

Brussels, 16th December 2011
STEMG/11/02/OC

SERVICE INFORMATION LETTER / POSITION PAPER

To all users of ASD Simplified Technical English, ASD-STE100

Subject: Simplified Technical English, ASD-STE100

Dear Madams and Sirs,

I am the Chair of the ASD Simplified Technical English Maintenance Group (STEMG) and I am writing to you with the purpose of providing some clarifications and guidelines on the correct use of the ASD-STE100 Specification.

The ASD-STE100 Specification

ASD-STE100 (STE) is a controlled language developed in the early Eighties (as AECMA Simplified English) to help the users of English-language maintenance documentation understand what they read. It was initially applicable to commercial aviation. Then, it became also a requirement for Defense projects, including Land and Sea vehicles. As a consequence, today, primary texts of maintenance manuals are mostly written in STE.

On civil applications, since 1986, STE has been a requirement of the ATA Specification i2200 (formerly ATA100) and ATA104 (Training). On military applications, STE is a requirement of the S1000D Specification. The European Defence Standards Reference (EDSTAR) recommends STE as one of the best practices standard for writing technical documentation to be applied for defense contracting by all 26 EDA (European Defence Agency) participating member states.

Today, the success of STE is such that other industries want to use it beyond its intended purpose of maintenance documentation and outside the Aerospace and Defense domains. STE interest is also growing within the Academic world (Engineering and Language).

The current issue of STE is dated April 2010 and the next one will be available in January 2013 (basically, we release one issue every three years). Although the STE structure is stable and consolidated, the language has to be kept in line with the technology evolution and amended on the basis of the continuous and important feedback received from the users.

Purpose and objectives of STE

The international language of many industries is English, and English is the language most used for writing technical documentation. However, it is often not the native language of the readers (or even of the authors) of such documentation. Many readers have limited knowledge of English, and are easily confused by complex sentence structures and by the number of meanings and synonyms which English words can have.

The key factor for the creation of a controlled and simplified form of English was essentially a request from the customers (i.e. the Airlines), of which 80% are not native English speakers, and their need of doing correct maintenance to guarantee the aircraft availability.



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Complex technical instructions can be misunderstood and misunderstandings can lead to accidents. STE makes technical texts easy to understand by all readers and can be regarded as an important and valuable resource for technical writing to simplify the correct understanding of the maintenance instructions by the operators, remove linguistic barriers and reduce Human Factors risks.

How does STE work?

The STE Specification provides a set of Writing Rules and a Dictionary of controlled vocabulary. The Writing Rules cover aspects of grammar and style; the Dictionary specifies the general words that can be used. These words were chosen for their simplicity and ease of recognition. In general, there is only one word for one meaning, and one part of speech for one word. In addition to the specified general vocabulary, STE accepts the use of company-specific or project-oriented technical words (referred to in STE as Technical Names and Technical Verbs), providing that they fit into one of the categories listed in the Specification. Control of additional specific vocabularies is, of course, the responsibility of the companies or the projects themselves.

The STE Maintenance Group (STEMG)

The STEMG is currently composed of 14 members from the ASD member countries in Europe, the AIA in the United States, the AIA in Canada and the ANAC (Civil Aviation Authority) in Argentina. In addition, there are associate members representing the customers (Airlines and Military Organizations).

The mission of the STEMG is to control, develop and maintain STE with the following primary tasks:

- Keep the Specification up to date and improve it if necessary.
- Process change requests (Change Forms) and take the appropriate amendment actions.
- Provide recommendations and advice to users on the interpretation of STE.
- Promote STE in general.

The STEMG reports to the ASD Product Support Group (PSC) which in turn reports to the ASD Services Commission.

The operational scenario

Information on how to get copies of the Specification can be provided by the STEMG directly. Currently, the Specification is distributed by ASD-STAN and Airlines of America or A4A (formerly known as ATA).

The primary objective of STE is the creation of simplified texts for the readers. However, STE is not a simplified version of English for the writers. Writing correctly in STE is not an easy task as it requires a good command of the English language together with a good knowledge of the matter of the writing. This combination is without a doubt the key to writing successfully in STE. Authors who would like to write proficiently and correctly in STE must have as the only point of reference the Specification itself. There is nothing that can replace it. The use of manipulated versions of the ASD-ASTE100 specification, partial use of the specification or deviations from its writing rules and vocabulary will diminish the accuracy of STE and create confusion among its users. This works against the efforts of the STEMG to create a clear and useful standard.

To assist users and potential users of STE, there are commercial companies or organizations that market and give training courses in the use of STE, and there are producers of software products that support STE.



