**Writing Good Definitions**

**Definitions vary substantially from their normal dictionary meanings**.

If a normal dictionary definition can be swapped in without loss/change to meaning, do not redefine the term in the document.

**Definitions don’t include requirements.**

**Definitions don’t include illustrative language or examples.**

Move illustrations and examples to informative notes, sections, or appendices, as applicable.

**Terms are specified and defined in a way that distinguishes them from one of several possible technical uses.**

For example, ASHRAE’s filter community uses “removal efficiency” to distinguish their specific use of “efficiency” from other technical uses.

**Terms are defined exactly as they’re used and used exactly as they’re defined in the document.**

**Terms are not used to define themselves.**

(i.e., no circular definitions). For example, *correlation ratio data acceptance criteria* should not be defined as “criteria used to determine the adequacy of the correlation data.”

**Standard I-P and SI units of measure aren’t defined (e.g., kilowatts).**

Exceptions include calculated measurements or rates, such as SEER, EER, etc.

**Synonyms are cross-referenced to a primary definition and used sparingly**.

Where multiple terms *could* be used, best practice is to define one and use it consistently.

**Definitions aren’t substantially made up of jargon**.

…even if such jargon is commonly understood in the industry.

**Definitions don’t include measurements or calculations, or the units in which a value is expressed**.

*No:*

***particle counter sizing accuracy:*** the sizing accuracy Ɛ(x) is determined by the function 

Note, *xmeasured* is the particle size indicated by the counter for a reference particle and x*reference*is the actual size of the reference particle.

*Yes:*

***particle counter sizing accuracy:*** measure of the ability of an instrument to correctly determine the size of a reference particle of known size.

**Terms defined as verbs are not also used as nouns (and vice versa).**

* The term *control* (v.), which defines an action, can’t also implicitlyrefer to the thing performing the action (*control*, n.).
* Nouns and verbs should be defined as different terms. For example, *control* (v.) and *control device* (n.).
* Terms defined as nouns can also be used as adjectives. The term *process load* defines a kind of load. Used as an adjective—*process load* calculation—the term’s meaning doesn’t change, so it applies.
* Single and plural forms of terms both always have the same defined meaning. *Building* and *buildings* carry the same defined meaning, even if *building* (singular) is what’s defined.