

# INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

**ISO**  
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## **Information and documentation — Transliteration of Arabic characters into Latin characters —**

### **Part 2:**

Arabic language — Simplified transliteration

*Information et documentation — Translittération des caractères arabes en  
caractères latins —*

*Partie 2: Langue arabe — Translittération simplifiée*



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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. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

International Standard ISO 233-2 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 46, *Information and documentation*, Sub-Committee SC 2, *Conversion of written languages*.

ISO 233 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Information and documentation — Transliteration of Arabic characters into Latin characters*:

- *Part 1: Arabic language — Stringent transliteration* (Actually published as ISO 233:1984, *Documentation — Transliteration of Arabic characters into Latin characters*.)
- *Part 2: Arabic language — Simplified transliteration*
- *Part 3: Other than Arabic languages*

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## Introduction

ISO 233 is one of a series of International Standards, dealing with the conversion of systems of writing. The aim of ISO 233 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 re-constitution of these by men or machines. The system of conversion, in this case, must be univocal and entirely reversible.

This means that no consideration should be given to phonetic and esthetic matters nor to certain national customs: all these considerations are, indeed, ignored by the machine performing the function.

The adoption of ISO 233 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 ISO 233. The system proposed herein should make this possible; and be acceptable to international use, if the graphisms it creates are such that they may be converted automatically into the graphisms used in any strict national systems.

ISO 233 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 thus allowing anyone 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 ISO 233 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.

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# Information and documentation — Transliteration of Arabic characters into Latin characters —

## Part 2: Arabic language — Simplified transliteration

### 1 Scope

This part of ISO 233 establishes a simplified system for the transliteration of Arabic characters into Latin characters. This simplification of the stringent rules established by ISO 233:1984 is especially intended to facilitate the processing of bibliographic information (e.g. catalogues, indices, citations, etc.).

### 2 General principles of conversion of writing systems

**2.1** 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. The procedure is often used for historical or geographical texts, cartographical documents and in particular bibliographical work where characters must be converted from different writing systems into a single alphabet to allow for alphabetical intercalation in bibliographies, catalogues, indexes, 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 or mechanical means as well as by electronic means.

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

**2.2 Transliteration** is the process of representing the characters of an alphabetical or syllabic system of writing by the characters of a conversion alphabet.

In principle, the conversion shall be made character by character: each character<sup>1)</sup> of the converted graphical system is rendered by only one character of the conversion alphabet, this being the easiest way to ensure the complete and unambiguous reversibility of the conversion alphabet in the converted system.

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 digraphs or diacritical marks. In this case, arbitrary choices and the use of purely conventional marks shall be avoided as far as possible, and a certain phonetic logic shall be maintained in order to give the system a wide acceptance.

However, it must be accepted that the graphism obtained will not always be correctly pronounced according to the phonetic habits of the language (or of all the languages) which usually use(s) the conversion alphabet. On the other hand, this graphism shall be such that the reader who has a knowledge of the converted language can mentally restore unequivocally the original graphism and thus pronounce it.

**2.3 Retransliteration** is the process whereby the characters of a conversion alphabet are transformed back into those of the converted writing system. It is the exact opposite of the transliteration process in that the rules of a transliteration system are applied

1) A character is an element of an alphabetical or other type of writing system that graphically represents a phoneme, a syllable, a word or even a prosodical characteristic of a given language. It is used either alone (for example a letter, a syllabic sign, an ideographical character, a digit, a punctuation mark) or in combination (for example an accent, a diacritical mark). 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.