.0_121124.pdf. Accessed June 05 2026.

3.663.64**open (non-blind) verification**

A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner knows the identity of the other examiner(s) and has been provided with their decisions, conclusions and/or documented data used to support their conclusion.

3.673.65**participant (in proficiency test)**

Laboratory, organization, or individual that receives proficiency test items and submits results for review by the proficiency test provider.

3.683.66**pattern force area**

A region of friction ridge skin in which minutiae were forced to form due to pattern type and existing ridge fields during friction ridge formation. As these minutiae form more predictably, their configurations are more common and less random.

NOTE For example, in the outflow of a loop, many ridges converged during formation, which forced many ridge endings to form as space ran out.

3.69**peer review**

~~An independent evaluation of a scientific, professional, or academic manuscript or publication, by a qualified second party, to evaluate the claims, methods, interpretations, and conclusions.~~

OSAC Preferred Term

3.703.67**positive controls**

~~Controls~~**control**

~~A control test that confirm~~**confirms** that the procedure will produce the expected result.

3.713.68**preventive action**

Action to eliminate the cause(s) of a potential nonconformity or ~~other~~**a** potential ~~undesirable~~**undesired** situation.

NOTE ~~A preventive~~**Preventive** action is taken to prevent occurrence whereas corrective action is taken to prevent recurrence.

ISO 9000:20152026^o

3.723.69**probability**

An expression of the chance that a particular event occurs. A probability may be empirically, classically, or subjectively derived.

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3.733.70**proficiency testing**

Evaluation of participant performance against pre-established criteria.

3.743.71**propositions**

~~A statement~~ **proposition**

Statement that is either true or false, the truth of which is uncertain.

ISO 21043-1~~fmod~~^p

3.753.72**quality assurance measures**

Steps taken by ~~an FSP~~ **a forensic service provider in the aim of continual improvement** to detect, correct, minimize and/or prevent nonconforming work.

NOTE ~~This may include, but is not limited to, root cause analysis, For example, quality management system, certification, accreditation, established training program, standards and controlled documents,~~ additional verification, nonconformity assessment, ~~root cause analysis, risk assessment,~~ audits ~~and,~~ corrective and/or preventive actions.

3.763.73**questioned impression**

An impression or image of friction ridge skin whose source or identity is unknown

NOTE The questioned impression may be ~~designated as~~ a “known impression” or “exemplar impression” in tenprint to tenprint examinations.

3.773.74**rarity (of a feature)**

The frequency or prevalence of a friction ridge feature, either in isolation or in conjunction with other information about its local context.

NOTE For example, the prevalence of a type of feature could be affected by its proximity to a pattern force area, the finger number or palmar region on which it is located, or the pattern type in which it is located.

3.783.75**record**

Document providing information on activities performed as part of the forensic process.

ISO 21043-1^q

3.793.76**repeatability**

Extent of agreement between more than one result determined in the same place, by the same person, on the same equipment, in the same way at similar times.

OSAC Preferred Term

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3.803.77

reproducibility ~~(synonym of replicability)~~

Extent of agreement between repeated results determined under any combination of different conditions.

OSAC Preferred Term

3.813.78

risk assessment

Systematic process of identifying and evaluating perceived or potential risks throughout the forensic process.

ISO 21043-1^r

3.823.79

semi-porous

Partially but not freely or wholly permeable ~~(e.g., glossy paper).~~

NOTE For example, glossy paper

3.833.80

sequential processing

The application of chemical and/or physical friction ridge development techniques in a specific order to target specific constituents of friction ridge impressions which may be visualized for examination and to maximize the preservation of the friction ridge detail during each process.

3.843.81

similarity

An observation that two impressions share a general likeness when comparing an individual feature or detail. Not to be confused with “*agreement*.”

3.853.82

source

An area of friction ridge skin ~~off~~from an individual from which an impression originated.