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These efforts are greatly appreciated by ASD and the STEMG. However, neither ASD and the STEMG, nor any organization associated with the production of ASD-STE100 intend or imply any warranty or endorsement of any of the companies or organizations that provide training or supporting software products.

Essentially, trainers and software providers are not authorized nor certified by ASD. The few authorizations which were granted by AECMA or ASD in the past are now revoked and therefore no longer valid.

It is very important that you are well informed on the fact that trainers or software providers are also not authorized to use in their training material or documentation the ASD Logo, the Copyright and the Trademark of ASD-STE100, nor to distribute copies of the Specification. They are not authorized to release certificates of attendance carrying the ASD Logo or the ASD-STE100 Logo, as protected by the European Community Trademark, even for publicity on web sites. ASD recognizes to the members of the STEMG (who actually do work on the Specification at no cost), and their companies, a particular privilege to give a sort of “authorized” STE Training, but even the STEMG members should obey the rule above.

It must be clear that ASD-STE100 does not intend to compete with other forms of Simplified English, Plain English, Simple English or any other Controlled Language and must not be confused with them, or mixed up with them. Commercial companies often tend to generalize and make no distinction between existing controlled languages, thus confusing users, who have no idea which form of simplified English is being referred to.

It must be made very clear that the STEMG is a non-profit group. It does not sell a product and is not a commercial entity, nor does it compete with other commercial companies or individuals. Companies are at liberty to sell their products and services and users are free to purchase such products and services as they wish. Interfering with the free market is not the task of the STEMG.

STE training

As already remarked, writing in STE is not easy. Without training, authors tend to focus simply on the Dictionary and not on the Writing Rules, which are equally important. Simply giving authors a copy of the Specification is probably the best way to discourage them from learning about STE, and applying it correctly. It is important for authors to fully understand the STE rules, and to think about what they are writing. Therefore, STE training is the first essential step for a technical author to be able to apply STE correctly.

The STEMG strongly recommends that you read the training guidelines we have in our web site (www.asd-ste100.org/training.htm) before you attend a training course. We do not recommend attending STE training courses which are given by companies or individuals who have no experience whatsoever with the Specification, who are not linked to the STEMG and have not received an initial training by a member of the STEMG. These companies or individual may be professionally competent in language services and other controlled languages but not necessarily in ASD-STE100.

STE authoring tools

The STEMG also recommends that you read the guidelines for authoring tools (www.asd-ste100.org/software.htm) before planning to purchase one of these products. STE checkers should only be seen as aids for those authors/editors with a good knowledge of STE. None of these checkers will write STE text for you. Nor can they fully convert non-STE text to STE or replace the specification in



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any way. Although STE checkers can be helpful with highlighting non-STE terms and incorrectly written STE text, they are not foolproof. No checker has 100% accuracy and there is no software that guarantees 100% compliance with STE. Always remember that tools or software do not think in our place! We recommend that users always gain experience in writing STE directly before they start using STE tools or software. The authoring tools can be useful only at the end of the writing process where the authors/editors (not the checker) must have the last word.

The Internet jungle

Today, the Internet is the primary source of information for most people. However, it is also a source of misinformation and must be used with extreme care. You may want to join STE interest groups through social networks such as LinkedIn or Facebook or participate in blogs or discussion forums but be aware that none of these groups are officially recognized by the STEMG and ASD. Many of these groups are run by companies or individual who want to promote their respective businesses and are misusing the name ASD-STE100 to sell their products. In one case even the STE page on Wikipedia was manipulated by a company wishing to advertise itself as the best possible solution for STE needs.

Users often get lost in the internet jungle and the STEMG recommends that you do not trust the advertisements and statements of companies or individuals who are selling their services as official representatives of ASD or the STEMG. Do not trust webinars, forums, conference presentations or training events unless they are held by a member of the STEMG.

Conclusions

I think the interaction of STE users with the STEMG is essential and important. I strongly encourage all users to address any issues or questions they may have to the STEMG through the following official channels:

- The web site of ASD-STE100 www.asd-ste100.org (all 14 members' details are included there)
- The Facebook page www.facebook.com/pages/ASD-STEMG/210694588989064
- The LinkedIn account <http://be.linkedin.com/pub/asd-stemg/3a/374/846>
- The Twitter account [@asd_stemg](https://twitter.com/asd_stemg)

Please remember: no other web sites, addresses, accounts, or groups that refer to ASD-STE100 are official!

I sincerely hope you will find the information in this letter useful in your attempts to successfully implement STE and that it clarifies doubts and misconceptions concerning the use of STE. I remain at your disposal for any further queries that you may have.

Sincerely yours,

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Chair, ASD STEMG

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