The Fingerprint Sourcebook SWGFAST- Document 19^s

3.863.83

source conclusion ~~(synonym of conclusion)~~

Opinion stated by an examiner after interpretation of observed data. The opinion is the professional judgment that the observed data can offer support for one proposition over another.

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^s SWGFAST Document 19, Standard Terminology of Friction Ridge Examination (Latent/Tenprint).
https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2016/10/26/swgfast_standard-terminology_4.0_121124.pdf
 National Institute of Justice (U.S.). *The Fingerprint Sourcebook*. Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice Office of Justice Programs National Institute of Justice; 2011. <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo18039>. Accessed November 11 2022., Accessed June 05 2026.

3.873.84

source exclusion (friction ridge)

Source exclusion is the conclusion that two friction ridge impressions did not originate from the same source.

3.883.85

source identification

The (friction ridge)

Source identification is the conclusion that the observed data provides substantially stronger support for the proposition that the two impressions originated from the same source rather than different sources.

3.89

stakeholder (synonym of interested party)

Person or organization that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity.

ISO 9000:2015^t

3.903.86

strength of the evidence

The relative support or extent to which the evidence supports one proposition over another. It may be described verbally or numerically.

3.913.87

substrate

Surface or material upon which an item of interest is deposited.

ISO 21043-1^u

3.923.88

suitability (synonym of utility)

The usefulness of an impression for a further step in the examination process, such as comparison or Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) entry.

3.933.89

target group

A specific set of friction ridge features selected as a starting point during comparison.

3.90

task-irrelevant

Information is task-irrelevant if it is not help for drawing conclusions about the propositions applicable to the analyst's task.

NOTE. Information that is irrelevant for friction ridge examination may well be relevant for other administrative, analytical, or reporting tasks.

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3.91**task-relevant**

Information is task-relevant for analytic tasks if it is helpful for drawing conclusions:

- a) about the propositions applicable to the analyst's task,
- b) from the physical evidence that has been designated for examination,
- c) through the correct application of an accepted analytic method by a competent analyst.

3.943.92**technical review**

A qualified second party's evaluation of reports, notes, data, and other documentation to ensure there is appropriate and sufficient support for the actions, results, conclusions, opinions, and interpretations.

OSAC Preferred Term

NOTE- Technical review can also be applicable to observations and opinions that are communicated other than by way of report (see ISO 21043-5)

ISO 21043-1^v:*[Note only]*

3.95

~~unknown (synonym of latent, synonym of latent impression)~~

~~See latent impression.~~

3.963.93**utility (synonym of suitability)**

See **3.88 suitability**.

3.973.94**validation**

A process of evaluating a system, method or component to determine that requirements for an intended use or application have been fulfilled.

OSAC Preferred Term

3.983.95**verification (phase of examination process)**

Quality assurance measure consisting of independent examination by one or more examiners to ascertain if a decision, conclusion, or opinion is reproduced or is in conflict with the decision, conclusion, or opinion of another examiner.

NOTE Verification may be implemented in multiple ways including blind verification, open(non-blind) verification and consensus review. The general term verification is inclusive of these various types.

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Annex A (informative)

Bibliography

~~This~~The following bibliography is not ~~meant~~intended to be an all-inclusive list ~~as, review, or endorsement of literature on this topic. The goal of the group recognizes other bibliography is to provide~~ publications ~~on this subject may exist. At the time this document was drafted, these were some~~cited informationally, and publications ~~available for reference~~relevant to the standard.

- 1] ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 165, *Best Practice Recommendation for Analysis of Friction Ridge Impressions*, 1st Edition, 2024.^w
- 2] ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 166, *Best Practice Recommendation for Comparison and Evaluation of Friction Ridge Impressions*, 1st Edition, 2024.^x
- 3] ISO 9000:~~2015~~2026, *Quality management systems — Fundamentals and vocabulary*, ~~Fourth~~Fifth Edition^y
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